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**The Inherent Liminality of Lesbian Detectives:
Shifting Spaces and Lesbian Crime Fiction 1984-2022**

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Abstract

This thesis studies lesbian detective fiction and specifically considers this genre in its early decades (1980s-1990s) from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. This thesis postulates that out of a sample pool of a hundred novels, there are recurring patterns of behaviours and attitudes among the protagonists of this genre within certain physical and metaphorical spaces. These patterns demonstrate a destabilised identity, as the lesbian sleuth never ceases to explore and test the boundaries of her authority as an enforcer of law and order and of her suppressed spatiality as a member of a sexual minority. This causes her to live in a perpetual state of Insider/Outsider liminality and it causes queer trauma to be a fundamental aspect of her character. This thesis considers this concept as the result of long-standing, systemic homophobia and heterosexist normativity, and utilises the notion of queer trauma to interpret the way the lesbian sleuth is inescapably stuck between a sense of duty and justice and a yearning for belonging and self-affirmation. The interpretive process is supported by an extensive and in-depth theoretical research into the fields of history, culture, geography, feminist criticism, gender, and sexuality studies for the selected subject matter. The spaces selected and analysed in this thesis are the queer closet, the medical establishment, domestic settings, and the gay bar. These spaces have been chosen for the significant, emblematic ways in which the lesbian detectives interact with them and have been analysed in order of their importance for the protagonists' characterisation. The introduction includes introductory statements and the theoretical framework, the first chapter overviews major detectives in the history of crime literature from a spatial perspective; the second chapter discusses the queer closet; the third chapter considers the space of the clinic and the topics of queer trauma and of the pathologisation of homosexuality; the fourth chapter analyses the domestic settings of the protagonists; the fifth chapter examines the context of the gay bar and its history; finally, the conclusion offers closing statements about the focus and originality of this thesis. The originality of this thesis lies in its focus on spaces and on the relationship between the protagonist and society, law and order, and Self and Other. This thesis contributes to the knowledge of queer literature by specifically considering the unescapable liminality of the lesbian/Outsider detective/Insider.

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Introduction

She dreamed she had gone to visit a hospital, but she was lost, wandering through wards, searching for someone to give her directions.

Passing through a set of heavy metal doors with wired windows, she found herself in an exit-less room. Cloaked figures mumbled in the corners.

She turned to retrace her steps, and saw the faces of children pressed against the glass.

They began to change as she watched, growing clawed legs...

...and hinged tails...

turning into scorpions.¹

In *Something Shady* (1986) Sarah Dreher's Stoner McTavish infiltrates Shady Acres, a mental hospital, to find and rescue a family friend. In the course of this undercover work, McTavish struggles with her own mental health issues, combatting the trauma of having been forcefully institutionalised by her parents for her homosexuality, and unwittingly uncovers a smuggling ring for criminal fugitives wanted by the FBI. As she is drawn deeper into the layers of corruption, McTavish is haunted by the hostile confinement of Shady Acres, which induces nightmares filled with anxiety, disorientation, inescapable helplessness, and mutations. In one harrowing dream she journeys through the hospital's dark spaces, needing to press forward for the sake of her investigation but soon lost in the dreamscapes' tangle of corridors. Safe pathways and options are stripped from her as her role isolates her and locks her into a room, a box with fixed confines, but regrettably porous to the whispers of shadowed figures, the inescapable gaze of conformist society. These cloaked figures reveal their cowardly nature by mumbling from dark corners. The content of their whispers is hidden from the reader, but judging from the lesbian sleuth's reaction, it is nothing positive – echoes of old taunts and the judgements that McTavish carries with her. In her dreams, but also in her waking life, the lesbian sleuth never ceases to explore the confines of enclosed spaces – rooms in which crimes were committed, mental spaces which hold solutions to these crimes – but must also grapple with her own interior spaces, shaped by a lifetime of exclusion. As she traverses the floors of the hospital, whose horrors are not confined to dreams, she locks gazes with outsider figures that morph from harmless, innocent children into vicious little monsters.

¹ Sarah Dreher, *Something Shady* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1986] 2015), p. 48. Amazon ebook.

The transformation McTavish undergoes can be transposed to some of the characteristics traditionally ascribed to femininity (trust, dependence, passivity, sexual innocence) within the characterisation of past female detective. These age-long traits of traditionally regarded femininity may appear as innocuously natural (like the visage of babies in the dream quoted above), but within queer studies the artificiality of such attributes is exposed (like the transformation into monsters within the dream). Analysing the introductory dream sequence particularly for its spatial imagery, the figure of a terrified yet combative woman emerges: she boldly goes into unfamiliar and possibly dangerous locales to seek answers, to seek the truth behind a mystery. Yet, when her surroundings shift and everything around her turns into something else entirely, the woman halts, rooted on the spot by the corrupted fabric of reality, staring into otherworldly eyes and trying to make sense of this new truth.

If the babies in the scene can be said to represent the Self, and the monster the Other, then the woman stares into the personification of her Other-ed Self. Because of her sexual identity she has been judged and expunged by society. Another possibility could implicate the connection between the woman and her dangerous quest: the lesbian sleuth sets out on a quest for truth, but unearthing society's most sordid secrets reveals the oppression that she also suffers. This discovery creates a nightmare, a play of shadows, where in every surface the detective looks, only monsters can be seen, without being sure of (or perhaps unwilling to acknowledge) whether the Other she locks gazes with stands outside the border of her Self, or is her own reflection.

From this interpretation, it is evident how exemplary the quoted introductory dream sequence is in respect to the researched material. The experience of Stoner McTavish in losing then reforging the connection between Self and Other in the spaces she navigates in pursuit of the truth is representative of the experience of many other lesbian detectives. It is by virtue of this amalgam of feelings that this scene lends itself particularly well to being transposed into a grander frame, one which evokes the wider disorientation of the lesbian detective. In dialogue with Tania Modleski's research on feelings of estrangement, disorientation, and paranoia in gothic fiction's female characters, Sally R. Munt argues that in lesbian crime fiction the state is the locus of paranoid fears and the sleuth becomes the Other.² Thus, as Munt points out, the investigative process becomes essential to the resolution of one of the genre's inherent conflicts: the lesbian detective is part of the establishment and enforces its rule, but is also

² Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 125.

estranged from it.³ This introduction opens with a nightmare pivoting on space and the way the protagonist navigates, or more precisely, loses herself in this space. Haunted by external forces and her own fears, reading space is the key to read the protagonist's fundamentally unstable, vulnerable self.

In *Trauma, Culture, and PTSD* (2016) Fred C. Alford examines the social contexts in which trauma affects communities and is passed down to generations. Alford asserts that trauma engenders 'the vulnerability of the embodied self,'⁴ exemplifying this feeling through the imagery of shattered glass that can never be made whole again.⁵ He further describes it through a verbal shift, stating that '[o]nce we have experienced this ourselves or seen it in others close to us, everything changes, for it renders the world fundamentally unstable, fragile beyond words.'⁶ 'Fundamentally unstable' is an apt expression for the spatial aspect of Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, where the protagonist reflects the new style of characterisation informed by second wave feminism, modern, cool, witty, assertive, yet slowly, gradually making sense of the history of suppression and finding confinement haunting her and her community. The history of suppression that LGBT+ individuals had to endure is part of the trauma Alford alludes to and, as this thesis argues, the resulting queer trauma causes a vulnerability of the sense of Self, an indelible rupture within the lesbian detective: she belongs to society's establishment through her profession, but is simultaneously estranged by her sexuality.

present a vibrant array of lesbian characters that lend themselves to repeated readings, in-depth analysis, and interpretation. Authors of this genre used their novels as venues in which to explore the dilemmas of the LGBT+ community, issues such as internalised, familial, and societal homophobia, sexism, sexual harassment, sex work, domestic abuse, and pornographic exploitation were specifically considered and discussed from an insider's perspective, and brought to the centre of the crime plot. Thus, writing a thesis about how fundamentally troubled, unmoored, and disoriented the protagonists are in certain spaces may appear pessimistic, but instead it demonstrates the undaunting will of these characters to continue on their paths despite all adversities.

This thesis is the product of the close reading and feminist/queer-based literary criticism of roughly a hundred Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction novels. The novels'

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fred C. Alford, *Trauma, Culture, and PTSD* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 42.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

interpretations are bound to the allusions of space and the attitudes of the characters in the local settings; in this light this thesis peers into buildings, wanders the streets, and engages in the characters' ongoing struggles for spatial comfort and control. Through the gaze of the protagonists of the novels under examination, this thesis explores key issues about the way the lesbian detective navigates, inhabits and generally engages with certain spaces in the researched novels. As these lesbian detectives walk, run, and drive across urban and rural landscapes, solving crimes against the backdrop of hostile communities and fragile support-networks, the spaces in which they live and work recur like set-pieces, shaping the actions of the lesbian detective and forming a commentary on the obstacles she must overcome.

In this thesis I argue that the early lesbian detective navigates heteronormative spaces as an uncertain Insider/Outsider of society, perpetually unmoored in her roles of subversive transgressor and law enforcer. The position of Insider is coded in the lesbian sleuth's role as law enforcer, while the position of Outsider is coded in her self-recognition as a homosexual woman. These positions blur in the figure of the lesbian detective and the tension between the Insider/normative/Self and Outsider/deviant/Other liminality is aggravated by queer trauma, which often leads the protagonist to self-sabotaging attitudes and behaviours. The lesbian sleuth is constantly forced to navigate a societal order that is inextricable from a landscape which has caused her queer trauma. This thesis argues that this vicious cycle destabilises the identity of the lesbian detective irreparably, thus this character is an always-already liminal Insider/Outsider. This argument is described through the analysis of the attitudes and behaviours of the lesbian detective in four exemplary spaces she traverses in her working and home life: the closet, the clinic, the home, and the bar.

It is no longer necessary to preface analysis of detective fiction with elaborate justifications of the academic consideration of such material, as the literary value of this genre has been proved repeatedly and a range of its prominent scholars will be indicated below and in the following chapter. Although it belongs to a genre which has demonstrably intrinsic literary value, Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction still greatly benefits from increased research. In the main it has been featured as part of broader research topics, for instance in sections of feminist detective novel studies such as Merja Makinen's *Feminist Popular Fiction* (2001), sections of lesbian literature studies such as Stephanie Foote's 'Deviant Classics,' or popular genre sub-sections within sections of lesbian literature studies, as seen in Kaye Mitchell's essay in 'Popular Genre and Lesbian (Sub)Cultures.' While exclusive research on this genre exists, particularly by Judith A. Markowitz and Phyllis M. Betz, these works consist of overviews of tropes in the researched sub-genre. Only Gill Plain's analysis of Katherine V.

Forrest's Kate Delafield contains a focused discussion similar to the focus of this thesis (in Plain's case she reads Kate's closeted identity in connection with Terry Castle's concept of the apparitional lesbian).⁷ However, in respect to my argument this dissertation is the first of its kind: an expansive yet also in-depth comparative analysis of the character design of the protagonists in the context of recurring figurative and physical spaces is unprecedented. This approach not only affords new clarity and insight into the specific difficulties besetting lesbian detectives in their work and private lives, but connects Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction to the wider, spatial patterns of classic detective fiction. Detective fiction has long seen spaces as chaotic, secretive, and in need of order, whether it be Agatha Christie's pristine rooms in a rural mansion or Raymond Chandler's grimy alleyways in an urban city.⁸

Space constitutes a central aspect of the genre. As Stephen Knight highlights in his study of Golden Age detective fiction, the mapping out of the settings represents an ingenious way in which the reader can partake in the author's intelligence and omniscience, such as in the clue puzzle where the reader is directly invited to participate,⁹ at times with actual maps and timetables provided for reference, such as in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926). On a more symbolical level, the way crime fiction characters navigate spaces has become an integral part of the genre's discourse through the many social power imbalances that the detective needs to outmanoeuvre to obtain the truth, such as the hard-boiled detective who sneers at the opulence of the rich, navigates mangy back alleys and fights with the force of a societal rage in the forgotten slums. The American crime novel and hard-boiled novel have been examined also in terms of spatiality, by specifically considering the figure of the detective discovering pockets of humanity and hidden aspects of himself in the fast-growing American city. As Richard Lehan contends, the city of early twentieth century America had to define itself not only against its European counterpart, but also 'against the wilderness and the frontier experience.'¹⁰ The term frontier may signify the boundary between the Old and New World, thereby encountering the wilderness, but this term and its relevant research may be fruitful for the argument of this thesis, especially regarding liminality. Hard-boiled crime fiction scholars

⁷ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 166-191. See also Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

⁸ David Schmid, 'Imagining Safe Urban Space: The Contribution of Detective Fiction to Radical Geography', *Antipode*, 27.3 (1995), 242-269, (p. 243).

⁹ Stephen Knight, 'The Golden Age', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 77-94, (p. 90).

¹⁰ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 167.

tend to compare the hard-boiled private eye to the cowboy,¹¹ and the hard-boiled private eye tends to be described as a liminal figure between justice and criminality, purity and corruption. These analyses place this thesis within a broader history of spatial research in crime fiction.

This perspective can be transposed to Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, where the protagonist moves along a spatial frontier with a similar yearning, not only for a transformation of the established social order, but also for genuine human relationships, which so many lesbian sleuths yearn for while regularly sabotaging, as will be evident in the core chapters of this thesis. The study of spaces in detective fiction has been instrumental, moreover, in collocating a number of evolving characteristics of the female detective, such as chameleonic infiltration abilities and the instinct for community well-being. From Andrew Forrester's and Stephens W. Hayward's nineteenth century lady detectives who, with their superior capacity for disguise and undercover work, slink around the abodes of the suspects undetected, to McTavish's successful infiltrations of a mental health hospital in *Something Shady*, or of a hippie queer theatre company in *Bad Company* (1995), the cultural stereotype of the deceitful, mendacious woman has been re-evaluated also thanks to the close analysis of her spatial mastery.¹² In the case of community spaces, hard-boiled male and female detectives may both be marginalised by their profession, lone figures against the chaos of the corrupt capitalist metropolis, but while Chandler's Philip Marlowe's office, for instance, is austere and impersonal, Sarah Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski's is linked to her mother, and J. M. Redmann's Micky Knight's to her feline companion and elderly protective neighbour.

These examples introduce another special characteristic of this thesis, which is its engagement with the way Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction expands and/or subverts detective fiction tropes from the perspective of spaces. For instance, Dupin, Holmes, and Miss Marple are perfectly content to unravel mysteries from their home as well as outside of it, while in early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction the home is rarely a space from which the detective can comfortably work. Instead, it is either a place of retreat from a difficult, judgmental world, or more commonly, a space of confinement, alcohol-soaked solace or domestic difficulties. In Laurie R. King's Kate Martinelli series, for example, Kate is forced to

¹¹ See for example, Nicole Décuré, 'V. I. Warshawsky, a "Lady with Guts:" Feminist Crime Fiction by Sara Paretsky', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 12.2 (1989), 227-238. See also Lehan, *The City in Literature*, and Dennis Porter, 'The Private Eye', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 95-113

¹² Martin A. Kayman, 'The Short Story from Poe to Chesterton', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 41-58, (p. 52).

work from home for a period of time.¹³ Another example involves Redmann's Micky Knight, who considers staying at home for any extended stretches of time as either a medical necessity¹⁴ (before her relationship with Cordelia), or as a stressful, confusing experience (as her relationship with Cordelia self-destructs).¹⁵ Thus the researched literature not only subverts certain expectations of the genre in terms of characters and motives, but also in terms of how the characters interact with certain spaces.

This thesis examines trends in the protagonists' character design within the context of four recurring spaces (the closet, the clinic, the home, and the bar), and analyses how the protagonists' characterisation compares in respect to different sub-genres, spaces, and publication dates. In this way, this thesis highlights the way the primary source material celebrates lesbian identity in a highly entrenched masculine profession while discussing the social exclusions her gender and sexuality bring. This opening section has provided but a few examples of the way the study of spaces in crime fiction can lead to a fruitful discussion of the detective's representation. The inclusion of an Insider/Outsider spatial dimension adds depth and complexity to the study of this genre and is one of the most significant ways in which this thesis continues LGBT+ studies' prominent role in literary critical innovation. The remainder of my introduction summarises what is to come by first introducing the central figure of this thesis: the lesbian detective. Then, it will introduce the authors and novels which are within the purview of this thesis' geographical and chronological scope, namely Western Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction series created in the 1980s and 1990s. Following this, the Introduction will discuss in depth the structural frame of this research which is constituted by the examination of certain spaces, and finally the theoretical framework which informed my literary analysis will be presented.

¹³ See for example second half of Laurie R. King, *A Grave Talent* (New York: Picador, [1993] 2014) Macmillan ebook, and Laurie R. King, *To Play the Fool* (New York: Picador, [1995] 2014) Macmillan ebook.

¹⁴ J. M. Redmann, *Death by the Riverside* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1990] 2009), p. 125. Bold Strokes ebook.

¹⁵ See for example J. M. Redmann, *Death of a Dying Man* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, 2009), pp. 13, 147-148, 167. Bold Strokes ebook.

The Characterisation of the Lesbian Detective

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction features a distinctive figure at its core: the maverick female investigator. This character is the result of First and Second Wave feminist and queer activism and battles for dignity and rights. The novels under examination focus on portraying the lives of sleuthing women who may or may not have excellent deductive skills, who may or may not be single, who may or may not live for the thrill of the puzzle-solving, but who are most definitely lesbians. Historically, lesbians have been characterised as outlaws, psychotic, and unnatural. They are barely considered women. Informed by Monique Wittig, Kathleen G. Klein argues that the stereotype of the lesbian as Not-Woman fits particularly well in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, '[i]f female, then not detective; if detective, then not female.'¹⁶ Across the history of crime fiction, there was a tendency to feature women as bodies, '[w]hen she does appear in the traditional story, the woman shows up as a *body*—if not the victim, then the seductress or suspect',¹⁷ thus, when Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction emerged, the subversive force of the protagonist's gender and sexuality created a significant shift.

'I wanted to see what a mystery could do in terms of tackling social issues.'¹⁸ This statement by Barbara Sjöholm (Barbara Wilson) on her motivation for creating one of the pioneer lesbian detectives, Pam Nilsen, explains the potential and power of the crime genre. Hard-boiled novels, for instance, repeatedly refer to the engulfing corruption and decadence of the world, with the hero standing alone to fend off the forces of evil. Lesbian detective novels, on the other hand, tend to link murders, or missing persons, to wider social issues that are related to the oppression of the LGBT+ community. Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction particularises the world's corruption as specific to gender and sexuality. While the hard-boiled novel justifies male dominance through the haunting presence of femme fatales whose excessive sexual drive poses a danger to men and thus to society as a whole, Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction explores the deleterious results of this dominance.¹⁹ One notable example, Dreher's McTavish series, begins with a patriarchal villain who plans to kill his young wife, Gwen, to invest the inheritance in careless land developments plans. The criminal repeatedly

¹⁶ Kathleen G. Klein, 'Habeas Corpus: Feminism and Detective Fiction', in *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*, ed. by Glenwood Henry Irons (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) pp. 247-270, (p. 249). Amazon ebook.

¹⁷ Linda Mizejewski, *Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 13.

¹⁸ Judith A. Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2004), p. 8.

¹⁹ Maureen T. Reddy, 'Women Detectives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 197-198.

calls Gwen a naïve, stupid woman and McTavish a wannabe man and a pervert because of her crush on Gwen.²⁰ Gwen was educated by her traditionally-minded grandmother to regard men as providers and protectors, while McTavish, trodden upon by the heteronormative establishment in her youth, grew into an advocate for the freedom of female sexuality.²¹ This is an emblematic case for the type of critique commonly directed to early novels in this sub-genre. Most early novels highlight cases such as this, where authors tend to tie their stories strongly to the LGBT+ community and often deal with crimes motivated by heteronormative entitlement, misogyny, and particularly homophobia.²² In the following chapters I explore these ties and exemplify them through the ways the lesbian detective interacts with pivotal social spaces.

Insider/Outsider Argument: Spatiality and Sexual Identity

The typical cover of a novel from the main list of novels examined in this thesis features the figure of a lone woman against a darkened building or city skyline, a synecdochal connection between person and geography. The urban landscape of the researched novels is animated by a spatialisation of struggles pivoting on the social identity of the community. In this way, I explore how lesbian detectives are put in situations where they have to recognise and confront complexities and ambivalences of spatiality. For example, Rose Beecham's Amanda Valentine often ponders and is troubled by her status as expatriate (then emigrant); the prospective harassment she could face in the workplace and in public for being an openly out lesbian cop; her distrust towards committed relationships; and her detachment from domesticity. These elements of professional identity, cultural background, sexual identity, class identity, and family history form an intersectional identity arising from the ways a character behaves and interacts with certain spaces. Finally, my interpretation of whether that character fits my Insider/Outsider argument determines the character's inclusion and analysis in this thesis.

The study of space in social discourse is advanced by various sources: geographers who, in the wake of 1960s political movements, analysed the changes in modern societies, but also social, literary, and cultural theorists, including feminists, for whom certain spaces yielded new

²⁰ Sarah Dreher, *Stoner McTavish* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1985] 2015), p. 161. Amazon ebook.

²¹ Dreher, *Stoner McTavish*, p. 10.

²² Ibid.

meanings. Specific sources and discourses are presented below. These fresh studies of space have been highly political projects, aimed at exploring newly constructed capitalist-based geographies, or at decentring and replacing dominant concerns, such as class, racial, or gender inequalities.²³ The ways in which lesbian sleuths navigate spaces are directly tied to their profession and their sexual identity, thus these two elements are tightly intertwined in this dissertation. This thesis's argument follows this process: in order to place lesbian identity at the foreground of literary discussions, I examine how the homosexual was constructed as an outsider and the sleuth as an insider of societal institutions, then argue that these positions create an indelible tension at the basis of the characterisation. From this perspective, this thesis extends and sheds new light on what Michael Millner describes as a post-1980s tradition of identity-based scholarship in crime fiction and more generally in American popular culture.²⁴ This debate has been based on crime fiction writers who put racial, class, gender, and sexual orientation issues in the foreground, and this thesis considers specifically lesbian identity and how this identity is constructed and deconstructed in a series of spaces in the narrative.

This thesis posits that, despite a common reading of the detective as outsider, this type of character is essentially an insider. Jessica Mann, for example, describes Sherlock Holmes (and his predecessors) thus:

Doyle [...] invented a character who outraged Victorian convention in his behaviour, but who, on account of his superior qualities, was forgiven. Sherlock Holmes [...] was the first detective to be socially acceptable to the upper classes, for detection was vulgar work, and only an outsider, like Holmes or Poirot, or an aristocrat, could plausibly transcend social barriers.²⁵

This position of outsider implies outdated views of detective work that are irrelevant to the historical context of the primary source material of this thesis, but it is significant to point that the outsider-ness of the detective in this passage is in relation to social class order and not legislative order. An argument can be made for private eyes and amateur detectives, since they

²³ Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam and others, eds, *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 96.

²⁴ Michael Millner, 'Identity Politics in Crime Fiction', in *A History of American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Chris Raczkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 236-249

²⁵ Jessica Mann, *Deadlier Than the Male: Why Are Respectable English Women So Good at Murder?* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 70.

often work outside of the legislative order, following their own morals to navigate a highly corrupted environment, as reported by Sally R. Munt:

[t]he private eye works outside the social order with his own moral purpose. He is tough, stoic, honest, loyal to his own values, fighting a lone battle against urban chaos, a contemporary crusader/knight. The perceived social order is inherently corrupt, ‘fallen’, and the outsider represents the harbinger of truth and justice amongst hostility.²⁶

This type of fictional detective, however, who disguises himself as outsider to restore ‘truth and justice’, is a highly battered and egotistical version of the detective who has become the symbol of ‘hardened and reified ... brutal masculinity’²⁷ and ‘a figure of monological misogynist megalomania’²⁸ instead of a law enforcer. And yet even this representation is not fully an outsider to institutional order because, as Julian Symons asserts, even the most street-hardened hard-boiled private eye ‘answer[s] to the demands of some kind of justice, rather than those of love or friendship.’²⁹ In hard-boiled novels justice has become corrupt and unreliable, but this sub-genre is distinguished by the crude portrayal of corruption and violence, a darker reality than other sub-genres such as the cozy mystery, the whodunit, and the police procedural. When considering the general outlook of the literature of crime, instead of being intended as judge and execution, the detective is intended as law enforcer, a figure whom the reader can trust to act for the betterment of society rather than for personal gains and vendettas, and this thesis positions this type of character in the role of insider to society.

As influential as these scholars are, the dates of their publication cannot be downplayed, but critics nowadays hold a similar position. Lee Horsley’s in-depth delve into the symbolism and ideology of the fictional twentieth century detective provides more recent proof for the underlying insider-ness of this character:

[t]his erosion of the sense of self is part of the disorder of contemporary society that the detective combats, as he negotiates between conceptions of civilized life and fears of chaos lurking beneath the surface. The classic detective is less implicated in (and less threatened by) the underlying disorder than is the hard-boiled private eye, but the

²⁶ Munt, p. 3.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1972), p. 126.

position he occupies can none the less be a liminal one. For in order to restore order, he must enter into the disturbed criminal mind. He has to have the capacity to understand the darker reality covered by the civilized veneer, and this capacity in itself destabilizes the detective's identity. It links him to the metaphoric darkness associated with the impenetrability and disorder of the urban scene.³⁰

The contrast between 'civilized life' and the 'chaos lurking beneath the surface' is the best way to describe the fictional detective's liminality, but more in line with the topic of this thesis' argument is Horsley's point on restoring order. In order to do this the detective 'must enter into the disturbed criminal mind' and once common sense establishes that the 'disturbed criminal mind' occupies an outsider role to society, the inherent nature of insider of the detective emerges, which is further proved by Horsley's use of the verb 'enter', implying a shift from one space to another.

After establishing that the criminal mind is to be read as the outsider role, one can assume that the starting point of the detective is the insider role. Even though Horsley mentions that this 'civilized veneer' covers a 'darker reality', the veneer is none other than institutional order, which the detective must ultimately enforce. Horsley, in fact, concludes that the detective is a contradictory figure but it also ultimately embodies lawful discipline:

[t]he detective capable of penetrating these dark recesses of the modern city is a contradictory figure [...] A scientific investigator and restorer of order might on the face of it be thought of as a stable construct. He is the embodiment of the Law of the Father, a disciplinarian who punishes the wayward, the embodiment of rationality in an age of 'widespread optimism [...] concerning the comprehensive power of positivist science'.³¹

This description, which is meant to portray only one side of the character detective, of this inherently 'contradictory figure', is nonetheless what this thesis utilises as a premise for the insider role of the lesbian detective. It is a controversial and unstable premise, for it puts on the foreground one facet of the fictional detective, and it purports that the deepest essence of this

³⁰ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 28-29.

³¹ Horsley, p. 30.

type of character is a 'stable construct' where this is only a veneer of discipline and rationality, but it is nonetheless what this thesis presents as premise for one side of the argument.

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction is not purely a mystery genre, as the focus is not overwhelmingly on the murder case investigation. Instead, this is a hybrid genre mainly of crime fiction and romance, with some novels (especially early in a series) adopting several elements of the coming out story (described in-depth in the following chapter). The presence of romance in the primary source material is a fundamental feature of the genre that aided in normalising its core homosexual relationship, and helped the literary lesbian in her transformation from a niche novelty into a staple figure of mainstream crime literature. The reason why lies in the power of the romance genre to demonstrate how, no matter how different straight and gay characters' sexual practices may appear to be, they share the same feelings of tenderness, affection, and love. This naturally can be said for other genres, but the normalising effect of romance is accentuated by its popularity. Because readers can gain pleasure from a text by imbuing it with their own experience, no matter whether the readers can empathise with the lesbian detective's pursue of justice in the mystery plot, they can still empathise with the relationships the protagonist forges in the romance sub-plot.

The Analysis of Spaces in Early Anglo-American Lesbian Detective Fiction

Space can be intended as a physical boundary, but it can also be studied as a social construct: this thesis especially considers the second option, though it does not eschew grounding certain points of the argument in the textual descriptions of physical spaces. The Amanda Valentine case study in the fourth chapter, on the home, analyses Amanda's disorientation in relation to familial and romantic bonds grounded in scenes depicted within her home. The argument is then expanded into the discussion of bonds between individual and society, where home is not considered a building anymore but a community of individuals, thus transposing the analysis from a physical to a metaphorical plane.

This multi-level discussion is essential because it supports an intersectional approach to space which interweaves literary, historical, political, and psychological discourses. The importance of this transposition from a physical to metaphorical consideration of space is underlined by prominent scholars such as David Harvey, who asserts that such a multi-level analysis of space, 'is not as simple as a mere semantic contest between supposedly real and ideal conceptions of space, but a quite contested *rapprochement* between multiple political

visions.’³² Space is a concept inherently imbued with meanings and these meanings may originate from marginalised groups, such as in the case of activism in mid-twentieth century gay bars, but it may also originate from pre-established institutions of power, such as the system of surveillance and control that surrounded twentieth century gay bars. Thus, examining space not only as a physical boundary but also as a metaphorical reconstruction of social hierarchies is particularly meaningful for minority studies. In Harvey’s words, ‘[n]ot only is the production of space an inherently political process, then, but the use of spatial metaphors, far from providing just an innocent if evocative imagery, actually taps directly into questions of social power.’³³ This perspective highlights the intersectional, meaningful work done in this thesis; studying the sense of disorientation of the Insider/Outsider lesbian detective equals studying the questions of social power overlapping this figure, and draws attention to the artificiality and inescapability of meanings imbued in gender and sexuality.

Refracted against a mirror of spatial interpretation, the mystery crime assumes new and intriguing venues for discussion. Therefore, a space which is commonly understood as being as fecund and life-giving such as the family home, can also be examined in terms of loss and death, thus gaining new meanings and venues for interpretation and debate. As Stewart King argues, ‘place is arguably the most important feature in crime fiction. While it is not the defining feature – that, of course, is the presence of a crime – place gives the crime meaning. For in crime fiction, nothing makes sense without place.’³⁴ King focuses on place as a lens through which to make sense of the novel’s world, based on his assessment that ‘[s]paces surround places, such that places are spaces imbued with meaning.’³⁵ What does this expression, ‘spaces imbued with meaning,’ imply for crime fiction? It implies the extremely significant and central role of hidden meanings within the spaces of this genre.

W. H. Auden emphasised this point by comparing the quest for the murderer’s identity to the Quest for the Holy Grail and calling upon the two essential tools of this quest: ‘maps (the ritual of space) and timetables (the ritual of time).’³⁶ He also remarks on the spatial characterisation of the corpse, stating, ‘[t]he corpse must shock not only because it is a corpse

³² David Harvey, ‘From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity’, in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. by Jon Bird and others (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 2-29, (p. 97), emphasis in original.

³³ Harvey, p. 98.

³⁴ Stewart King, ‘Place’, in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Janice Allan and others (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 211-218, (p. 211).

³⁵ King, p. 212.

³⁶ W. H. Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage: Notes On the Detective Story, By an Addict’, *Harper’s Magazine* (1948), 406-412, (p. 408).

but also because, even for a corpse, it is shockingly out of place.³⁷ Therefore, in crime fiction space often makes sense of the crime and propels the investigation forward, as Thomas Heise argues, '[t]he time-consuming circumambulations of the detective novel's plot should be understood as a spatial operation to gather evidence.'³⁸ Space is not only relevant to crime fiction because of the evidence hidden in every nook and cranny, but also because of the social aspect of spaces, which in early novels are imbued with highly enriching meanings about gender hierarchy, sexuality, and community belonging. Harvey claims that social beings invest places with social power.³⁹ His argument explores the ways in which and purposes for which this power is deployed and used in interlinked places, and how the production and reproduction of power differentiations is central to the multiple and nuanced hierarchical divisions of the people navigating these power-imbued places.⁴⁰ Thus for Harvey, place is increasingly important to societal and individual identity formation and development: for example, place is the means of 'the search for an authentic sense of community'⁴¹ in the inauthentic capitalist urban society.

Harvey's findings can be applied to my reading of recurring spaces of early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction because in this genre the reproduction of power differentiations exposes intersectional hierarchical divisions, which in turn elucidate the Insider/Outsider liminality of these protagonists. For instance, in Forrester's *Amateur City* the crime scene consists of an office building where the branch chief supervisor puts in motion a multi-layered oppression of his employees based on racial, class, political, gender, and sexual differences.⁴² This oppressive ordering within the space of work is invaded by a subversive element, namely Detective Kate Delafield, but since the power of the existing hierarchy is still in place, Kate plays the part of the conservative element in order to infiltrate the system and gather evidence. This sort of undercover work not only pays homage to the chameleonic skills female detectives excelled in, such as Forrester's and Hayward's pioneering protagonists, but is also part of an empowering aspect of the detective as Insider/Outsider. This position not only necessitates but also facilitates the protagonist's boundary-blurring behaviours, as Kate, for instance, does when she plays the part of guardian or foil of state institutions as the situation requires. As

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Thomas Heise, 'Time and Space', in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Janice Allan and others (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 219-226, (p. 221).

³⁹ Place is meaning-adjacent to space, thus Harvey's research can be fruitfully utilised to support the premise of this thesis' argument.

⁴⁰ Harvey, p. 21.

⁴¹ Harvey, p. 12.

⁴² Katherine V. Forrester, *Amateur City* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1984] 2011) Bella Books ebook

mentioned above, the study of spaces exposes intersectional hierarchical divisions as the basis of inauthentic urban society, and from this perspective the researched material addresses a knowing audience: its sceptical, critical spatial manipulation highlights the artificiality and fragility of social hierarchies. This indicates how significant a study of spaces in this genre can be, as argued by Munt, who commends the use of such manipulations within feminist and queer reappropriations of the genre; '[b]oth women writers and lesbians, positioned as Other, have facilitated a subversive awareness of the real, and this has often been through playful disruption and mockery.'⁴³

When she acknowledges the impenetrable, deep-seated intolerance of the establishment towards any changes to the status quo,⁴⁴ at the end of her investigations, Kate can only expose the dark side of this oppressive space, it is up to corporate conscience to actively change it. This is but one brief example of the analytic process carried out in this thesis; as Heise contends, the operation of this spatial analysis sheds lights on something larger, a mosaic of interconnected societal discourses of power, 'an interrogation of the social itself – its structures, ideologies and human and spatial relations – of which crime is only a symptom.'⁴⁵ This thesis deals with the unique interpretive lens of space because of the multi-faceted results that can be obtained through a close interrogation of the spatial. Harvey argues that interpreting 'the changing meaning of the production of place amongst all realms of the social order'⁴⁶ is necessary to construct a 'mental map of the world which can be invested with all manner of personal or collective hopes and fears.'⁴⁷

In this thesis I describe how spaces become *heteronormative* spaces through meaning reproduction, specifically through the description of the space's relevant cultural context. For instance, in the fourth chapter on the home, I use the construct of the meek, domestic woman and the publicly professionally engaged man to establish the premise of the heteronormative home. Consequently, I expose the lesbian detective's disorientation and loss of authentic sense of self by describing her interactions with certain spaces in terms of personal and communal hopes and fears. In the fourth chapter this process translates into, first, examining Amanda's reaction towards Debby Daley's caring domestic gestures ('[h]er kitchen had been taken over by a Real Woman. If this was what happened after a one-night stand what would a relationship

⁴³ Munt, p. 77.

⁴⁴ Forrest, *Amateur City*, pp. 162-166.

⁴⁵ Heise, p. 221.

⁴⁶ Harvey, p. 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

be like?’⁴⁸) as the threat of the potential domesticity/stagnation in her life. Secondly, I add to this examination a layer of interpretation befitting my Insider/Outsider argument; arguing that Amanda wallows in a desolate domesticity because of its comforting familiarity, and only towards the end of the trilogy can she move towards a potential future companionship because of her Insider/Outsider status within society as an immigrant and a closeted homosexual.

These instances in Amanda’s case study may at first seem to be focused on momentary stages of her spatial belonging. It is plausible that Amanda’s outsider status in her domestic relationship will be solved with a well-balanced partnership, and the same can be said of the way she feels detached from both New Zealand and the United States, similar to how detached she feels from both the queer and the straight community, which can be solved with dialogue and adjustment. These seemingly momentary issues may be transposed to the spatiality of many other protagonists’ in the genre, but this thesis postulates that this liminality is something permanent, inherent to the characterisation of early lesbian sleuths. Amy Jeffrey’s study on space in Irish lesbian fiction also comments on the ‘negative suspended/permanent liminality’ of this subject matter, pointing out that lesbian women ‘negotiate a geography of fear in heteronormative cultures.’⁴⁹ While Jeffrey highlights the liminality of closeted lesbians, her initial, more general, assessment of the spatiality of queer women can easily be transposed to publicly out early protagonists, such as Wilson’s Pam Nilsen and Cassandra Reilly, Claire McNab’s Carol Ashton, and Dreher’s Stoner McTavish. As Jeffrey argues, ‘[l]esbian women constantly navigate a geography of fear that decrees where and what spaces might allow them to express themselves without fear of negative consequences.’⁵⁰ As the following section demonstrates, no setting (in early novels) has reached the efficiency of portraying a geography of fear quite like the urban environment.

The Urban Context

In this thesis, the examination of spaces in early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction unearths the living and working modalities that trapped characters fight so fiercely to establish and maintain. This process is so fruitful because it exposes a multitude of meanings, including the relations of power inscribed into the apparently empty spatiality of social life, revealing how

⁴⁸ Rose Beecham, *Introducing Amanda Valentine* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1992), p. 181.

⁴⁹ Amy Jeffrey, *Space in Irish Lesbian Fiction: Towards a Queer Liminality* (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 9.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey, p. 20.

human geography is filled with pre-constructed hegemonies, for instance those between law enforcement and criminals, or those between privileged and less privileged citizens. The space most prominent in early novels consists of the urbanised conglomerate, the city. The city has undergone exponential changes in the twentieth century and crime fiction has played a central role in exposing the various consequences of these changes, so much so that Auden calls this representation ‘the poetry concealed in city life,’⁵¹ and compares the detective story writer as ‘the poet of the city, and the detective as a romantic hero, the protector of civilization.’⁵²

The phrasing ‘the protector of civilization’ can be read as meaning the protector of law and order, which implies the pre-established status quo maintained through order. On this topic, Heise argues that, with its peculiar geography and its humans/institutions relations, crime fiction set in an urban context is a particularly apt setting to explore social order, with the conventional imagery of the detective weaving through the streets as he seeks out criminals a main staple of the crime genre.⁵³ Heise highlights the concept of surveillance and control in crime literature’s spaces: two notions which are fundamental in the understanding of the privileged position of law enforcement members, one of the elements empowering lesbian detectives in respect to their Insider role in the context of social order.⁵⁴ This paradoxical endowment of surveillance and control is one of the reasons why this thesis argues for the unavoidable Insider/Outsider position of the lesbian detective, who finds herself unmoored in the spaces she moves through because of the lingering psychological shadow cast by queer trauma-related liminality.

The lesbian sleuth is supposed to be part of the mechanism of surveillance and control organised by the State, but she is also part of a community that has been historically persecuted by, among others, state-sanctioned surveillance and control. The idea of control through surveillance is most precisely described in the fifth chapter, on the bar, which discusses gay bars, spaces where an encroaching heterosexual presence worked towards the repression of homosexual congregation. On this topic Kelly Hankin argues that literary (particularly in pulp fiction) and visual representations of gay bars foreground the mutual detachment and contempt between the heteronormative establishment and the LGBT+ community through systematic processes of surveillance and control in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States. In this country and time period, these processes involve civilian presence, such as

⁵¹ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1972), p. 76.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Heise, p. 221.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

heterosexual voyeuristic passers-by, but also law enforcement presence, such as the raids at the hands of vice squads. The latter was considered an effective method and was widely utilised. As Hankin asserts, '[b]y being contained in a single locale—both physically and representationally - lesbians, who might otherwise evade detection, were easily identified and surveyed.'⁵⁵ The spaces through which the lesbian detective moves are often simultaneously freeing and claustrophobic.

Peter Messent's research also highlights the relevance of urban space in the literature of crime, for two elements in particular: gender and sexuality. Messent contends that the imagery of the sleuth weaving through an urban space in pursuit of the criminal is traditionally male-centred, and that with female detection 'the sense of physical vulnerability that often affects the male detective is foregrounded to a much greater extent.'⁵⁶ One of the ways in which this physical vulnerability is shown is the focus on harm done to the female body; despite the abundance of corpses in the genre, the level of physical mutilation, especially of sexual origin, is predominant in female victims.⁵⁷ Messent also engages with the notions of surveillance and control in crime fiction, by building on Franco Moretti's argument that there is a deep connection between detective fiction and coercive societies, represented by the symbol of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, the omni-seeing prison design,⁵⁸ and enacted through the detective's weaving through criminalised spaces. As Messent elaborates, 'the private eye negotiates the street world, using his or her knowledge and watchfulness to illuminate that part of it through which s/he moves - and generally uses such knowledge to the ends of the existing social order, whatever alienation from it s/he may feel.'⁵⁹ Here Messent draws from the image of the panopticon to imbue the act of detection with meaning, whereas this thesis argues that the obsessive will to monitor and control of the panopticon can also be likened to heteronormative cultures' long history of gazing upon, judging, and repressing homosexuality. Additionally, the incited paranoia in the prisoners can be paralleled with the lesbian sleuth's queer trauma and the depressing sense of indelible disorientation and unmooring inherent to these characters.

Geography scholar David Schmid proposes that radical geographers consider the figure of the detective in visualising representations of safe cities. While Lehan identifies certain

⁵⁵ Kelly Hankin, *The Girls in the Back Room: Looking at the Lesbian Bar* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 10.

⁵⁶ Peter Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 73-74.

⁵⁷ Messent, p. 75

⁵⁸ Messent, p. 63.

⁵⁹ Messent, p. 65.

Holmes stories in which the city is a perfectly knowable grid of human activity, a realm of order where criminality is a disdainful disruption, Schmid starts from a different premise. First of all, he paints the image of the city as an unknowable den of chaos, from Victorian to noir representations, then he examines how several fictional detectives have tried to systematise the chaotic city, in so doing exposing the violent nature of capitalist progress and institutional inequality.⁶⁰ Schmid compares Doyle's detective with Chandler's, Himes', Paretsky's and Robbe-Grillet's writing, contrasting how the former foregrounds the individual's power to know the spaces one navigates intimately, assuring the readers that these spaces can be mastered.⁶¹ I contrast this with the spaces that the lesbian detective inhabits: instead of mastering spaces imbued with hetero-normative mores and expectations, the lesbian detective is constantly struggling against being mastered by them. She valiantly tries to carve out a space for herself like Paretsky's Warshawski, but the reader is left feeling that the individual female detective is simply surviving in these hostile environments, while a true sense of presence, of inhabiting and owning a space, is depicted in different spatial and social settings, primarily through community scenes, queer friends, allied colleagues, or queer suspects and witnesses.

The other important geography/popular literature study of the modern urbanised environment in the literature of crime is Lehan's *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (1998) and Maarit Piipponen's, Helen Mäntymäki's, and Marinella Rodi-Risberg's *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders and Detection* (2020). With urban development and diversification Other-ed entities are marginalised. As Lehan states, '[urban] diversity led inevitably to the "Other"—an urban element, usually a minority, deemed "outside" the community.'⁶² To flesh out the figures Othered in the city, Lehan offers intriguing insights into the relationship between the detective and the urban setting, such as in the Sherlock Holmes' series:

[t]he city is the embodiment of order in these stories because Holmes is often blind to a disorder—a chaos—deeper than the surface he unfolds for us. But despite his inability to see how many archaeological layers a city might have, Holmes finds no piece of evidence too trivial in the great scheme of connected meaning. His powers of

⁶⁰ Schmid, pp. 242-248.

⁶¹ Schmid, pp. 248-249.

⁶² Lehan, p. 8.

observation lead to a new sense of excitement about the physical world that it begins to demystify.⁶³

This quote reveals three significant elements for this thesis' core chapters: the city as embodiment of order, Holmes as blind to/unaware to the city's hidden chaos, and the demystification brought by detection. In Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction these three elements are over-turned, as the city is the embodiment of filth and chaos and what Holmes could not see, and the systemic socio-economic inequalities perpetrated by the institutions are exposed and criticised.

While Lehan navigates the city, the contributors to Piipponen's, Mäntymäki's, and Rodi-Risberg's volume navigate a globalised world. They argue that 'through engaging with a broad selection of mobilities, contemporary crime narratives comment on sociocultural transformations in a globalised and interconnected world.'⁶⁴ By concentrating on globalisation and transnationalism, the argument shifts from a localised conceptualisation of crime to a decentralised one, and from neat resolutions to compromises, proposing that,

violence is endemic in local and global sociopolitical and economic systems that affect people's lives. Truth may be discovered by the detective, but there might be no justice for the victims or release from abusive systems and institutions. It follows, then, that the lack of a neat resolution in today's texts also challenges the traditional understanding of crime texts' cathartic value for readers.⁶⁵

In this anthology Mary Ann Gillies draws on the ideas of border crossings, social expectations, and liminal subjectivities to critique King's *Touchstone* and *Keeping Watch*, highlighting the ingenious ways in which the protagonists, two traumatised war veterans, navigate liminal spaces due to geopolitics (World War I and the Vietnam War). Examining links between prevalent past and present sociocultural norms, Gillies identifies the noteworthy parallel movement of the reader and of the protagonists, namely how the reader follows the protagonists back and forth in time, constantly reliving the past and negotiating with the border between normalcy/present and trauma/past, thus underlining deep-seated consequences of conflicts for

⁶³ Lehan, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Maarit Piipponen, Helen Mäntymäki, and Marinella Rodi-Risberg, 'From Mobile Crimes to Crimes of Mobility', in *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders and Detection*, ed. by Maarit Piipponen, Helen Mäntymäki and Marinella Rodi-Risberg (Cham, CH: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 1-41, (p. 3).

⁶⁵ Piipponen, Mäntymäki, and Rodi-Risberg, p. 4.

societies and individuals.⁶⁶ The lesbian sleuth is both an insider, a member of the enforcement, a representative of the justice system which does not truly serve justice as the LGBT+ community has historically witnessed, and simultaneously she is an outsider, a marginalised abnormality. These reflections have matured also thanks to the analysis of works such as Lehan's and Piipponen's, Mäntymäki's, and Rodi-Risberg's anthology.

The analysis of spaces in the primary source material is also informed by literary and cultural representations of how the lesbian community of the second half of the twentieth century moved in public and private spaces, such as gay bars. Most public and private spaces, as they are depicted in early novels, are systemically heteronormative. They are secured and naturalised through the repetition of heterosexual practices, including public displays of affection between couples, sensual and sexual behaviours in advertisements and mass-distributed cultural products such as songs, and heterosexualised assumptions of one's partner. The heterosexing of public spaces is maintained through regulations aimed at curtailing public expressions of homosexuality and even subtle forms of regulations such as tacit disapproval (as in the case of Kate's family) or the association of heterosexuality with normality (as in the case of Pam's family) effectively continue the process of Other-ing homosexual women and making them feel out of place in everyday spaces. The premise of this thesis' argument can be summarised by Hankin's words, '[t]hus, through the repetition of heterosexual acts and representations within public space, on the one hand, and the regulation of lesbian and gay acts and representations, on the other, heterosexuality produces and maintains its spatial supremacy.'⁶⁷ This premise is pitted against recurring spaces, such as the queer closet, the workplace, the home, the homes of suspects and of the detectives, and finally the gay bar.

The Literary and Chronological scope

I have selected my primary texts to build a solid foundation of a range of writing styles, literary devices, themes, and representations of spaces. This initial coverage counts a hundred novels published between 1984 and 2019 and lends itself to the consideration of diverse theoretical and strategic approaches to various themes and social issues in this genre. Further selection

⁶⁶ Mary Ann Gillies, 'Liminal Spaces in Laurie R. King's *Touchstone* and *Keeping Watch*', in *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders and Detection*, ed. by Maarit Piipponen, Helen Mäntymäki and Marinella Rodi-Risberg (Cham, CH: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 153-68.

⁶⁷ Hankin, p. 2.

was then conducted according to the lesbian detective's meaningful interactions with certain geographical and/or metaphorical spaces. Anyone interested to peruse the list of all primary texts read for this thesis may consult the Appendix at the back of this thesis.

This thesis analyses twenty-eight novels across eleven Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction series which were first published in the 1980s and 1990s. Texts from the broader pool of samples are sometimes mentioned to further inform the reader about my interpretations. The primary novels are:

Barbara Wilson's Pam Nilsen series:

- *Murder in the Collective* (1984)
- *Sisters of the Road* (1986)

Claire McNab's Carol Ashton series:

- *Lessons in Murder* (1988)
- *Fatal Reunion* (1989)
- *Dead Certain* (1992)

J. M. Redmann's Micky Knight series:

- *Death by the Riverside* (1990)
- *Deaths of Jocasta* (1992)
- *The Intersection of Law and Desire* (1995)

Jaye Maiman's Robin Miller series:

- *Crazy for Loving* (1992)
- *Under my Skin* (1993)

Katherine V. Forrest's Kate Delafield series:

- *Amateur City* (1984)
- *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987)
- *The Beverly Malibu* (1989)
- *Murder by Tradition* (1991)
- *Liberty Square* (1996)
- *Apparition Alley* (1997)
- *Sleeping Bones* (1999)
- *Hancock Park* (2004)
- *High Desert* (2013)

Laurie R. King's Kate Martinelli series:

- *A Grave Talent* (1993)
- *The Art of Detection* (2006)

Rose Beecham's Amanda Valentine series:

- *Introducing Amanda Valentine* (1992)
- *Second Guess* (1994)
- *Fair Play* (1995)

Sandra Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano series:

- *Everything You Have is Mine* (1991)
- *I'll be Leaving You Always* (1993)
- *My Sweet Untraceable You* (1994)
- *To Play the Fool* (1995)

This thesis covers mostly Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction primarily published and set in the United States. This research focus originates in the fervent socio-political American activism of the second half of the twentieth century and its significant influence on the wider genre. Most of the works published in the 1980s and 1990s engage with highly sensitive gender- and sexuality-related issues such as gay bar raids, the reappropriation of LGBT+ adult content industry, the state's dismissal of the early AIDS epidemic outbreak, and gay bashing. The American output was not the only literary market that was examined in the early stages of this research; other countries' literary landscapes were taken under consideration, including the United Kingdom's, Australia's and New Zealand's. However, partly due to the strong presence of themes, settings, and characterisation styles influenced by feminist discourses, and partly due to the copious catalogue of American publishing houses for this genre, in terms of nationality, the American market provided the highest number of texts examined here. In fact, out of the series quoted in this thesis nine out of eleven were authored by American writers and set in the United States, including: Barbara Wilson's Pam Nilsen series (1984-1989) and Cassandra Reilly series (1990-2000), Forrest's Kate Delafield series (1984-), Dreher's Stoner McTavish series (1985-1998), Redmann's Micky Knight series (1990-2019), Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano series (1991-1998), Maiman's Robin Miller series (1991-1999), and King's Kate Martinelli series (1993-2000).

Added to these American works are Claire McNab's Carol Ashton series (1988-2003), which is set in Sydney, Australia; Beecham's Amanda Valentine series (1992-1995), which is set in Wellington, New Zealand; and finally Val McDermid's Lindsay Gordon series (1987-

2003), partially set in Scotland. Of these three authors, McNab and Beecham emigrated to the United States in their youth, published their series through American publishers, and followed trends of characterisation and plot structure shared by American lesbian authors of their time, as shown in the following chapters of this thesis. Maintaining a substantial sampling breadth from the genre and remaining within the geographical and chronological scope delineated above, I selected the novels read for this thesis based on the lesbian detectives' patterns of attitude and actions within certain spaces.

Thesis Structure

Following this introduction, which includes concise presentations of the argument, the material under study, and the theoretical foundations constituted by feminist, queer, and geographical literary studies, chapter one presents a brief historical overview of the detective fiction genre, introducing the traditional detective novel, the police procedural, and hard-boiled sub-genres. Chapter one also offers brief snapshots of key protagonists in the genre as they inhabit the most emblematic spaces of their narratives, such as the domestic settings for Miss Marple, or the urban underground for Philip Marlowe. This is useful for the analysis of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction because it provides a solid foundation in respect to the tension between the role of the detective as the upholder of justice and order, and the aspects which alienate or threaten to alienate the investigator from this position.

Following these introductory sections, the thesis's core structuring focus comes into play. The argument centred on the lesbian sleuth's liminality finds supporting evidence in a number of spaces, and this thesis recognises the closet, the clinic, the home, and the bar to best elucidate the complexities and nuances of its argument. Each chapter discusses a different space and contains multiple sections, delineating the space in question and its relevance in the novels under examination. These chapters convey the subversive nature of this genre, which emerged as a new type of fiction in the early 1980s in the United States. For series that began publication in these decades but continued onwards, these novels are still included in the selection pool for literary interpretation.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth chapters examine how lesbian detectives navigate a series of spaces through an institutional lens, focusing attention on the relation between the lesbian detective (as symbol of the female gender and of the LGBT+ community) and the larger machinations that constitute law enforcement, including the spaces of the police precinct

offices, the city itself, its clinics and hospitals, its spaces of recreation, and even homes. The second chapter discussing the closet, which primarily engages with space from a metaphorical perspective, introduces the often thorny relationship between lesbian sleuths and their sexual identity. Sexuality plays a central role in the investigations of the lesbian detective and this chapter foregrounds this premise by attentively analysing how the queer closet is depicted in key novels. This chapter also conveys the social pressure in the LGBT+ community of the 1980s and 1990s to canonise public coming out as a sign of strength and mental wellbeing. Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction authors reveal the struggle not only of older individuals such as Kate, who may be slower to adapt to change, but also of LGBT+ people in law enforcement in general. These officers, and to a lesser extent the private eyes and amateur detectives, represent the very law which has historically punished their community for committing homosexual acts.⁶⁸ This is a fundamental starting point because the majority of novels read for this thesis featured closeted protagonists in a hyper-masculine, homophobic environment and forced coming out usually means harassment and unprecedented issues at work. At times authors also refer to historical events; for example Forrest's Kate states '[s]he did not want to become a Mitch Grobeson,'⁶⁹ referring to the LAPD Pacific Division sergeant who filed the first lawsuit against homophobic harassment in the workplace.⁷⁰ The second chapter also draws attention to the long-term psychological consequences for closeted characters, most notably the sense of disorientation lingering from marginalisation which in this thesis coalesces into the argument of the lesbian sleuth as perpetual liminal figure.

Chapter three focuses on the space of the clinic or hospital, particularly in terms of the history between psychology and non-heterosexual sexual desire. The AIDS epidemic occupies a significant portion of the chapter, as it is regarded as the apex of a long history of marginalisation of queer identity by the medical establishment, another instance of queer trauma which leads to the Insider/Outsider liminality that is the core argument of this thesis. Why the apex? Because the way the United States' medical and political system handled the AIDS epidemic's initial spread is indicative of systematic rejection, another step in the process of Other-ness that the LGBT+ community experiences. Susan Sontag's now classic analysis of illness as metaphor for the undesirable, unthinkable, unspeakable, indicated that having AIDS was typically considered as shameful, exposing (and, in respect to my argument, confirming)

⁶⁸ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 20. Google ebook.

⁶⁹ Katherine V. Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1989] 2013), p. 44. Google ebook.

⁷⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, p. 48.

a sexually ‘deviant’ identity,⁷¹ positioning the illness (written as illness but read as homosexuality) ‘as a disease not only of sexual excess but of perversity.’⁷² Consequently, as Celia Kitzinger points out, ‘[t]he [AIDS] disease was used to fuel anti-homosexual attitudes and initiatives, with gay men depicted as a dangerous threat to public safety.’⁷³

As this thesis contends, queer trauma permeates all medical settings, thus the lesbian sleuth is affected too, especially in early novels where several protagonists are surrounded by characters and plots embedded in therapy, spiritual healing, or working in clinics or hospitals. Micky’s neighbours are psychoanalysts and her girlfriend works at a women’s clinic; Kate has a dedicated subplot about her troubled relationship with her therapist and with therapy and treatment in general, while Stoner’s identity has split in childhood as a result of forced hospitalisation. Thus it is no wonder that the AIDS epidemic becomes the catalyst to build the argument of the third chapter.

As this chapter outlines, the use of the AIDS epidemic as a means for the establishment to tighten its web of surveillance and control over the LGBT+ community under the guise of public hygiene caused further marginalisation of the LGBT+ community and the exacerbation of resentment towards the establishment. When the lesbian detective encounters cases with victims, suspects, or criminals who are sick, this painful history is unearthed and rehashed, reinforcing the lesbian sleuth’s Insider/Outsider liminality. Sickness, and AIDS in particular, is frequently foregrounded in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, such as in Maiman’s *Crazy for Loving* where both the criminal and the victim have been infected with HIV, with the criminal intentionally infecting the victim as a form of twisted personal revenge against the world and its incurable maladies.⁷⁴ The psychological scarring of the LGBT+ community is a reminder of systemic neglect and has compounded the community’s queer trauma. Literary examples of these significant consequences include the morbidisation of same-sex parenting, as seen in Maiman’s *Under My Skin*, where the protagonist’s neighbours are denied the opportunity to adopt so-called normal babies.⁷⁵ Another consequence is the defilement of same-sex intimacy, again evidenced in another Maiman’s novel, *Someone to Watch*, where the protagonist cites the television coverage of a scene of two men kissing during a gay rights

⁷¹ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 89, 115, 122, 136. Google ebook.

⁷² Sontag, p. 89.

⁷³ Celia Kitzinger, ‘The De-gayng and Re-gayng of AIDS: Contested Homophobias in Lesbian and Gay Awareness Training’, *Discourse & Society*, 16.2 (2005), 173-197, (p. 177).

⁷⁴ Jaye Maiman, *Crazy for Loving* (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, [1992] 2010), pp. 190-191. Bella Books ebook.

⁷⁵ Jaye Maiman, *Under My Skin* (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, [1993] 2011), p. 76. Bella Books ebook.

march: '[t]hese are the faces of AIDS. They didn't ask for help before choosing their lifestyles. Now they want to know why America isn't willing to spend tax dollars to help them now.'⁷⁶ These issues accentuate the lesbian sleuth's liminal position in trying to conciliate her sense of justice and the society's will to let a group of so-called undesirables drift into a slow, painful end.

Following the closet and the clinic, the literary analysis concludes with two chapters on spaces that are more intimate: homes and lesbian bars. The first of these chapters, on the home, moves away from a focus on queerness and crime into more detailed engagement with queerness and domesticity and outlines the ways in which the home can be intimate, but can also be a site of judgement when controlled by hostile family members. As Sarah Schulman denounces in *Ties that Bind: Familial Homophobia and its Consequences* (2009), the ideal nuclear family home 'pretends that it is neutral, objective, normal, right, and value free,'⁷⁷ and yet this is actually 'the opposite of its actual function.'⁷⁸ The higher these elements are valued by the protagonist's family, the more vicious the retaliation against the protagonist's supposedly deviant proclivities. Dreher's Stoner McTavish is institutionalised by her parents,⁷⁹ Forrest's Kate Delafield is shunned by her brother,⁸⁰ and Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano is spitefully ignored by her in-laws.⁸¹ The fourth chapter, on the home, connects such treatment with the uncertain way lesbian sleuths live their domesticity; some are stressed or depressed in their solitude but hesitate to commit to intimate relationships, like Beecham's Amanda Valentine. Other protagonists suffer such abuse during their teenage years that it warps their sense of intimacy altogether, as in the case of Redmann's Micky Knight, where the heterosexual home truly becomes the symbol of heteronormative Christian intolerance of so-called deviancy. As Schulman asserts, 'the homophobic family lies at the heart of what we are told is the model for loyalty, caring, love, and identity.'⁸² From this perspective, the home chapter looks at a fundamental pillar of conformist society, one of the spaces where heteronormativity is secured and naturalised through the repetitions of heterosexual expressions, as well as one of the spaces where homosexuality is curtailed in an individual's formative years. The argument thus centres on the impact of regulatory tactics on the domestic

⁷⁶ Jaye Maiman, 'Someone to Watch' (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, [1995] 2013), p. 68. Bella Books ebook.

⁷⁷ Sarah Schulman, *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (New York: The New Press, 2009), p. 38. Google ebook.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sarah Dreher, *Shaman's Moon* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1998] 2015), p. 225. Amazon ebook.

⁸⁰ Katherine V. Forrest, *Hancock Park* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, 2013 [2004]), p. 26. Google ebook.

⁸¹ Sandra Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine* (Boston: Little Brown, [1991] 2011), pp. 111-112. Amazon ebook.

⁸² Schulman, p. 38.

lives of lesbian sleuths and any tensions caused by heterosexual spatial supremacy between the protagonists' domestic and professional contexts.

Moving from the fourth chapter's private space, the fifth chapter explores the highly problematic public entertainment venue that is the gay bar of the second half of the twentieth century. In the beginning of the twentieth century the bar was a male-controlled environment, as Hankin writes:

[w]ithout male or family escorts, women's entry into and navigation of these spaces was orchestrated by male desires and compromised by the threat of male violence. Though the bar was a traditionally male domain (save for the presence of prostitutes), it was newly penetrated by, if not welcoming of, women.⁸³

Hankin's poignant observation of this subversive penetration of a traditionally male domain informs a pivotal point in my argument: the lesbian bar is a space which itself is liminal. In fact, it is doubly liminal because as the bar was appropriated not only by heterosexual females, but also by queer females, the so-called outsidership of the bar represented in the source texts is thus compounded by both gender and sexual identity. Additionally, the bar is deemed a problematic space due to its history of having been instrumentalised by the state to maintain surveillance and control over the LGBT+ community, becoming an ominous beacon of both sanctuary and threat for queer individuals who wished to socialise with others like them. Gay bars made it easy for the establishment to control queer spatiality; as Hankin points out, '[a]t the same time that homosexuality could no longer easily be identified by physical markers, it began to be identified by geographical ones.'⁸⁴ With bogus excuses raids were routinely conducted in these locales, gay men and lesbians were arrested and often had their vice squad files filled and made available to FBI, employers, and the press.⁸⁵ As Hankin concludes, 'confining the lesbian's public activities to the space of the bar enabled the tenacious ideological project of excluding homosexuality from the definitional center of public/private divide, thereby ensuring heterosexual spatial privilege and dominance.'⁸⁶

Such contexts shed light on the complex connection between the lesbian sleuth and this space, which is further complicated by her close ties with the law, as evidenced extensively in

⁸³ Hankin, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Hankin, p. 10.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Forrest's *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* where the protagonist's sense of Self is profoundly shaken by the encounter with a lesbian bar's clientele. Faced with the spiteful gazes of fellow Sisters who have gone through decades of law-sanctioned persecution, Kate goes as far as asking herself '[w]here does my integrity begin and end,'⁸⁷ narrativising the conundrum at the foundation of the Insider/Outsider argument. The fifth chapter analyses such scenes, weaving in the image of a perpetually lost ship whose only remaining safe port is not only a space which in itself contains contradictions (as the bar potentially leads to alcoholism, uniting salvation and damnation), but is also a space which simultaneously introduces the protagonist to a community and to the inevitability of her own solitude, since the investigator needs to side with the law. The reason why the lesbian community and the law are irreconcilable in these novels is partly due to the historical context delineated above and more extensively in the fifth chapter, but also because the authors themselves compound this divide by utilising the lesbian bar as focal point for contradictions. In Forrest's *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, the victim found a family in fellow bar-goers but is bludgeoned to death outside the bar by her homophobic mother, in Gerri Hill's *Hunter's Way* one of the protagonist's superiors, a person close to the Chief of Police himself, secretly meets his lover in a gay BDSM club, while in Beecham's *Second Guess* the victim is another client of a gay BDSM club murdered by a homophobic lover. In the latter example the crime scene is located within the club and the criminal goes out of his way to recreate a BDSM scene gone wrong, intending to cast suspicion on the LGBT+ community.⁸⁸ The fifth chapter interrogates such dramatisations and argues that an inescapable web of contradictions is woven around the lesbian sleuth, supporting the core argument of this research.

The close reading of these spaces exposes the issues, doubts, and anxieties the lesbian detectives voice or have introjected about the network of law enforcement that they themselves are part of and the tense history between law enforcement and the gay community in the twentieth century. Such anxieties often centre on the relationship between the LGBT+ community and concepts of justice, morality, community, and law, and on the nature and extent of the lesbian detective's commitment to the values of the social authorities. The unfair situations the protagonists consistently discover themselves in never overwhelm or defeat them, which is remarkable considering that even if small battles are won along the way, the system itself survives, like a many-headed beast with endless resources, to the point that it appears like

⁸⁷ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1987] 2011), p. 11. Bella Books ebook.

⁸⁸ Rose Beecham, *Second Guess* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1994)

an ultimately pointless fight. Yet lesbian detectives stand apart from the larger state, motivated by the respect and justice that their community deserve.

Second Wave Feminism, First Wave Lesbian Detective Fiction

Crime fiction, as seen in the following chapter, is often viewed as a genre that functions towards conservative ends, to preserve and sustain the dominant social order; after all, in the classical form of crime fiction, the detective novel, the solving of crimes consists in the restoration of normality by the rule of the law. However, this process can also be read in a more radical and challenging way, as Messent states, ‘what makes the crime fiction genre so distinctive is its direct relationship to the law, and to the fracturing of the social system that the law supports and protects.’⁸⁹ Feminist crime fiction and LGBT+ crime fiction have developed a reputation for actively working towards the exposure and the fracturing of the established social system’s biases.

The impact of second wave feminist practices on the novels I analyse in this thesis has been such that space needs to be dedicated to their overview. The history of feminist literary criticism inevitably intertwines with the history of women’s rights movements and with the concept of wave history in feminism. Feminist criticism occurs in the exploration of and informed response to representations of gender and sexual oppression. Feminist criticism oversees several different specialised forms of criticism, including the revision of the literary canon, the study of underrated or lost female writers, and the development of a thriving female literary history.⁹⁰ For some, feminist criticism originates from a desire to uncover and discuss female writers, while for others it comes from the urge to expose the ways female authors have been neglected and misinterpreted by patriarchal critics.

In her study of the wave metaphor as ‘a discursive legacy’,⁹¹ Jo Reger identifies the beginning of the first wave in the mid-1800s lasting into the 1920s, the beginning of the second in the early 1960s until the 1980s, and the *incipit* of the third wave in the mid-1990s to the present.⁹² As for postfeminism, Sarah Gamble’s research identifies its origin in the early

⁸⁹ Messent, p. 12.

⁹⁰ Sydney J. Kaplan, ‘Varieties of Feminist Criticism’, in *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn (London: Routledge, 1985) pp. 37-58, (p. 37).

⁹¹ Jo Reger, ‘Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism’, *Feminist Studies*, 43.1 (2017), 193-221, (p. 194).

⁹² *Ibid.*

1980s⁹³ and its ‘bewilderingly uncertain’ trajectory into the present. Early feminist activism focused on organising and making the voices of women heard; as Lillian Faderman states, ‘[w]omen witnessed the demands for rights by other oppressed groups and concluded that it was time for their own voices to be heard.’⁹⁴ For some women, feminist activism ended with this significant historical milestone, the vote. But by the time the two world wars ended and the societal revolution of the 1960s approached, it was clear to many women that patriarchal oppression was still a problem, as it was still pervasive and was damaging the lives of more and more women who wanted to live freely and equally, not just through the ballot but in every aspect of human life. Thus, a new, more complex discourse of women’s liberation emerged, which is generally referred to as second wave feminism. The so-called old feminism was deemed individualist and reformist, while the new movement was highly promoted as collective and revolutionary.⁹⁵ Third World feminist praxis emerged from second wave feminist discussion and drew attention to all the possible kinds of gender, race, class, sexual, political, and socio-historical consciousness. In Ednie K. Garrison’s words, there was ‘a differential consciousness which multiplies what counts as feminist politics and consciousness,’⁹⁶ a fundamental concept which contributed to developing a differentiated, subjective implementation of feminist praxis: the fact that race, class, culture and sexuality are regarded as top priorities depending on subjective experiences and the fact that such concerns are no less important and not separable from gender. No wave was completely uniform in goals, population, methodology, or theory, and no wave resolved or dismissed the problems which arose during its course before the next began.⁹⁷

Throughout the 1970s, the lead-up to the beginnings of lesbian detective fictive, the feminist agenda was gathering pace, especially in the United States where second wave feminism emerged out of the 1960s Women’s Liberation Movement. Spearheaded by works such as Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1971) and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), feminist discourse coalesced around the issue of ‘the problem that has no name,’ the definition of women’s oppression, and the relationship between the ‘old feminist of

⁹³ Sarah Gamble, ‘Postfeminism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, [2001] 2006), pp. 36-45, (p. 36). Google ebook.

⁹⁴ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 202.

⁹⁵ Ednie K. Garrison, ‘U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologics of the Third Wave’, *Feminist Studies*, 26.1 (2000), 141-163, (p. 145).

⁹⁶ Garrison, p. 148.

⁹⁷ Garrison, pp. 145-147.

equal rights' and the 'new feminism of women's liberation.'⁹⁸ Towards the betterment of this relationship, legislative progress was made in gender biased issues such as equal pay and work roles, and significant progress was also made on the cultural front, as feminist theatre proliferated, feminist publishers were founded, and gender politics began to enter mainstream interest.⁹⁹

Alongside feminism activism, the gay liberation movement grew publicly visible in the late 1960s and 1970s, and a significant number of lesbians took into account the resistance or indifference that they had experienced at organisational levels in the feminist movement and formed separate groups of their own. They were informed by feminist discourse and with time they divided into groups focusing on black and women of colour, liberal, radical, and socialist lesbian feminist concerns. From a political and theoretical point of view the 1980s were characterised by lively and cross-referencing critical debates about what constitutes lesbianism and how it should be defined in countercultural protests most effectively. This negotiation of identity politics structured the post-1960s political movements and their academic applications, becoming increasingly fragmented due to critiques of single axis focus, either for sexuality, class, race, or nationality, much like other feminist and male gay activist movements.¹⁰⁰

Second wave feminism built upon centuries of speculation around the concept of woman, either misogynist or emancipatory. Early feminist literary criticism was eager to investigate its own origins, seeking to establish a history of women's writing and of proto-feminist thought to resist the predominant acceptance of male writing as the norm. Literature has been fundamental to the creation of feminist theories and the inspiration of new generations of theorists. As Plain and Susan Sellers remark, 'it is [in the text] that the most persuasive possibilities can be found for imagining the future of the female subject.'¹⁰¹ Thus it is in literature that many feminist theorists probed woman's past, debated about her present and imagined her future. The history of women's writing and literary criticism extends far beyond the boundaries of second wave feminism, however this is the most significant phase for Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction due to chronological proximity. As feminist critics began to question what was taught in institutions of higher learning, they adopted a more personal and

⁹⁸ Sue Thornham, 'Second Wave Feminism', in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, [2001] 2006) pp. 25-35, (p. 25).

⁹⁹ Margaret Kinsman, 'Feminist Crime Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Catherine R. Nickerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 148-162, (p. 158).

¹⁰⁰ Annamarie Jagose, 'Debating Definitions: The Lesbian in Feminist Studies and Queer Studies', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. by Jodie Medd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 32-33.

¹⁰¹ Plain and Sellers, sec. 2 par. 2.

immediate connection between their lived experience and viewpoint and the text. This visceral response provided long-lasting momentum and creative power to feminist criticism and also encouraged collaborative research between literary criticism and the women's rights movements.¹⁰²

There were several problematic aspects to second wave feminist criticism, such as the marginalisation of the concerns of lesbians and women of colour effaced by the predominantly white, middle-class, heterosexual image that many sought to foreground. For instance, in the late 1970s Barbara Smith pointed out that while Elaine Showalter's reviews exalted feminist criticism as cosmopolitan, she failed to draw attention to Black or Third World writers and that this mishandling reflected a wider trend in feminist criticism of the time.¹⁰³ In Smith's words, '[t]here [was] no political movement to give power or support to those who want[ed] to examine Black women's experience through studying our history, literature, and culture.'¹⁰⁴ Black theorists particularly active during the publications of the novels featured in this thesis, such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde, articulated serious concerns of systemic racism within the movement,¹⁰⁵ yet the lack of coverage of racial issues in this thesis should not be seen as acquiescence to the lacklustre inclusivity which has plagued feminist criticism in the past. The vast majority of the authors of novels read in preparation of this research project are white, and as such, while this thesis examines those marginalised by sexual identity, it represents the majority voices – white people – within this marginalised group. Certain aspects, such as race or class, fail to appear systematically in the analysis as they are not dominant themes in the primary source material. This speaks to the bias of representation in this field and will be the theme of future research.

Post-Second Wave Feminism and Intersectional Research

Reger's study indicates that the term "third wave" has roots in both grassroots activism and academia, citing women of colour's 1960s and 1970s challenges towards second wave

¹⁰² Kaplan, pp. 38-40.

¹⁰³ Barbara Smith, 'Toward a Black Feminist Criticism', in *An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham NC: Duke University Press, [1977] 1994) pp. 410-427, (p. 414).

¹⁰⁴ Smith, p. 412.

¹⁰⁵ See for instance bell hooks' 1981 *Aint's I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, or the criticism moved by Audre Lorde to Mary Daly's 1978 *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* in private correspondence, as cited in Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse, *Gender: In World Perspective* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), p. 170.

feminists' lack of racial-ethnic inclusivity and other problematic aspects, Lynn Chancers' 1991 call for a third wave, and Rebecca Walker's 'Becoming the Third wave.'¹⁰⁶ In the 1980s an increasing number of young feminist critics began to distance themselves from the problematic politics of post- and second wave feminism, forming the third wave of feminist discourse, which included groups such as the Women's Action Coalition and Third Wave. Garrison defined the third wave as a backlash in response to 1970s women's movements and postfeminism.

Third wave feminism is characterised by an innate acceptance of hybridity, an understanding that the oppression of women differs depending on elements such as class, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual identity.¹⁰⁷ As stated by Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, the editors of *Third Wave Agenda* (1997), the main feature of third wave feminism compared to second wave is the acceptance of contradiction; thus this wave is generally characterised by the twin imperatives of continuity and change and because this wave's participants have developed their research within competing feminist structures, they strive to incorporate plurality as a given. Quoting Heywood and Drake, Gamble traces the origin of the third wave in a combination of white-based feminism critique by women of colour and Third World feminists.¹⁰⁸ hooks challenged white middle-class' women's assumptions on oppression and the concept of feminism as a lifestyle: in other words, she promoted feminism as advocacy rather than identity, not a rigid commitment but a flexible viewpoint that permitted the integration of different causes into one's work.¹⁰⁹ Both the waves metaphor and postfeminism illustrate inter-generational discourses of separation and difference, creating a sense of fluidity in the movement and discouraging a rigid classification, as bell hooks envisioned.

My analysis, informed by a mixture of third wave and postfeminist perspectives, considers specifically the role of heteronormative spaces, societal constructs which have been the centre of the civil rights struggle in the formative years of this genre and which still are under scrutiny by the LGBT+ community, such as the closet as relatively safe space or the nuclear family home. Work by the second wave feminists writing during the period the novels were written informed my reading of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction as a fantasy of empowerment, but my analysis was furthered by postfeminist discourses on rejection of female victimisation, autonomy, and responsibility, indicated as some of the central points of

¹⁰⁶ Reger, pp. 205-206.

¹⁰⁷ Gamble, 'Postfeminism', p. 43.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Gamble, 'Postfeminism', p. 44.

postfeminism by scholars such as Gamble. Thus, for instance, while I encounter scenes which read as fantasies of dominance and resistance against an oppressive establishment, such as the many shoot-outs at the end of McNab's Carol Ashton novels, my interpretation also takes care to emphasise that the disorientation the lesbian detective feels in certain spaces is inherent, it is part of her Self.

The wave metaphor is still utilised by feminist scholars and activists to characterise different generations and to indicate the long history of the movement, but it also has been criticised for its outdatedness,¹¹⁰ thus twenty-first century feminism sees the co-existence of the fourth wave and a new approach called postfeminism. The term postfeminism could imply a move beyond feminism, but what it actually indicates is that feminist criticism is a dynamic and multi-faceted movement without a centralised agenda.¹¹¹ The prefix *post* could also imply a chronological order, but postfeminism developed around the same time as the Third Wave and its definition is a matter of on-going debate.¹¹² As for its theoretical discourse, Reger contends that, according to her ethnographic research, 'contemporary feminists argue that they are taking a different approach by focusing on the cultural, personal, and everyday. By turning away from a focus on institutions, many of the feminists interviewed saw their generation focusing instead on changing culture.'¹¹³

The shift towards a smaller scope in feminist criticism gained significant traction also thanks to intersectionality. This term was coined by lawyer Kimberle Crenshaw in 1991 to describe the ways race and gender impact the professional life of black women, arguing that attending to gender or race separately cannot fully explain their experiences.¹¹⁴ Sociologist Patricia Hill Collins applied this idea to all women, arguing that issues of gender are always connected to other cultural patterns of oppression.¹¹⁵ Intersectionality has also become a fruitful framework for scholarly debate, as evident in Leema Sen Gupta's reading of Adrienne Rich's 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.'¹¹⁶ Here Rich (drawing from Kathleen Gough's 'The Origin of the Family') sheds light on several different areas of male-

¹¹⁰ Reger, p. 207.

¹¹¹ Sarah Gamble, 'Editor's Introduction: The Controversies of Feminism', in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2006 [2001]), pp. vii-x, (p. viii). Google ebook.

¹¹² Gamble, 'Postfeminism', p. 36.

¹¹³ Reger, pp. 211-212.

¹¹⁴ Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43.6 (1991), 1241-1299

¹¹⁵ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (London: Routledge, [2000] 2002)

¹¹⁶ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-660.

dominated femaleness, including forcing or denying female sexuality, limiting and exploiting their labour, limiting their movements, and curbing the growth of their knowledge and cultural attainments.¹¹⁷ Gupta interacts with Rich's statement that 'the workplace, among other social institutions, is a place where women have learned to accept male violation of their physic and physical boundaries as the price of survival.'¹¹⁸ Gupta demonstrates that this reasoning is aided by 'intersectionality between gender, sexuality and economic labour market where women of all sexual identities are marginalized.'¹¹⁹ This quote calls upon another major influence to this thesis, the marginalisation of the lesbian identity resulting from a history of power imbalance within society (queer trauma).

Intersectionality, Power, and Sexuality

The workplace constitutes but one example of how power impacts space and the way spaces are lived in society. The intersectional impacts of power occupies a central position in recent studies on gender and discrimination, such as Stephanie A. Shield's, Abigail J. Stewart's and Christa McDermott's. Mike C. Parent, Cirleen DeBlaere, and Bonnie Morandi refer to these studies, for instance, when they compiled the arguments of recent intersectional gender-related research. Intersectionality especially informed my argument by highlighting the way a person's identity is formed by multiple interlocking elements which are, as Parent and colleagues assert, 'defined in terms of relative sociocultural power and privilege.'¹²⁰ In regard to this, Crenshaw argues that gender and sexuality are the products of intersectional subordination, and 'need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment.'¹²¹ This point also returns in Stewart's and McDermott's research which identifies three aspects of intersectional research that are critical to gender studies as well as psychology, one of them being 'location of persons within power structures and

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-660, (p. 638).

¹¹⁸ Rich, p. 642.

¹¹⁹ Gupta, pp. 58-59.

¹²⁰ Mike C. Parent, Cirleen DeBlaere, and Bonnie Morandi, 'Approaches to Research on Intersectionality: Perspectives on Gender, LGBT, and Racial/Ethnic Identities', *Sex Roles*, 68 (2013), 639-645, (p. 640).

¹²¹ Crenshaw, p. 1249.

acknowledgement of the relations between those structures,¹²² as Parent and colleagues aptly summarise.

What does this entail for the study of spaces in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction? To answer this question I first need to extrapolate the significance of social identity (the influence of society, its meanings reproduction and mores, on identity formation) by quoting from Shields where she asserts that ‘the individual’s social identities profoundly influence one’s [...] experience of gender,’¹²³ and further points out that the ‘individual’s social location’¹²⁴ is reflected in ‘intersecting identities,’¹²⁵ concluding that ‘gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities.’¹²⁶ Shifting understanding of gendered identity to sexual identity aided my research in connecting past notions of power and sexuality in society, such as Foucault’s, second wave feminist discourses of empowerment and visibility, and postfeminist intersectional studies on power relations in the context of social identities. On one side I examined the way the lesbian detective fulfils the fantasy of empowerment of second wave feminism, by being cunning, professional, and coming out of fights and shoot-outs victorious. On the other side I adapted the idea that identity is formed also through operations of power relations among groups of people to the argument that queer identity is corrupted through mores of heteronormativity (imbalanced power relations) that linger in certain spaces.

In other words, I adapted recent psychological feminist studies on intersectional social identity and power hierarchies to the interpretive lens of spaces. Quoting from another one of Shields’ points to further illustrate this perspective: ‘identity, such as gender or social class [...] also reflects the operations of power relations among groups that comprise that identity category.’¹²⁷ This influenced my research in the understanding of spaces, social power, and identity formation; for instance, a woman may be disadvantaged in a domestic setting because of imbalanced power towards the figure of the patriarch of the household, and the same setting may be further detrimental for a homosexual woman because of divergence from the heterosexual standard home.¹²⁸ The core chapters highlight the significance of the lesbian detective’s characterisation by thoroughly analysing their background information and

¹²² Parent, p. 640.

¹²³ Stephanie A. Shields, ‘Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective’, *Sex Roles*, 59 (2008), 301-311, (p. 301).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Shields, p. 302.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

pointing out which shifting positions of marginality and privilege shaped the character under examination.

In the Stoner McTavish series, for example, *Gray Magic* addresses the oppression that LGBT+ individuals and Native Americans are subjected to by framing both groups as marginalised and despised but who turn out to be the true pillars of society. The author frames this critique by first representing a heated exchange between the protagonist's love interest, Gwen, and the love interest's grandmother during Gwen's coming out. Gwen's grandmother repeatedly rejects Gwen's sexual orientation (she comes out as a lesbian) and refers to homosexuality as perversity, obsession, and sickness. This vitriol is mirrored in the novel by society's treatment towards Native Americans, narrativised primarily in the critique of the prejudice and confinement suffered by the Hopi and Navajo populations of Beale, Arizona, where the novel is set. This intersectional critique mostly remains at an implicit level throughout the novel, although one scene explicitly speaks out about this during an exchange between the protagonist, Stoner McTavish, and the town's trading post's manager,

“[m]ost of the Indians trust us enough to keep shopping there [...]. But it's hard to forget we're visible representatives of a race that's been screwing them for four hundred years. [...]” She glanced over at Stoner. “Shoot, why am I explaining this to you? You know what it's like being hated for nothing you did yourself.”¹²⁹

Based on such intersectional critiques, I argue that one of the manifestations of the social power imbalance between the privileged position of being an insider to conformist society and the marginalised position of the outsider, the early lesbian sleuth, no matter how idealistically empowered her characterisation may seem, is a perpetually Insider/Outsider liminal entity.

Variation within gender and sexuality categories thrives in the current research on queer literature. In contrast to the way the so-called female role was discussed in the late twentieth century, it has become common to speak of femininities. Similarly, intersectionality lends itself well to understanding how the firm establishment of law and order is not always as stable as it should ideally be. The fluidity of queer studies, plus the insights offered by intersectional analyses enabled me to explore the complexities of the lesbian sleuth's gendered and professional subjectivities. It became possible for me to separate the novels from their historical contexts, which called for a second wave-influenced protagonist, a self-reliant, assertive,

¹²⁹ Sarah Dreher, *Gray Magic* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1987] 2015), p. 22. Amazon ebook.

lesbian herald of justice, and read them in terms of on-going identity struggle, which is one of the most emblematic teachings from third wave, intersectional and postfeminist discourses. In a world where bodies are shaped and categorised by a mix of gender, class, race, religion, and sexuality, the protagonist who tries to be two unshakeable pillars, the pillar of lesbian feminism, and the pillar of fair justice, in my view, was always-already crumbling down.

Lesbian Identity and Queer Studies

Martha Vicinus asserts the significance of literary criticism in exploring the persistent effort of homosexual women to articulate their own erotic desires.¹³⁰ This is what prompted me to approach LGBT+ popular literature and this particular sub-genre, and it is also the basis for the careful selection of works which stand at the foundations of this thesis. This section introduces a series of approaches to and perspectives on lesbian identity which common denominator is the fluidity and liminality of this identity: this trend provides insights into how I interpreted the novels I read in preparation for the analysis conducted in this thesis.

According to Rich, simply by being a lesbian, a person occupies an embattled position of cultural resistance, as she contends, '[l]esbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women. [...] we may first begin to perceive it as a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance.'¹³¹ This compulsion, however, is overlaid on a matrix of homosocial and homosexual connections, which naturally creates psychological and emotional issues for queer youth, as is demonstrated by queer trauma in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, the uneasy way in which the protagonists navigate spaces which heterosexual characters inhabit with ease.

Another key contributor is Faderman who discusses lesbian identity, among other topics, in works such as *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981), *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* (1991), and *The Gay Revolution* (2015). *Surpassing the Love of Men* spans a tradition of romantic love between women from the sixteenth to the twentieth century as Faderman. In *Surpassing the Love of Men* Faderman argues how Western pre-modern sapphic love was considered neither abnormal nor undesirable; not because passionate love between women was socially commendable, but because women's sexuality was viewed as dormant before marriage (more

¹³⁰ Martha Vicinus, 'The History of Lesbian History', *Feminist Studies*, 38.3 (2012), 566-596, (p. 575)

¹³¹ Rich, p. 649.

precisely it was dismissed and repressed by Christian notions of chastity). Faderman indicates how late nineteenth century sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis morbidified female friendship and started to construct a stereotype of the lesbian which included previously accepted forms of female-to-female friendship/love. Consequently, the acceptable forms of friendship between women became increasingly circumscribed, while forms that fell outside of these new parameters but were previously accepted, such as passionate embraces and kisses, or sharing a bed for a night of intimacies, became expressions of sexual pathologies.¹³² *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* and *The Gay Revolution* provided more invaluable historical context for the literary analysis of this thesis. *Odd Girls*, especially, established just how crucial gay bars have been for the lesbian community and Faderman's summary of twentieth century lesbianism is poignant. According to her, lesbianism changed

from a state from which most women who loved women dissociated themselves, to a secret and often lonely acknowledgment that one fell into that category, to groups of women who formed a subculture around the concept, to a sociopolitical statement and a civil rights movement that claimed its own minority status and even formed its own ghettos.¹³³

The initial state of self-marginalisation described by Faderman lends itself effectively to the argument of this thesis about the lesbian detective as an always-already marginalised entity, an Other-ed figure, a default outsider in the spaces she navigates.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is another queer studies theorist whose work informed this thesis. Sedgwick analysed the troublesome ways in which modern society has accepted essentialist definitions of male and female, masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, advocating to denaturalise essentialist presumptions about desire.¹³⁴ Sedgwick's first major publication, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), draws on Michel Foucault's claim that homosexuality is a modern concept that emerged in European scientific thought in the 1870s. Naturally, same-sex relationships have been occurring and have been acknowledged since antiquity, but Sedgwick follows closely in Foucault's footsteps in placing the start of the pathologised, institutionalised and classified homosexual in the late nineteenth century.¹³⁵

¹³² Lillian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (New York: Morrow, 1981)

¹³³ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 303-304.

¹³⁴ Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 11.

¹³⁵ Kosofsky Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 27.

Sedgwick also espouses Michel Foucault's idea that sexual identity is socially constructed and more malleable than gender.¹³⁶ Sedgwick's contribution to the framework of this thesis does not only pertain to the social constructivist nature of sexuality, her work also informs the turbulent, ever-changing history of homosexuality's vilification. Her research on homophobia demonstrated that in order to impose itself as the norm and to perpetrate the rightful rejection of homosexuality, heterosexuality needs to constantly reinforce the status of its own authority as natural and to mark as unnatural the threat of homosexual intimacy.¹³⁷

In lesbian (and gay) literature there is a familiar tension between what is always present but buried under layers of cultural repression and what is socially forbidden but is still achieved. The search for and discussion of this tension was a main goal of 1970s lesbian literary criticism, as for instance evidenced by the *Woman-Identified Woman* manifesto by the Radicalesbians activist group. One of their mottos states, '[t]ogether we must find, reinforce, and validate our authentic selves,'¹³⁸ a sentiment which resounds in all the lesbian detective novels read for this thesis. This search for an authentic sense of Self is neither smooth nor free of suffering, as the scholarship of the turbulent 1980s demonstrates a pattern of defensiveness against pre-established constructions of normalised gender and sexual behaviours.

Heather Love's work on the topic, included in the invaluable *A History of Feminist Criticism* (2007) collection of essays, provided several insights for this thesis' foundations. For example, Love mentions the 1981 dialogue between Cherrie Moraga and Amber Hollibaugh about lesbian sexual experience, focusing 'on the significance of pain, trauma, and struggles for power in their sexual lives, arguing that sex is not a space separate from larger social difficulties but is infused with them at the deepest level.'¹³⁹ The queer theorists presented in this section operate on a similar level, as they deconstruct the category lesbian to expose how systems of domination constantly divide people.

Peter Hegarty is one of the scholars who focuses on the interrelations between psychology and queer studies, evident in his monograph *A Recent History of Lesbian and Gay Psychology: From Homophobia to LGBT* (2018). Hegarty dedicates part of his monograph to connecting the AIDS epidemic to the late 1980s public recognition of systemic homophobia. This connection is based on evidence such as pollsters, community groups, and government reports. Moreover, Hegarty connects this systemic homophobia with a wider nature vs nurture

¹³⁶ Sedgwick, p. 31.

¹³⁷ Sedgwick, pp. 83-84.

¹³⁸ Radicalesbians, 'The Woman-Identified Woman', (Pittsburgh, PA: Know, Inc, 1970), p. 4.

¹³⁹ Heather Love, 'Feminist Criticism and Queer Theory', in *A History of Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007) pp. 301-321, (p. 312).

debate around LGBT+ identity. Namely, whether LGBT+ people identified themselves as being so by birth or by choice impacted on the homophobic response of heterosexual individuals.¹⁴⁰ However, Hegarty's findings do not simply connect biological theory with a generally decreasing societal homophobia, as this claim cannot be substantiated. Instead, Hegarty recalls James D. Weinrich's warning that 1990s right-wing conservatives were going to use biological theory to equate homosexuality to a psycho-sexual pathology and links this threat to the emergence of twenty-first century conversion therapy practices.¹⁴¹

Hegarty's research can be connected to several elements dramatised by early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction authors. For instance, Scoppettone's Lauren Lauran voices a middle way to the nurture vs nature homosexual identity debate, claiming that her lesbian identity is part predisposition, part upbringing;¹⁴² while Dreher's Stoner suffers conversion therapy as a small child in her parents' hope that her innate lesbianism would be eradicated as early as possible.¹⁴³ Despite the seemingly heroic representation of this genre's protagonists, I insist on the importance of lesbian spatial marginality in my research also to align the lesbian sleuth with a long tradition of borderline sleuths such as Holmes (norm/eccentricity), Poirot (Insider/Outsider, femininity/masculinity), Marlowe (justice/crime), and Warshawski (community/solitude). The roles of these figures in influencing my reading of early novels will become evident in the following chapter.

In this thesis lesbian identity is read through the lens of two core concepts: queer trauma and the Outsider/Insider dichotomy. One influential text for this reading is Lois McNay's *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self* (1992), in which she connects Foucault's theory of sexuality with 1980s and 1990s feminist discourses of agency. Postmodern deconstructions of categories such as subjectivity, for instance, cast doubt on women's chance of analysing and articulating their experiences, including marginalisation and the possibility of overcoming it.¹⁴⁴ This speaks directly to the connections made in the third chapter, on the clinic, between the pathologised queer, degeneracy, the perceived threat of sodomy-based rape by conservative society and its reactive violent rejection of same-sex expressions of love, as well as the oppressive and self-negating way in which the lesbian sleuth investigates cases related to maladies and acknowledges her own.

¹⁴⁰ Peter Hegarty, *A Recent History of Lesbian and Gay Psychology: From Homophobia to LGBT* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 39.

¹⁴¹ Hegarty, p. 76.

¹⁴² Sandra Scoppettone, *My Sweet Untraceable You* (Boston: Little Brown, [1994] 2011), p. 47. Amazon ebook.

¹⁴³ Dreher, *Shaman's Moon*.

¹⁴⁴ Lois McNay, *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender, and the Self* (Cambridge: Polity, [1992] 2007), pp. 1-10.

Lee Horsley also writes on the lesbian detective's subjectivity as an outlier endowed with a transgressive kind of agency. By virtue of her sexual identity, the protagonist is in a favourable position to avoid the patriarchal binary, that is to say she lies *outside* this binary and the heterosexual contract.¹⁴⁵ This "outside-ness" is accentuated in the strong, personalised female voice of these novels, where the use of focalised narration draws readers into the subjective experiences of female protagonists who are positioned simultaneously in traditional (butch and law enforcement) and non-traditional (homosexual and female) ways in respect to masculine biases. Horsley's research on female hard-boiled writers and their female private eyes highlights the appropriation of 'an independent vantage point from which to comment on the failings of patriarchal institutions.'¹⁴⁶ Due to the traditionally perceived masculine characterisation of the typical 1980s-1990s female private eye, Horsley points out that this is peculiarly characterised

[i]n appropriating a site of discursive power conventionally seen as masculine, the chick dicks of the 1980s and 1990s (and on into the twenty-first century) are, then, imitating the stereotypical male qualities of the genre. But they are also subverting them, superimposing a different form of marginalization on the marginalized but empowered position of the traditional detective.¹⁴⁷

Horsley highlights the role of the lesbian detective in this marginalised but empowered position, arguing that '[b]y refusing heterosexuality, lesbian crime fiction is arguably better able to avoid the patriarchal binary.'¹⁴⁸ This perspective of avoidance, of Otherness, of outside-ness, laid the foundations for the perpetual Insider/Outsider role of the lesbian detective contained in the argument of this thesis.

As mentioned before, this thesis postulates that the Other-ed status of the lesbian derives from queer trauma, and psychological studies have impacted this thesis' understanding of the relations between trauma, culture, society, and identity. I link queer trauma with the outside-ness of the lesbian to the patriarchal heteronormative binary with a quote from Alford, who aptly connects chronic trauma with marginalised people by considering trauma in terms of the 'inability of marginalized groups to use the social and cultural resources of a society in order

¹⁴⁵ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 250.

¹⁴⁶ Horsley, p. 249.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Horsley, p. 250.

to protect themselves from the effects of chronic trauma.¹⁴⁹ Another extract from Alford's research elaborates on the connection between chronic trauma and marginalised groups:

[i]ndividual members of the culture (or more likely, subculture, such as a marginalized group) find it difficult or impossible to appropriate their culture. This would be potentially traumatic for any individual, for it provides the individual with fewer psychological resources to fall back on in times of stress. This phenomenon may become a group one if the society makes it more difficult for particular groups of people to do this by depriving them of cultural resources and the opportunities to use them.¹⁵⁰

Lesbians have been marginalised on a number of levels, such as professional, cultural, and even psychoanalytic.¹⁵¹ Connecting this marginalisation back to Horsley's positioning of the lesbian detective, because the lesbian is in a privileged position to empower herself outside of the patriarchal binary, she is marginalised, and because of this age-long disadvantaged position I connect her to queer trauma and finally to the always already Insider/Outsider concept at the core of my argument.

Gillies' afore-mentioned work on the spatial and psychological detecting in two of King's novels also informed this perspective. Gillies explores the character design of two of King's protagonists: *Touchstone* World War I British officer Bennett Grey and *Keeping Watch* American Vietnam veteran Allen Carmichael, whose postwar experience is influenced by border-crossing and trauma.¹⁵² Intriguingly, Gillies observes that in King's novels, 'the act of detecting is itself a form of border crossing that allows Grey and Carmichael to orientate themselves to their post-war worlds in ways that had previously eluded them.'¹⁵³ This is true for the novels I have analysed in so far as the border crossing identified by Gillies is mostly reduced in scope in their pages. Gillies identifies topographical and epistemological border crossings, with the first shifting Grey and Carmichael from one nation to another and the second shifting the characters' psyche from well-adjusted, wistful, and ambitious, to fragile, entangled, and discombobulated. This premises a point that recurs regularly in this thesis and will be thoroughly explained and supported by literary evidence in later chapters. The most

¹⁴⁹ Alford, p. 31.

¹⁵⁰ Alford, p. 45.

¹⁵¹ Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza, 'Introduction: Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave', in *Lesbians, Feminism, Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011), pp. 11-18, (p. 11).

¹⁵² Gillies, pp. 153-168.

¹⁵³ Gillies, pp. 154-155.

important border crossing for Gillies is the symbolic, ‘the erecting of categories of those who went to war and those who stayed home’,¹⁵⁴ which enables her to read border crossings in a layered manner with multiple border crossings at work simultaneously and thus develop a picture of ways in which trauma reshapes the characters’ identities. Gillies thus reframes border crossings in terms of rites of passage, of separation from and reintegration into society.¹⁵⁵ This reasoning is applicable to how this thesis utilises the role of queer trauma in liminality. Some lesbian detectives incur or deal with trauma after crossing topographical borders, such as Kate Delafield being dispatched to Vietnam or Cassandra Reilly negotiating separation in Venice.

Other psychologists influenced this reasoning: for instance, in Judith M. Glassgold’s and Suzanne Iasenza’s 2004 collection of essays about lesbian identity, feminism, and psychoanalysis, Susan Gair connects the issues of her lesbian patients to the inherent problems of their communities. Gair argues that closeted lesbians who suffer from trauma are so used to hiding aspects of themselves that they experience difficulties embracing self-fulfilment and empowerment when this is finally available due to the fear of emotional memories related to the origin of the trauma.¹⁵⁶ Gair cites the example of a lesbian patient who is a successful corporate executive and is convinced that whenever her colleagues talk in hushed tones, it negatively relates to her. The patient’s solution, putting on a distant, unapproachable façade both perpetrates her conviction and has become a part of her professional identity.¹⁵⁷ This kind of defence mechanism is visible in so many lesbian detectives, including Kate Delafield, Micky Knight, Carol Ashton, and Amanda Valentine. This vicious cycle prevents the person from exiting it, from fully knowing herself and growing into her potential; this, according to Gair, is because ‘being known can be retraumatizing.’¹⁵⁸ Later on in her essay Gair discusses the impact of community on traumatised queer individuals, highlighting the community’s role ‘to provide the atmosphere to make it possible to internalize new beliefs about oneself.’¹⁵⁹ Her research also indicates that in the absence of validating, reparative communities during a person’s childhood, ‘internal intrapsychic communities’¹⁶⁰ have become fixed and their re-conditioning arduous. These principles informed the application of my understanding of queer trauma in respect to my argument. I emphasised the unknowability of the Self and the

¹⁵⁴ Gillies, p. 155.

¹⁵⁵ Gillies, p. 156.

¹⁵⁶ Susan Gair, ‘It Takes a Community’, in *Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011) pp. 50-59, (p. 51).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Gair, p. 53.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

grindingly slow abilities of adults to change, finding a fitting reflection in the way lesbian sleuths often fall back on self-sabotaging practices such as adultery and alcoholism and framing this reading in terms of spaces. Intriguingly, Gair does mention the relation between trauma and the margins of society, a highly relevant notion for this discussion:

[p]atterns of self-regard and perception are entrenched from the early and ongoing negative messages; we develop significant self-destructive styles of relating that maintain these negative beliefs about the self; we find ourselves projecting our beliefs onto our current environment thereby reinforcing our attitudes. Being marginalized by society may foster defenses that aid survival, such as isolation, hiding or defiance, which tend to restrain us from reaching out to affirming communities.¹⁶¹

This perspective has been pivotal for this thesis' argument, and has been compounded by research conducted into the history of LGBT+ oppression. The lesbian protagonist hides her true self from the intensity of homophobic violence, but also from herself, adopting self-destructive strategies which turn what ought to be a smooth path weaving in and out of ordinary societal spaces into a painful trudge. Moreover, the protagonists examined here are detectives, which creates a contrast between a duty that they owe to themselves in order to become healthy, stable individuals, and their professional duties. These duties are unmasking of the Self and the unmasking of the criminal, as will be discussed further in the second chapter, which analyses the closet. Here it is sufficient to introduce the relationship between trauma, marginality, self-negation, and detection.

Feminist Criticism of Crime Fiction

It is important to point out that whenever this thesis calls upon "crime literature," "crime fiction," or "detective fiction" it makes general statements about the phallogocentric trend of the genre to positively portray hypermasculinity. Crime fiction as a masculine stronghold has long been under heavy attack, however, as women writers and detectives have lost their status as oddities. In 1989 Nicole Décuré's research already accounted for four hundred female writers and detectives in American detective fiction alone,¹⁶² and since then numbers have only

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Décuré, p. 227.

proliferated: this is only a hint of the efforts feminist criticism has exerted to balance the genre's hypermasculinity.

This thesis often compares lesbian detectives to hypermasculine male detectives and to feminist women detectives, however the purpose of such comparisons is not to question whether it is possible for women writers to effectively confront the genre and render it a form which voices a feminist revision of crime, policing, and detection. This thesis considers this point made and proven by previous writers. As Carme Farré-Vidal aptly summarises in the introduction to her essay on Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta,

[i]n contrast to the long-standing tradition of male detective fiction, where, in general, men were privileged to play the powerful role of the detective and women were characterised as either too weak to defend themselves or too evil to be able to carry out any good deeds, feminist detective fiction has striven to prove that women can be as talented detectives as men. In this way, this genre, particularly by the hand of woman writers, has reflected the changes that society has undergone since the beginning of feminism in the 19th century.¹⁶³

This literary appropriation has been set in motion by memorable figures within Anglo-American crime fiction such as Nancy Drew, V. I. Warshawski, Cornwell's Scarpetta, and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone. Instead, this thesis examines the ways early lesbian detectives inhabited certain spaces and finds that their spatial relations with the places in which they live and work are marked by traces of the lingering trauma of a long history of systemic homophobia.

Makinen writes that feminist criticism of crime fiction revisited the genre's literary history with generally agreed-upon goals: '[t]he more uncritical simply look for strong women, the more complex look for a critique of law, authority and the hierarchy, the scopic gaze, the fragmentation of the individualist self, and a validation of difference and communitas.'¹⁶⁴ These variegated goals were prompted by the ways, particularly in the US, feminist critics had to prove that their research was not merely activism or sociology under the guise of literary analysis, but a legitimate form of criticism which asked pointed questions about literary history,

¹⁶³ Carme Farré-Vidal, 'Dissection of Patricia Cornwell's Feminist Woman Detective Kay Scarpetta', *Journal of English Studies*, 10 (2012), 51-64, (p. 52).

¹⁶⁴ Makinen, p. 112.

the formation of canons, and literary production.¹⁶⁵ During the mid-1980s feminist criticism focused on crime fiction began to appear: in 1986 Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan published the monograph *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* and consequently the detective fiction-centred feminist debate took off. Craig and Cadogan were among the first to expose a different history of the literature of crime from a feminist perspective, presenting a profusion of ‘lady detectives’ and early female writers. Their research demonstrates that early lady detectives of anglophone crime fiction hark back to the 1860s with the publication of Wayward’s *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864) and Forrester’s *The Lady Detective* (1864), whose protagonists were upper-class women solving murders in milieux that men could not infiltrate, such as suspects’ household personnel. Craig and Cadogan’s extensive research rediscovered a wealth of female detectives, energising similar scholarly attention into the 1970s and 1980s.

A significant contributor to feminist criticism of popular fiction, including crime fiction, has been Makinen, whose *Feminist Popular Fiction* elaborates on the tendency of hypermasculinity in the genre. When overviewing the literature of crime Makinen follows the fil-rouge of the disruption and restoration of the status quo. From the early classics of Poe and Doyle to the ratiocinating puzzles of writers such as Christie and Sayers, Makinen extrapolates this classic formula, which starts with a

disruption of the status quo (the crime) which the detective, representing overdetermined individualism and a triumph of logical, rational thought, proceeds to make sense of, discover the criminal and eradicate his/her disruption, thereby restoring the status quo. The ‘establishment’, the police, judiciary, or the upper-class amateur detective restores order and stability to the closed, hierarchical community of the country house, the aristocracy, the church, cruise liner or college.¹⁶⁶

Makinen then points out the trend of toughness and individualistic machismo of the American hard-boiled and noir genres, and finally concludes that ‘female sexuality is posited as a site of social disruption and crime. Such a canonical history, and the “classic” format could be argued to be inherently conservative and phallogocentric.’¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Mary Eagleton, ‘Literary Representations of Women’, in *A History of Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 105-119, (p. 107).

¹⁶⁶ Makinen, p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

According to Makinen, a significant consequence of feminist literature is the emergence of lesbian romance in the mid-1970s and of lesbian mystery in the early 1980s. Feminist appropriations of crime stories and specifically lesbian mysteries challenge the two, as Makinen calls them, standard assumptions of traditionally masculinist detective fiction: ‘that it is a male-based genre because of its ratiocinating puzzle-solving element, and that it is an inherently conservative genre because its resolution involves the reinstatement of a hierarchical status quo.’¹⁶⁸ Female characters are positioned precariously in the canon of the authoritative detective, usually relegated as victims, love interests, or femme fatales.¹⁶⁹ Such a view ignores the consistent presence of female writers of crime and of emancipated female sleuths, however, in the following chapter on the history of the genre and in the core chapters the two main tenets mentioned in this paragraph are maintained as the baseline of traditional detective fiction. This baseline, as simplistic as it is, is necessary for the specific focus on lesbian detectives later on, and should not be read as a denial of feminist revisions of the genre.

Before such revisions were planned and implemented, crime fiction often showed substantial transgressive potential, though it was in the 1980s and 1990s that this potential was systematically engaged with from the perspectives of gender, sexuality, and race. This fantasy of empowerment is arguably one of the most fascinating aspects of the genre, due to the delicate balance between narrativizing it and the authors’ wish to remain faithful to genre conventions. As Plain asserts: ‘tension between the maintenance and collapse of cultural and social boundaries [...] underpins both the genre and our fascination with the form,’¹⁷⁰ and this tension is fully taken advantage of by early authors, who were concerned with exposing and challenging sexual conventions. Mitchell recently added to this point by arguing,

[i]f the traditional crime novel seeks - however fleetingly - to shore up those “cultural and social boundaries,” then the lesbian detective novel approaches them with a much greater ambivalence, endeavoring both to dispel the chaos wreaked by crime and to challenge the existing (patriarchal, heteronormative) order.¹⁷¹

A parallel can be drawn between Mitchell’s focus on the ‘existing heteronormative order’ of society and Makinen’s ‘hierarchical status quo,’ which are reinstated by the detective of

¹⁶⁸ Makinen, p. 92.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Plain, p. 3.

¹⁷¹ Mitchell, p. 156.

traditional masculinist crime fiction. This parallel can be broadened to a number of critics of the genre, such as Horsley, who has specified that characteristics of the culpable male model like physical prowess, self-reliance, and tenacity are instrumental. In feminist appropriations of the genre what changes most markedly are the sites of power in which these qualities are brought into play, and for Horsley this discursive power is foregrounded in the depiction of community,

[t]he ‘masculine’ quality of agency is important, but the ‘female’ quality of community is equally central. One of the things that distinguishes female-authored from other crime fiction is that community is not just a sustaining presence for the protagonist but the linchpin both of plot and of the protagonist’s own sense of self-definition.¹⁷²

A handful of scholars have discussed Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction as the object of their studies, as evidenced by, for instance, Anna Wilson’s essay ‘Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story’ which specifically regards the shift from the 1970s popular coming-out story to the 1980s development of Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction. The core of Wilson’s argument is that the researched material was heavily influenced by the coming-out story, foregrounding the element of the realisation of one’s own “true self” and the revelation of this to others, dramatised through coming out scenes.¹⁷³ As is expanded upon in the closet chapter, the novels I have worked on contain sophisticated parallels between this act and the discovery of the criminal’s identity by the end of the investigations, parallels which, according to Wilson, complicate the nature of the genre. Wilson raises the example of Barbara Wilson’s *Murder in the Collective*, where the ideal lesbian nation proves fictive and the protagonist Pam’s need to deal with sisters betraying each other parallels the resolution of the investigation, which not only leaves the criminal’s motive unexplained but also leads the protagonist to think that some homicides are justifiable. As Wilson points out, Pam’s series narrativises something I have also noticed in early crime fiction, namely, the liminality of the lesbian sleuth’s detection. According to Wilson, ‘Pam [...] finds that solving the investigative puzzle raises more questions than it answers: she doubts her privileged right to judge others in an unjust world.’¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Horsley, pp. 249-250.

¹⁷³ Anna Wilson, ‘Death and the Mainstream: Lesbian Detective Fiction and the Killing of the Coming-Out Story’, *Feminist Studies*, 22.2 (1996), 251-278, (p. 256).

¹⁷⁴ Wilson, p. 257.

My interpretation enlarges Wilson's argument to encompass all the lesbian sleuths I have examined for this dissertation, since the private eyes and amateur detectives possess an individual privilege, but police officers possess a similar if not more significant privilege because they are backed up the authorities of their jurisdiction.

Other significant contributions to the study of this genre and to the underlying research of this thesis are Markowitz's monograph *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (2004), and Betz's overview *Lesbian Detective Fiction: Woman as Author, Subject, and Reader* (2006), and her more focused *Katherine V. Forrest: A Critical Appreciation* (2017). Markowitz and Betz highlight the ground-breaking portraits of lesbian experience within the genre, revealing the dangers faced by LGBT+ individuals for standing by their right to self-determine. The novels read for this thesis integrated the history of a community into their narratives as well as the way cultural and political shifts have impacted the way LGBT+ individuals have defined, mobilised, and represented themselves.¹⁷⁵ The protagonists of this genre appear to symbolise issues specific to queer citizens and their fantasies of empowerment, and in part they do, but an in-depth analysis reveals flawed heroines who cannot fully commit to either side, law enforcement or the avowed advocate of gay rights. In this way Markowitz and Betz informed my examination of the lesbian sleuth as an Insider/Outsider, someone who cannot help but behave differently than any other investigator.¹⁷⁶

As an overview of upcoming content, this chapter introduced the argument of the thesis, the literary scope, the structure and general content of the thesis chapters, and presented a theoretical framework for the interpretative angle I utilise in this thesis. Before the core chapters that analyse the closet, the clinic, the home, and the bar, I provide a detailed, analytic overview of the development of crime fiction from the second half of the nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. The following chapter highlights female contributions and examines the liminality of major sleuths, presenting them as precursors of the Insider/Outsider lesbian detective. For instance, Miss Marple is introduced not only as a significant representative of Golden Age detection tropes, but also as a liminal figure in terms of her subversive and conservative aspects. The way she safeguards the pre-existing order of things and even revels in the punishment of the criminal can be read as conservative, while the way, for instance, she utilises her wit to glean clues from gossip can be read as subversive. After laying out such

¹⁷⁵ Phyllis M. Betz, *Katherine V. Forrest: A Critical Appreciation* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2017), p. 9. Google ebook.

¹⁷⁶ Betz, *Katherine V. Forrest*, p. 116.

considerations I assess the ways Miss Marple inhabits certain spaces, and interpret, for instance, that the limited mobility of Miss Marple recalls similar limitations of agency of the Insider role of the lesbian detective. Alternatively, I present the way certain elements of Miss Marple's characterisation, such as age, gender, occupation, sharp wit, and feminine intuition make her stand out peculiarly in a way similar to the Outsider role argued for the lesbian sleuth. The next chapter provides a grounding to the core chapters analysing the spaces of the closet, clinic, home, and bar through the historical contextualisation of the lesbian detective and an emphasis on the spatiality of the detectives' environments.

Chapter One

1.1 The Crime Fiction Formula: Tradition and Adaptability

This chapter provides a brief history of the most relevant (female) characters and authors of Anglo-American crime fiction, starting from Edgar Allan Poe's Auguste Dupin to the 1980s, the decade of the emergence and development of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction. I use "crime fiction" as an umbrella term that includes various sub-genres, such as the detective novel or whodunnit, where the plot is a puzzle which is solved with careful attention to minute clues and avoiding red herrings, with recurring sub-mysteries such as how the murderer got in and out of a locked space;¹ the police novel or police procedural, where the emphasis lies on the collaborative process of investigation of the police force, including its investigative process, its hierarchical institutional relationships, and shared expertise;² and the private eye novel or hard-boiled, where the narrative closely follows the lone, tough private detective who strives for truth and justice in a crusade against organised crime and the crime proliferating in the underbelly of urban environments.³ What these narratives have in common is the presence of key elements including crimes, criminals, victims and investigators, but each sub-genre has its own narrative structure.

Early tales of crime emerged from religious and moralistic contexts and crime fiction as a genre originated from early industrial societies.⁴ The formula of classic detective fiction and of most twentieth century sub-genres developed into a primary focus on crime from a psychological and scientific perspective.⁵ Despite the necessary complications mentioned in my introduction, a common trait of crime fiction genres is that they are generally conservative; the protagonist is usually an individual (in most cases a man) in the prime of his life, possessing highly developed analytical skills, a professional attitude and usually upstanding morals (with the noir and psycho-thriller genres being the most notable exceptions),⁶ as represented by Poirot, Wimsey, Marlowe, Hammer, Continental Op, and Nancy Drew. The inclusion of the latter may appear outlandish, but the variously authored stories of the 1930s and 1940s feature

¹ Judith A. Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2004), p. 12.

² Peter Messent, 'The Police Novel', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackness, 2010), pp. 175-86, (p. 175)

³ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xix.

⁴ Heather Worthington, 'From The Newgate Calendar to Sherlock Holmes', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 11-27, (p. 14)

⁵ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 22.

⁶ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 27.

a formidable protagonist, a young woman imbued with genuine heroic qualities, but also a primarily commercial figure, unconcerned by didacticism and sentimentality. As Patricia Craig and Cadogan assert, Nancy Drew can be equated to a traditional male investigator of that time, as

[s]ocial and moral observation is contained in the stories only in the form of the preconceived idea: certain values are taken for granted, including a view of femininity which actually conflicts with Nancy's behaviour. ('Good' girls in the stories are often sweet, meek, self-effacing and prim.) The author tackled this problem simply by ignoring it, which provides an economical but not very satisfactory solution. Nancy has never had to waste time wishing she were a boy; for all practical purposes she is. She's a winner, a high-flyer, a fast thinker, a champion.⁷

This is not to say that all male detectives are conservative and all female detectives are progressive, but in the more influential genres for Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction such as early classical detective fiction, hard-boiled, and noir, there are many protagonists who tend to symbolise the societal status quo. This is also not to say that fictional sleuths are monolithically conservative or progressive; some protagonists have contradictory facets in this regard, or shift from one end of the spectrum to another over time. Even reactionary sleuths such as Marlowe and Warshawski, who are fully conscious of the endemic corruption that they preserve at the end of their investigations, choose to remain in service of state laws. Theirs is a battle fought from within the system and their efforts of bettering their communities are substantial, but because detective work is inseparable from dominant understandings of safety, security, and social order, even those characters who skirt the line of conservative/progressive somehow reaffirm the symbolic order and bourgeois ideology. Although, as Julian Symons argues, there is an underlying tension between detection and law and order, '[o]ne of the most marked features of the Anglo-American detective story is that it is strongly on the side of law and order. Yet this was not always true, and is not altogether true now.'⁸ Both Symons and John G. Cawelti mention the hard-boiled as the locus where this tension is most evident,⁹ but in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction all researched sub-genres portray questioning of the

⁷ Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), p. 150.

⁸ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1972), p. 20.

⁹ John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 153.

validity of current law and order because these are not enough to protect queer people from discrimination, abuse, and death.

In Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction the detectives themselves are entrenched in both sides, the oppressive establishment and the oppressed minority, which sustains the argument that their characterisation is forever scarred by the shadow of queer trauma. Tracing the origin and major points of development of crime fiction, it is not necessary to broaden the geographical scope to several countries, as the United Kingdom and the United States provided the pioneers of the genre. The discussion of the authors and characters included in this chapter will position the following analysis of the source material in relation to the literary tradition of popular women investigators and authors in twentieth century crime fiction. This chapter will describe the history of the genre through its most prominent figures. Almost all of the authors and characters mentioned here resonate in the researched material, some for their mere historical importance, some for their elements of class, society, and gender critique.

Crime fiction is a formulaic genre. There is a widespread recognition of the staple characters of crime fiction: the criminal, the victim, and the detective. Another set of main elements connects the characters: the crime, the investigation, and the settings. In detective fiction, and in similar genres such as the hard-boiled and the police procedural, the development of the story follows a recognisable structure: the introduction of the investigator, the presentation of the crime and the clues to its solution, the interviews with suspects and the stumbling into false solutions, the announcement of the solution, and denouement.¹⁰ This is the main structure as passed down by Poe's Dupin stories and will be described in depth below, however it is important to point out that there are many instances where this sequence of events is not met.

Literature about crime includes the macro-elements of crime and detection or crime and solution. More specifically, each sub-genre such as the detective novel, the hard-boiled, the thriller, the police procedural, has its own formula. And finally, there is a degree of variation in each sub-genre, chronologically and thematically.¹¹ What binds the pattern together are elements that are significant to the context of production, such as the type of crimes represented, the method of detection, the description of criminality, and the characterisation of the detective (whether male or female, rational or instinctual, intellectual or physical, morally inflexible or morally dubious). The way these elements blend together in the story is also the reflection of

¹⁰ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, pp. 80-82.

¹¹ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, pp. 5-6.

the novelist's life and career. Crime fiction can resonate with a wide reading public across generations despite its contextual specificities and despite its seemingly unoriginal formulaic nature. Lee Horsley defends the literary dignity of crime fiction as an essentially formulaic genre by pointing out how writers are extremely responsive to the expectations of the readers and how they adjust novel elements to a familiar structure and still craft relevant works of fiction. According to Horsley, '[t]his interplay between a known form and the constant variation of that form is what vitalizes genre fiction.'¹² Sometimes variation is marked enough to spawn a new sub-genre, as in the case of the noir, other times variations play on the readers' expectations of an existing sub-genre by modernising, subverting, or parodying certain elements.¹³ For example, P. D. James and Sara Paretsky deliberately subvert the white, masculinist foundation of hard-boiled tradition,¹⁴ while butch protagonists of the source material can be said to appropriate the convention of the detective hero.¹⁵

Being a formulaic genre with a popular and accessible format, the production of crime fiction is highly responsive to social and cultural developments,¹⁶ and crime literature is a broad enough genre that it cannot be defined as conservative overall. Numerous writers consider the genre an adequate means of socio-political critique and they employ the genre to address questions of class, race, and gender, and to bring to light institutional corruption, organised crime, and to explore the nature of prejudice, obsession and discrimination. As Horsley contends, '[t]he genre itself is neither inherently conservative nor radical: [...] There has always been within it a capacity for socio-political comment, and using it in this way is facilitated by the very nature of crime fiction.'¹⁷ Therefore, despite having established roots in a conservative form, crime fiction has a highly changeable and adaptive nature. Capturing societal changes is a central feature of the genre. Feminist and lesbian crime fiction have made use of this feature masterfully in order to negotiate intangible and ever-shifting social constructs, especially in regard to gender and sexuality.

In the context of the argument of this thesis, emboldened by decades of feminist and lesbian feminist activism, throughout the 1980s writers such as Paretsky, Sue Grafton, Katherine V. Forrest, Barbara Wilson, and Val McDermid tackled the issue (among many

¹² Lee Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Stefania Ciocia, 'Rules are Meant to be Broken: Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Crime Writing', in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*, ed. by Christine Berberich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) pp. 108-128, (p. 119).

¹⁵ Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 133.

¹⁶ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, p. 34.

¹⁷ Horsley, pp. 158-159.

others), of the heavy influence of societal institutions on the lesbian body. There are many socially sensitive themes in early novels, including societal and familial homophobia, sexual harassment and abuse, unequal gender and sexual identity relations. Early crime fiction also includes headstrong female protagonists solving crimes, battling the justice system, and dealing with violence against minorities. The main difference is that, in the researched material, the murder plots fiction tend to resonate with contemporary issues of particular concern to the queer community, such as queer bashing, disowning of queer teens, judiciary bias towards gay bashers, medicalisation of queer identity, and forced closeting or forced coming out. This exploration produced intriguing narratives centred on many sensitive themes such as homophobia-induced violence (*Amateur City*, 1984), alcoholism among lesbians (*Murder in the Collective*, 1984), and the muffling of socialist feminist journalism (*Report for Murder*, 1987).

Crime fiction questions the characters' sense of identity and social agency, how gender relates to positions of authority and how morality and legality can clash over and over again. Faced with their mortality in innumerable ways, the characters confront the fears and vulnerabilities of a mortal body. The nature of real-world social networks and the relationship between individual autonomy, the dominance of the state, the sense of being a lawful citizen in relation to the continued prosperity of the state and civilisation may be all put into question. As Peter Messent asserts, '[crime fiction] allows its readers [...] to engage with their deepest social concerns, their most fundamental anxieties about themselves and their surrounding world.'¹⁸ Sally R. Munt also supports this perspective; commenting on the substantial value of the genre as social commentator, she writes that conventionally speaking crime fiction is a 'reassurance of cohesion, and the containment of threat and danger.'¹⁹ There are further connections between feminism, psychoanalysis, and crime fiction which informed the argument of this thesis and will be expanded upon throughout this and the following chapters, but now the following paragraphs will elaborate on this aspect of the genre, its significant role as social commentator, by pointing out how artistic, religious, social, and moral values are depicted in the genre and what this depiction means for early novels of the researched sub-genre.

¹⁸ Peter Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 7.

¹⁹ Munt, p. 124.

1.2 Artistic, Religious, Social, and Moral Values in Early Crime Fiction

During the nineteenth century popular and intellectual interests in crime literature shifted from a mostly religious and moral concern to an approach which focused on the aesthetic aspects of crime, as described by Thomas De Quincey in his 1827 essay ‘On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts.’²⁰ The essay explains and excuses a transformation in the subject matter of the contemporary literature of crime, from a tragic sin to a source of moderate pleasure and entertainment, as the alternation of crime and retribution had become an occasion for enjoyable intellectual engagement.²¹ The development of an aesthetic appreciation of unusual crimes caused a shift in crime literature: the life of criminals became romanticised. Maurizio Ascari’s study *A Counter-history of Crime Fiction* outlines the genre’s irrational, sensational literary conventions derived from texts with a penchant for the excessive, including eighteenth-century prison records, with their graphic accounts of crimes and punishment, as well as Gothic fiction, rich in seemingly paranormal riddles geared towards fear and suspense.²² Countering this shift arose a view of crime as a social issue from an increasingly scientific viewpoint, which led to empirical studies of the causes of crime and to the reasoning that crime would be best understood and dealt with not as a religious or moral offence, but as the result of certain social and psychological factors.²³

Sexual (or thinly-veiled censored sexual) content was one of the elements driving the sensational aspect of crime writing and by the turn of the twentieth century cultural attention started to focus on this subject matter, with sermons and public opinion demonising behaviours such as sodomy. Hugh Ryan indicates that in the first decades of the twentieth century American doctors, lawmakers and moral reform organisations began to closely consider the topic of criminal sexual behaviours, increasingly filling prison cells with individuals convicted of obscenity and sodomy.²⁴ Ryan specifies that at this point in time the public notion of sodomy not only included homosexual intimacy but also nonprocreative sexual activity involving excessive power gaps between the parties involved. The long history of the relation between sodomy and homosexuality was now one step removed from rape and paedophilia, as Ryan

²⁰ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, p. 54.

²¹ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, pp. 54-55.

²² Maurizio Ascari, *A Counter-history of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (New York: Springer, 2007)

²³ Lyn Pykett, ‘The Newgate Novel and Sensation Fiction, 1830-1868’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 32.

²⁴ Hugh Ryan, *When Brooklyn Was Queer: A History* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2019), p. 98. Google ebook.

states these anti-sodomy measures appeared compliant with prior anti-sexual-assault laws, ‘but by focusing only on male-male sexual assaults (and not male-female assaults that didn’t involve vaginal penetration, bestiality, etc.), they would help to redefine sodomy, in the eyes of the public, as synonymous with homosexuality—and homosexuality as synonymous with paedophilia.’²⁵ According to Michael Bronski’s *A Queer History of the United States* this synonymy re-entered the centre of public discourse in the 1980s, during the political and legal backlash engendered by the AIDS epidemic.²⁶

According to W. H. Auden, crime fiction pivots on two social concepts: innocence and guilt; as he argues, ‘[t]he interest in the detective story is the dialectic of innocence and guilt.’²⁷ This is due to the genre’s formula where the reader is meant to identify with the innocent and relish in cutting off the aberrant portion of society which disrupted the initial state of peace. Auden writes that the addictive effect of the detective novel is a phantasy of invincible peace and order, where the abnormality is dismissed through madness, confinement or death.²⁸ This argument echoes another theory, presented for instance by Symons, according to which the reader vicariously experiences and then exorcises the criminal deeds that are narrated in the story, where the punishment of the criminal symbolises a vicarious exorcism of one’s own sense of guilt, rooted in the concept of religious expungement of sin via ritual sacrifice.²⁹ From this perspective, the researched material is a highly subversive form, where the previously down-trodden queer community finally carries out its vengeance against the heteronormative establishment via the lesbian sleuth. Forrest’s *Murder by Tradition* (1991) is an emblematic representation of this vicarious triumph; the novel follows Kate’s investigation of the death of a young, openly out gay man who is stabbed to death by a closeted homophobic gay basher. As Kate is increasingly ostracised in the workplace due to her decision to pursue this case until the end, she embodies not only the victim’s will to justice but also that of the community, until the story’s denouement truly resembles an act of communal exorcism.

In terms of social values, from the turn of the century to World War II, the detective story was imbued with the values of a class in society that had much to lose by social change. On a social level, the classic detective novel offers its readers a reassuring world in which the individual found guilty of disrupting the established order is discovered and punished.

²⁵ Ryan, p. 101.

²⁶ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), p. 273. Google ebook.

²⁷ W. H. Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict’, *Harper’s Magazine* (1948), p. 406.

²⁸ Auden, pp. 411-412.

²⁹ Symons, p. 20.

Society's emissary, the detective, is usually the sole character allowed to have exceptional acumen. He might be eccentric and at times appear ludicrous, but the extent of the detective's knowledge is excellent and his inductive and deductive capabilities are more developed than any other character. Upon occasion, the investigator is even allowed to be above the law, to commit acts that less privileged characters would be punished for. Behind the Victorian and Edwardian adherence to a hierarchical society, there lay a deep-rooted anxiety about possible violent overturns, thus classical detective fiction generally defended the status quo.³⁰

This introduces another perspective of crime fiction scholarship: from a social point of view, crime fiction is an excellent means to expose intrinsic flaws of the institutions that societies construct and toil to perpetrate, such as the heterosexual nuclear family. In the genre family is often portrayed as the seat of violence, where relatives become suspects and the homely walls of a household may reveal unspeakable horrors. This is a theme threading especially strongly through feminist crime fiction, where oftentimes the crime is a device to expose the image of the female fractured subject, who is driven to the edge by social pressure, such as negative judgement towards divorce, lack of psychological support and counselling. Messent argues that the depiction of social ideals such as the nuclear family in the genre has undergone an increasingly graphic and grave transformation, where the high level of bodily violence may be partly due to a gothicisation of the genre, but also due to deeply embedded cultural attitudes.³¹ Messent further asserts that the objectification of the flesh in the genre is often associated with 'a general, rather free-floating, sense of gender anxiety, usually unexpressed at any fully conscious level.'³² This can be seen in the afore-mentioned gothicisation of settings in crime literature, and is telling that the example advanced here, the heterosexual nuclear household, is also part of Messent's argument, as he contends that,

[this objectification] acts accordingly - in its various manifestations - as a way of asserting linguistic, psychological, and physical authority and control over women in a gender context where traditional patterns of dominance and submission (the male as the physically and vocally powerful head of the household; the woman in the weaker, quieter, nurturing role) no longer hold.³³

³⁰ Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage.'

³¹ Messent, p. 77.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

To transpose this argument to early crime fiction, the genre's portrayal of social values such as the perfect heteronormative family is also riddled with cultural prejudices. For instance, Dreher depicts one of the most tragic family backgrounds for a lesbian sleuth, as her protagonist Stoner McTavish is forced by her homophobic parents to undergo conversion therapy in her childhood, and centres one of the mystery plots on the importance of reconciling with this past. By portraying crime, the disruption of order, the genre itself contains the seeds of oppositional purposes. Whether the order is perfectly restored at the end or not, how the criminal is apprehended or disposed of, what sort of crimes are included in the stories – these destabilising elements call for a close analysis of the works of the genre.³⁴

1.3 Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes

It would be logical to think that detective fiction could not be written before organised detective forces were created, but this is historically untrue, since the first detective stories were written by Poe (1809-1849), before Scotland Yard established the figure of the detective and before any American city had a semblance of a police force.³⁵ By starting his stories from the space of the detective's peaceful home, Poe establishes a metaphor of crime as a disruption of the harmonious social order. In this sense, the boundaries between the outside disorder and orderly personal space are clearly defined. At the centre of this orderly space stands Auguste Dupin, a man of extraordinary intelligence which shines all the more brightly compared to the obtuseness of his close friend, the anonymous narrator. This setting, the duo of the brilliant detective and less brilliant recorder became a fixed pattern of detective stories for nearly a century; as demonstrated by, for example, George R. Sim's Dorcas Dene and Mr. Saxon, Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Arthur Hastings, and Forrest's Kate Delafield and Ed Taylor.³⁶

Dupin anticipates Holmes' ability to interpret the intentions of his interlocutors by observing their reactions to what happens and what is being said around them. Through Dupin, Poe pioneered the method of solving cases via pure analytic deduction: aristocratic, eccentric and a brazen reasoning machine, the aptly named Auguste Dupin is only interested in making correct deductions about the criminals' actions – he dismisses the psychology and motives of

³⁴ Horsley, pp. 158-159.

³⁵ Symons, pp. 34-35.

³⁶ Symons, pp. 38-39.

the culprits.³⁷ From this perspective, it could be said that Dupin's position in the crime scene, and more generally in the urban city, can be likened to the Insider/Outsider position of the lesbian sleuth. Dupin has no particular concern with upholding justice or society's order; he is a recluse, largely motivated by intellectual challenges rather than by grand moral values.³⁸ However, while it remains true that the Dupin stories provide not so much a model but a tool-kit for posterity, it is equally true that Dupin's aloof characterisation renders him a master of any place he visits in a way that is completely foreign to lesbian sleuths. From this perspective, Poe is more of an outsider to society rather than an insider. Another major difference between Poe's spatiality and the lesbian detectives' involves verticality; as Judith A. Markowitz contends, Dupin can be counted among the early detectives who 'tend to be infallible geniuses whose powers of observation and scientific deduction separate them from ordinary humans.'³⁹ Additionally, a few lines prior Markowitz calls Dupin an outsider by the powers of his genius, 'Poe's detective, August Dupin, is an outsider skilled in observation and logic.'⁴⁰ Unlike the lesbian detective who only deals with horizontal spatiality, moving from one space to another, Dupin's position is *supra*-spatial, or, above the societal concept of spaces intended in this thesis.

As mentioned, Poe's Dupin anticipates Holmes' brilliant deductive skills and the sleuth's propensity for becoming enthralled by the mechanism of the mystery rather than by honouring the right to justice of the victims, like lesbian sleuths do. Moreover, Poe described certain elements of procedure, investigation, etc so effectively that they, after being consolidated by the Sherlock Holmes stories, became fundamental pillars of the formula of the detective story. These elements include a conventional way of defining a situation (the crime), a pattern of action following the initial situation (the investigation), the introduction of a certain group of characters related to the situation and the definition of the relationships among them (the investigators, the suspects and the criminals), and a setting appropriate to the action.⁴¹ All these elements are included in the literary heritage of twentieth-century crime fiction, including Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction.

Following Poe's example, Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) Sherlock Holmes represents another eccentric, brilliant character who wrote the history of the genre. The Holmes

³⁷ Symons, p. 39.

³⁸ Martin A. Kayman, 'The Short Story from Poe to Chesterton', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 41-58, (p. 45).

³⁹ Judith A. Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2004), p. 13.

⁴⁰ Markowitz, p. 12.

⁴¹ John G. Cawelti, *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* (Madison WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), pp. 36, 80.

series has a deep and far-reaching influence on the reading public, since the intended audience was the middle and upper classes and the stories played on fears of social upheaval and widespread chaos and used Sherlock Holmes as the ultimate representative of law and order – ‘I am the last and highest court of appeal to detection’ – which was reassuring for the readers.⁴² The attachment to absolutes of belief and behaviour, the desire to cleanse the community of its errors through some saving blessing is a constant undercurrent of Victorian crime literature, and Sherlock Holmes perfectly incorporated this sentiment. Crime represented the sickness, the decaying values of propriety and civilisation, and the reassuringly infallible detective represented the good doctor who administered the cure (in cases where the criminal ends up dead, the detective embodies both the doctor and the cure).⁴³

Holmes excels among the protagonists of crime fiction for his absolutes of belief and his superior intellect. Poe spawned not only the development of the criminal detective, but also the psychological analyst, yet it was Doyle who let this figure grow to its full potential. He drew on his medical expertise and on the diagnosing technique of his tutor at Edinburgh University Medical School, Dr Joseph Bell.⁴⁴ Holmes’ brilliant reasoning plays a major role in his appeal still today, appealing to the intellectual professions by solidifying the idea that they hold social power.⁴⁵ Today, detectives of this type are rare and generally resurface as extensions of the original characters, such as in Nicholas Meyer’s *Seven Percent Solution* (1974) and Laurie R. King’s *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* (1994).⁴⁶

The idea that professional figures of the middle class possessed social prestige was highly appealing for the readers. Doyle catered to the expectations and tastes of his audiences throughout his literary career. Although Sherlock Holmes’ personality was fully sketched out in ‘A Study in Scarlet’ (1887) and in *The Sign of the Four* (1890), Doyle recognised the increasing anxiety of middle and upper class society towards social change, brought by economic progress and more class mobility, and adjusted his protagonist to become a super-human figure, immune from ordinary weaknesses and passions. This change impacted on Holmes’ personality in various ways, including his refusal of amorous relationships and marriage, to the point of straying into misanthropic and misogynistic attitudes. Holmes’ moral principles are untouched by corruption or fame, thus when the law cannot enforce justice, Holmes takes the task upon himself, and instead of appearing unethical and daunting, he

⁴² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of the Four* (London: Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine, 1892), ch. 1.

⁴³ Messent, p. 13.

⁴⁴ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Kayman, pp. 46.

⁴⁶ Markowitz, p. 13.

projects an aura of reassurance and benevolence.⁴⁷ As Symons writes, '[p]art of Holmes's attraction was that, far more than any of his later rivals, he was so evidently a Nietzschean superior man. It was comforting to have such a man on one's side.'⁴⁸

Comfort is a characteristic which connects the Holmes saga to the Golden Age detective fiction. In fact, while the world of Doyle's stories may appear vast, spanning not only England but many colonies and ex-colonies of the British Empire, the events of the mystery plot are actually set in a very circumscribed world, such as a house, an office, a few acres of moors, or a few London streets. On the topic of Holmes' spatiality, he is the quintessential city detective, as Martin Kayman points out, 'Holmes' London has established itself as a stereotypical vision of Victorian London.'⁴⁹ Many of the Sherlock Holmes stories are set in London, with a dual effect. First, Doyle could avail himself of a varied gallery of social types in a believable manner, raising issues of scale of criminal acts, stolen or hidden identity, social belonging and change. Second, this setting enabled the suburban commuters who made up the majority of the magazine readership to develop a sense of connection between their routine and Holmes'. This connection was further reinforced by Doyle's factual writing style.⁵⁰

Holmes' character is interwoven with his spatial context, his acumen directly benefits the balance of the nascent urban metropolis and its pre-established social order; as Richard Lehan asserts, the epitome of the rational detective who 'uses that rationality to help safeguard another Enlightenment legacy: the imperial city.'⁵¹ This trend of the detective as pillar of pre-established order in modern urban societies is a fundamental premise of the interpretation of 1980s and 1990s lesbian detective novels in this thesis. Similarly to Dupin's, Holmes' spatial interpretation mainly develops in verticality: in certain aspects of society life he is extremely knowledgeable and acts as an insider, as a protector, while in others he is completely ignorant, as if he is an outsider monitoring a social experiment, as if observing societal spaces from above and afar instead of inhabiting them. Holmes' intellectual prowess envelops him in a sense of superiority and aloofness, while his ignorance and his quirks tend to isolate him below the basic consideration of his peers. Either above or below the social dimension of life, Holmes' lack of overt discomfort at this kind of isolation can be mostly attributed to Doyle's lack of authorial care. Thus, without taking into account Holmes' personal reactions and simply

⁴⁷ Symons, pp. 66-67 & Munt, p. 139.

⁴⁸ Symons, pp. 65-66.

⁴⁹ Kayman, p. 43.

⁵⁰ Messent, p. 33.

⁵¹ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 84.

examining his position at a surface level, from the perspective of this thesis' interpretive lens, Holmes' spatiality is tantalisingly reminiscent of the lesbian detective's.

The major difference between lesbian detectives and Holmes resides in Holmes' inherent self-confidence that his transgressive features are necessary components of a wider picture that is self-serving and self-assuring. Holmes' stable personality emerges in the ways in which he navigates the most disparate of settings with ease, which cannot be said for lesbian detectives. As the following chapters demonstrate, the homosexual, socially-coded transgressive elements of the lesbian detectives' characterisations disable cohesion of genre conventions, subverting and appropriating them. These facets create troubled characters who tend to inhabit or navigate certain spaces with the unfamiliarity of outsiders despite being enforcers of state institutions.

1.4 Early Female Sleuths: Mrs. Paschal and Mrs. G

The emergence of the New Woman who rejected domestic confinement for a career may be one of the key elements for the appearance of women investigators a couple of decades before women were able to join the police force.⁵² Within the context of female detectives, early examples of fictional female detectives appear in British literature with the publication of *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1861); published anonymously at first, it was subsequently attributed to William Stephens Hayward. Just three years later Andrew Forrester published *The Female Detective* with a nameless crime-solving protagonist.⁵³ In Hayward's novel the stern-looking Metropolitan Police officer Colonel Warner recruits the impoverished Mrs. Paschal for an infiltration and intelligence case. Mrs. Paschal fell into her profession by necessity; her husband died unexpectedly, leaving her in poverty at forty years old, and when she is offered the opportunity to become 'one of the much-dreaded, but little known people called Female Detectives,'⁵⁴ Mrs. Paschal immediately agrees.

Mrs. Paschal's professional life is the result of a negotiation of personas. Hayward implies that her every action is carefully studied from the beginning, in fact, the novels opens with Mrs. Maschal meeting with the Colonel to be assigned a new case. She remains quiet until

⁵² Merja Makinen, *Feminist Popular Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 104.

⁵³ Craig and Cadogan, p. 15.

⁵⁴ William S. Hayward, *The Revelations of a Lady Detective* (London: George Vickers, 1864) British Library <<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/revelations-of-a-lady-detective>> [accessed 28 March 2020], p. 2.

he speaks and when ordered to sit, '[she] did so immediately, with that prompt and passive obedience which always pleased him.'⁵⁵ Hayward's plot revolves an infiltration case in which Mrs. Paschal's role is to discover where an ostentatious lady acquires her funds by acting as one of the household's maids, without backup and without emergency contacts. Mrs. Paschal is quick-thinking, her first self-introduction is enough to set the tone for the rest of the novel, '[m]y brain was vigorous and subtle, and I concentrated all my energies upon the proper fulfilment and execution of those duties which devolved upon me.'⁵⁶

Mrs. Paschal is extremely goal-driven, she accepts a dangerous case without hesitation and also sets up a challenge for herself to complete her work as soon possible. In order to achieve her goals she cleverly utilises whatever resources she has to succeed in her new occupation. Like an actress (also similar to her successor Sherlock Holmes), Mrs. Paschal prepares for herself a range of personalities to fall into, 'I was well born and well educated, so that, like an accomplished actress, I could play my part in any drama in which I was instructed to take a part.'⁵⁷ Not only in terms of personalities, Mrs. Paschal's wardrobe can also rival Holmes', the master of disguises: she realises that disguising herself as a younger or older woman, as a wealthy spinster or as a humble servant is a requirement of her profession and not something to disregard or hold in contempt.

During the course of her investigations, Mrs. Paschal's range of disguises grows, until her wardrobe becomes, 'as extensive and as full of disguises as that of a costumier's shop,'⁵⁸ moreover, Mrs. Paschal does not plan ahead very much, but she is blessed by an affable personality and she is quick to realise what attitudes people favour,⁵⁹ denoting the remarkable adaptable and professional nature of this protagonist. In the main, Mrs. Paschal's investigations constitute relatively safe undercover work, including spying, eavesdropping and the search for clues at night in domestic settings. She is not spared from spooky adventures, such as crawling into Gothic-like secret passages in complete darkness,⁶⁰ which supports Ascari's argument about the gothic, sensational nature of early crime writing and offers itself for interpreting the spatiality of the early female sleuth as already contextualised with liminal spaces.

Forrester's detective is a mysterious and shadowy figure, even compared to the oft-disguised Mrs. Paschal. Forrester's nameless protagonist sometimes calls herself Miss Gladden,

⁵⁵ Hayward, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Hayward, p. 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Hayward, pp. 21-22.

although it is merely one of her professional pseudonyms,⁶¹ and for the most part she is not endowed with as strong an identity as Mrs. Paschal. Miss Gladden is reduced to her sex, starting from the title of the novel to the lack of a given name, to her self-effacing introduction as the novel opens, '[w]ho am I? It can matter little who I am.'⁶² The novel's police officers are either as ignorant as the reader regarding her real name, or they are as reluctant as the author to grace her with an identity, referring to her simply as G. Miss Gladden is a spy who mostly works undercover, a double life which seeps through the narration, where her outwardly demure, polite, and accommodating persona hides a sharp core. 'In my heart of hearts I am at a loss to decide at which side I laugh most—at my friends, who suppose me so very innocent, or at my enemies, who believe me to be not far removed from guilty.'⁶³ In this quote, for instance, the usage of 'laugh' conveys an authoritative voice who is fully self-reliant and self-confident in the multi-layered deception woven around herself.

Mrs. Paschal and Miss Gladden are historically relevant also because they work partly in relation with the police force and partly alone. Both of these ladies had enough chameleonic skills to pose as tradeswomen to gain access to places that were not open to ladies in order to gather evidence. Sherlock Holmes and other Victorian and Edwardian detectives could expertly alter their appearance at will, but the skill to assume different roles became a more essential tool of the trade for women investigators than for men.⁶⁴

1.5 The Golden Age of the Detective Novel

In 'The Guilty Vicarage' (1962), Auden expressed his reluctance to read crime fiction 'not set in rural England'⁶⁵ and this sentiment was shared by a substantial number of readers in the mid-twentieth century. Austen draws attention to the provincial, ostensibly idyllic setting of Agatha Christie's (1890-1976) clue-puzzle mysteries, whose cast of characters offers a limited number of suspects inhabiting a suitably circumscribed background. This ranged from a small village to a family gathering, from an isolated manor house to a train or cruise-ship. Christie utilised these limited elements so masterfully that she spearheaded the Golden Age of detective fiction as a sub-genre where the intricacy of the mystery becomes a form of art.

⁶¹ Andrew Forrester, 'The Female Detective', (Scottsdale AZ: Poisoned Pen Press, [1864] 2016), p. 60.

⁶² Forrester, p. 1.

⁶³ Forrester, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Craig and Cadogan, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁵ Auden, p. 406.

Most crime novelists of the Golden Age were British, notably Christie, Sayers, Marjorie Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, Anthony Berkeley, and Michael Innes, though American writers such as S. S. Van Dine, John Dickson Carr, and Ellery Queen also adhered to the formula. Each of them produced their best-known works during the three decades between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II, and while there is no clear consensus on the precise chronological framing of the Golden Age, these three decades are indicative of the most prolific period.⁶⁶ By the end of World War I, genius detectives were gradually supplanted by a range of fallible detectives in complex, plot-oriented mysteries which later evolved into the late classical detective novel and the cozy mystery, characterised by series such as *Murder, She Wrote* (1984-1996).⁶⁷

Christie's main bibliography, featuring Jane Marple (1927-1976) and Hercule Poirot (1920-1975), is more focused on the craft of the murder puzzle than Sayers is. This does not mean that Marple and Poirot's characterisation can be simplistically dismissed. In fact, there are a few elements in their characterisation which can be paralleled with early lesbian sleuths, such as the fact that both are, in a way, simultaneously insiders/outsideers. Both characters know how to take advantage of their positions, as Merja Makinen contends,

[w]here Poirot uses his foreignness to his own advantage, subtly exaggerating it to misguide English characters into dismissing his acumen, Miss Marple manipulates the sexist and ageist prejudices about old ladies being worthless to society, lacking in intellectual ability and outmoded in their assumptions and expectations, adopting the persona society expects as effective camouflage.⁶⁸

Marple and Poirot are emblematic Golden Age detectives for having sanitised the genre: a murder has been committed but their preoccupation with the motives, movements, and attire of those potentially involved cleanses the attack of its macabre features. The story instead becomes a game, in which the characters resemble the chess pieces and the readers accompany the protagonist in pitting their wits against an anonymous adversary.⁶⁹ Christine Berberich points out a common feature of male Golden Age investigators:

⁶⁶ Richard Bradford, *Crime Fiction: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 37. Google ebook.

⁶⁷ Markowitz, p. 13.

⁶⁸ Merja Makinen, 'Agatha Christie (1890-1976)', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 415-426, (p. 422).

⁶⁹ Bradford, p. 39.

in their privileged refinement and foppish fastidiousness, these classic detectives are all somewhat feminized, as if to emphasize their key role as moral guardians of an endangered social order, their ability to deal with crimes pertaining to a private, domestic sphere, their familiarity with – and aptitude for infiltrating – its undercurrent of shameful secrets, petty jealousies and strong emotions.⁷⁰

Poirot shares with Holmes the characteristic of being infallibly reliable and brilliant, and in his seemingly casual, aloof approach to crime. In this view Poirot is another personification of what was most needed among the public, a renewed faith that organisation and method are prerequisites for the full use of human intellect and that everything is explicable, even in the chaos of war.⁷¹ Whereas Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction is generally as much concerned with the process of becoming or celebrating one's own homosexuality as with the solution of the mystery.

In a tradition dominated by heroic male protagonists, the elderly spinster from St. Mary Head stands out as a reader-favourite sleuth, but while her characterisation is progressive, her actions and words hardly confront gender stereotypes in any fundamental way. As Makinen writes about Miss Marple's characterisation:

[c]ultural prejudices are dismantled to demonstrate how, behind the fluffy, frail exterior and the rather meandering, inconsequential talk, is an astute, shrewd, and knowledgeable woman whose expertise places her in the center of social occurrences, rather than at the excluded margins. Her characterization quietly challenges and rewrites the expectations of women of a certain age who are unmarried and live alone.⁷²

Distinguished by her rural setting and pastimes of knitting, gardening, and bird-watching, Miss Marple is endowed with unshakeable moral fortitude, wit, inquisitiveness, attention to details, and an excellent grasp of human behaviour. However, Miss Marple's genteel disposition towards the police and institutions of power implies only a minimal disturbance of accepted gender roles⁷³ or to the general state of law-and-order enforcement, as shown in later Miss

⁷⁰ Ciocia, p. 112.

⁷¹ Jessica Mann, *Deadlier than the Male: Why are Respectable English Women so Good at Murder?* (London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 79.

⁷² Makinen, 'Agatha Christie (1890-1976)', p. 423.

⁷³ Messent, p. 85.

Marple books where she relishes the prospect of the criminals being punished at a time when capital punishment was still active.⁷⁴ Another point to the conservative side of Marple and Poirot regards sexuality. The sexuality of popular investigators such as Poirot or Marlowe is portrayed as either absent or hyper-masculinist, but until gay and lesbian detective fiction emerged it constantly revolved around inter-sex interactions. This type of institutional sexual construction mirrored the role of the detective as defender of the societal status quo. Lesbian detective fiction introduces an outlier in the ranks of law enforcement, an entity whose sexuality (an integral part of society's self-perpetuation) is outside the control of hetero-sexism.

Poirot's and Marple's spatiality is similar to, but not as disoriented as, that of the lesbian detectives of the 1980s and 1990s. Poirot's insider/outsider dichotomy can be simply summarised in the contrast between his expatriate, effeminate characteristics and the hypermasculine connotation of his role as the main detective protagonist. Marple's engagement with spaces is slightly more intriguing. She spends most of her time at home and subtly coaxing suspects and witnesses to trust her and let some nuggets of truth slip in their encounters. She likes to visit her acquaintances in the United Kingdom and beyond, but the frequency and reach of these visits are quite limited. Worth noting is Marple's engagement with spaces on a smaller scale: while Poirot and the lesbian sleuths move with a certain frenzied energy in search of clues, Marple's most sustained activity consists of her ruminations. Regarding Poirot's and Marple's metaphorical spatiality, Stefania Ciocia points out a similarity between Golden Age detective fiction and hard-boiled writing, discussed in the following section,

[i]n classic detective fiction, the murderer usually turns out to be a member of the very élite society that projects its fears of disorder onto alien threats. Short of having to fend off the sudden intrusion of a violent outsider, the ostensibly peaceful, rigorously hierarchical 'Golden Age' world must come to terms with the realization that evil lurks among its own ranks.⁷⁵

From this perspective, the Golden Age detective often needs to tread carefully through spaces of societal power and control, mending the ruptures as if they were never there, more subtle an Insider/Outsider position than, perhaps, any other investigator discussed in this paper; whereas the classic hard-boiled detective occupies a more ambiguous position by himself when, as

⁷⁴ Makinen, 'Agatha Christie (1890-1976)', p. 422.

⁷⁵ Ciocia, p. 113.

Ciocia remarks, he restores murder ‘to its natural environment of gangsters and small-time crooks.’⁷⁶

To note other aspects in which Christie’s investigators occupy an Insider/Outsider position, critical attention has rightly focused on the way Miss Marple subtly manipulates cultural expectations that old ladies in rural villages would be ignorant of the darker aspects of modern life, playing up to these expectations by performing it but never quite owning it, as demonstrated by an excerpt from *The Body in the Library* (1942): ‘an old lady with a sweet, placid spinsterish face, and a mind that has plumbed the depths of human iniquity and taken it as all in the day’s work.’⁷⁷ In this way she is realistically portrayed in a tradition of genteel female investigators who are to a considerable extent constrained by assumptions of early twentieth-century feminine manners, with Marple’s intellectual prowess being the outlier in this representation, symbolising the unlimited potential of human intelligence stifled by societal conventions. From this perspective, Marple’s characterisation as a seemingly meek, nosy spinster stands for an insider societal role, while her extraordinary acumen and vicious sense of retribution tinge her with an outsider role. Marple’s spatiality, as well as Dupin’s, Holmes’, and Poirot’s, does not lend itself to a direct, in-depth comparison with the lesbian sleuth, since the latter is endowed with an indelible sense of disorientation caused by queer trauma, which these eminent investigators lack. It is essential to note, though, that the Insider/Outsider dichotomy has played a major role in the development of the genre, shedding light on the imbalance between the privileged position of the detective as defender of social order vis-à-vis the detective’s most transgressive features. This imbalance exposes just how illusory and ephemeral the protected status quo actually is, which, in my view, renders the long-lasting effects of queer trauma all the more poignant and tragic.

1.6 Chandler’s Mean Streets

Nothing could be further from the illusion of order conveyed by Christie’s novels than the chaotic city and endemic corruption explored by the cynical private eye of the hard-boiled sub-genre. Successor of Dashiell Hammett’s (1894-1961) style, Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) was not only an emblematic author in his genre, but also one of its most avid advocates and

⁷⁶ Ciocia, p. 114.

⁷⁷ Agatha Christie, *The Body in the Library*, (New York: Harper Collins, [1942] 2011), p. 73. Google ebook.

theorists, prompting Auden to write, ‘whatever he may say, I think Mr. Chandler is interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu,’⁷⁸ concluding that ‘his powerful but extremely depressing books should be read and judged, not as escape literature, but as works of art.’⁷⁹ Chandler actively worked to change the way the figure of the detective was regarded in fiction, he was conscious of the supposed state of the genre in his time, which he regarded as mediocre, a sub-par type of literature,⁸⁰ and it is no exaggeration to say that he despised the archetype of the Golden Age’s amateur detective. He claimed to return the genre to the real world, to imbue it with hard-earned realism, but his own stories equally depended on the reader’s suspension of disbelief.⁸¹

Constituting a rupture in the history of crime fiction, the hard-boiled American crime novel sets itself apart from the classical and the Golden Age genres of the likes of Doyle and Christie. The hard-boiled genre is a predominantly American form and it is best regarded as a response to the social, economic, and political conditions from the 1920s onwards. This response was not, as Chandler would have had it, objective.⁸² In fact, this thesis is in line with the research discussing hard-boiled writing as a specific world-view, that of the straight, white male. (This might be a simplification but it serves as a premise for this thesis’s literary analysis. In other words, whenever this thesis compares the character design of the novels under examination to the one of hard-boiled writing, it is based on a generalised conceptualisation of early hard-boiled literature.) Corporate-level social criticism is another major rupture that the American crime novel exerted in the history of the genre, as Andrew Pepper argues: ‘[t]he US crime novel has always been interested in the manipulation of the law by big business,’⁸³ such as insurance companies in Cain’s *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1935) and the gambling syndicate of Chandler’s *Farewell My Lovely* (1940).⁸⁴ While this type of criticism was directed at liberal capitalist society, Paretsky’s private eye V.I. Warshawski, who was involved in white-collar investigations in her 1980s and 1990s novels, shifts the criticism towards patriarchal capitalist society. Evolving from this tradition of individuating criminality as an endemic social plague of corrupted values, early novels on the same principle of corporate criticism but featuring middle-class individual criminals who represent the whole. In this case, the individual

⁷⁸ Auden, p. 408.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Symons, p. 130.

⁸¹ Craig and Cadogan, p. 75.

⁸² Andrew Pepper, ‘The “Hard-boiled” Genre’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 140-151, (p. 141).

⁸³ Pepper, p. 143.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

criminal stands for the fragmented psyche of conformist society which has been conditioned into associating homosexuality with disease, perversity, and criminality, leading to criminal acts in order to stave off an imaginary invasion of social foibles. Pepper's research demonstrates that hard-boiled writing discusses race, class, gender, and sexuality in, 'how the straight, white male protagonist vanquishes that which threatens his autonomy by projecting or displacing his anxieties onto a polluting Other characterized as black, female, and homosexual.'⁸⁵ This polluting Other is part of the literary tradition which informs Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction and is directly exposed and dealt with in early lesbian detective novels, in the way it polluted the psyche of generations of lesbians and is represented by the uneasy way lesbian detectives navigate spaces which heterosexual citizens inhabit with ease.

Chandler's most emblematic detective, Philip Marlowe, progressively develops into a form of wish-fulfilment and an idealised version of the author.⁸⁶ This not a unique trait to Marlowe; Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction is also, in many ways, a wish-fulfilment fantasy. The authors generally underscore the socially conscious attributes of their protagonists by giving them a past history in feminist activism like Stoner McTavish or Pam Nilsen, or filling the protagonists' surroundings with mouth-pieces for feminist principles, such as Dr. Lauren Calder in J. M. Redmann's *Death of a Dying Man* (2009), a theorist of women's sexual health. These traits and characters provide the lesbian sleuths a superior position from which to tackle gender and sexuality biases. Also, by the nature of the protagonist's profession, the authors are able to set up a contrasting sphere within which they could act in any way they wish against the arbitrary constructiveness of heterosexuality's hegemony: thus Kate Delafield can tussle with young homophobic thugs in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987), and Micky Knight can publicly shame her homophobic aunt for the domestic abuse suffered in childhood in *Lost Daughters* (1998).

Chandler also tussles with the societal aspects he detests through Marlowe. The private eye tackles cases psychologically as well as physically, resulting in frequent violent confrontations between the detective and criminals, and he is often forced to define his own concepts of morality and justice, even contrasting with the police's. Cawelti summarises this tough identity aptly by stating: '[w]here the classical detective's role was to use his superior intellect and psychological insight to reveal the hidden guilt that the police seemed unable to

⁸⁵ Pepper, p. 141.

⁸⁶ Symons, p. 131.

discover, the hard-boiled detective metes out the just punishment that the law is too mechanical, unwieldy, or corrupt to achieve.’⁸⁷ This scenario created a convention in which a poor, disreputable private eye takes on a criminal organisation or corrupt administration first on behalf of a client but then working under a strong sense of social cleansing masked as justice. In this way Marlowe (and the typical hard-boiled detective) would often trudge on without pay, undergoing several rounds of physical assaults per case, drinking to recuperate, staking out suspects in sleek vehicles, and entertaining brief sexual encounters with witnesses, suspects, or clients. This formula created a pariah, anti-hero mixed character whom Chandler hailed as a modern knight.⁸⁸

Marlowe is an invaluable character who significantly informs the literary analysis of this thesis and is compared to lesbian detectives throughout. Urban studies scholar David Schmid aptly notes that ‘Chandler retains the individualism of the detective, but he challenges the individualism of the criminal in a way that has the potential to produce a more optimistic and empowering view of the possibility of change within the city.’⁸⁹ According to Schmid’s analysis, Chandler’s vision of the city, in fact, is more than a generalised criticism of the collapse of the Californian dream born out of petty-bourgeois resentment, but is the product of a politically-engaged critique of capitalism.

Chandler undertakes his investigation of the city by mapping out an economic geography of Los Angeles, one which draws a distinction between the “spaces of the rich” and the “mean streets” only to collapse that distinction in order to show that the efforts of the rich to isolate themselves from the past and the corruption it represents are bound to fail.⁹⁰

What is evident in early novels is a clear illustration of the deep anxieties about the influence of homophobia, queer trauma, and heteronormative hegemonic powers on the liveability of every day spaces for LGBT+ communities. In hard-boiled fiction the booster image of large urbanised centres is turned upside down: instead of the emboldening view of the city as a golden land of opportunities, the genre sees the city as an ouroboros of corruption, crime, and

⁸⁷ Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*, p. 143.

⁸⁸ Mann, p. 75.

⁸⁹ David Schmid, ‘Imagining Safe Urban Space: The Contribution of Detective Fiction to Radical Geography’, *Antipode*, 27.3 (1995), 242-269, (p. 252).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

violence. Another similarity between Schmid's argument and this thesis' interpretive key regards the collapse of divisible spaces, more precisely of moral spatiality.

In hard-boiled novels the conclusion of the tough guy's investigation is generally more focused on characterisation and setting than the closure of the mystery as in traditional detective novels, and it is often undercut by the awareness that the detective himself has been tainted by the surrounded corruption.⁹¹ The depiction of how the protagonist's struggle against corporate corruption often ends in failure or in a heavy price to be paid, compounds the liminality of the hard-boiled private eye between an upholder of justice and societal transparency and an enforcer of society's shady flaws. At the end of *The Big Sleep* (1939), for instance, Marlowe's actions end up protecting immoral wealthy magnates and killers like Canino, and Marlowe admits '[m]e, I was part of the nastiness now.'⁹² This ending style embedded in social criticism typical of Hammett, Himes, and Raymond was largely politically disaffected, yet they were dedicated to bringing problematic elements of their times into explosive contact. Chandler's vision of the city is the result of a politically engaged critique of capitalism and despite the suspension of disbelief necessary to follow the vicissitudes of the detective, Chandler's handling of his settings is usually regarded as a faithful representation of the true hidden nature of twentieth century American urbanisation.⁹³

In her analysis of twentieth- and twenty-first century crime fiction, Ciocia identifies an intriguing spatial characteristic of the traditional hard-boiled novel, arguing that 'there is not even a semblance of order and domesticity in the uncertain world inhabited by the tough guy of the hardboiled tradition'⁹⁴ and that the hard-boiled detective is 'riddled with existential doubts.'⁹⁵ Ciocia also describes the hard-boiled private eye as troubled and compromised, whose moral murkiness is often entangled with the treacherousness of the modern city. This argument can be shifted towards the lesbian sleuth in these terms: there is order and domesticity in the lesbian crime story, but they are continuously destabilised by the uncertain position of the homosexual individual, thus creating an uncertain world inhabited by the perpetually unmoored lesbian sleuth. It is even easier to shift perspective from the deeply troubled private eye to the existential doubts of the lesbian sleuth, since these are extensively narrativised in, for instance, Dreher's *Shaman's Moon* (1998), which portrays the protagonist Stoner McTavish finding a piece of her personality in an out-of-body mystical experience, or Beecham's Amanda

⁹¹ Ciocia, p. 112.

⁹² Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep* (London: Penguin, [1939] 2005), p. 272. Google ebook.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ciocia, p. 112.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Valentine's dividing her domestic yearning between the United States and New Zealand. The moral disorientation of the private eye can thus be paralleled to the existential disorientation of early lesbian investigators.

Despite the variety of sub-genres which emerged after the hard-boiled, this chapter halts the overview of the spatiality of major detective figures in the history of detective fiction at this point and proceeds to closely related precursors of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, such as lesbian pulp fiction and late twentieth century feminist detective fiction. This overview of the first half of the genre has described a shift from valuing conformity to genre conventions to 'a preoccupation with the inability or refusal to conform to conventional expectations.'⁹⁶ The settings tend to focus on the city, acting as a microcosm of society, and in this inescapable labyrinth of closed doors where, instead of seeping into the ground and disappearing, the blood of the victims congealing on the streets, 'we see crystallized the pressures to impose conformity and to sweep aside impediments to the creation of a buoyantly commercial American system.'⁹⁷ The 'refusal to conform to conventional expectations' and the representation of the 'consequences of the pressures to impose conformity' connect the late twentieth century hard-boiled inspired private eye and the lesbian detective. After all, the association of improper femininity with criminality and depravity is clearly present in the strongly masculine hard-boiled fiction, exemplified by Chandler's writing.⁹⁸ As Worthington puts it, '[t]he trend in conventional, masculine crime fiction tends to be that sexualised women who refuse to conform to their proper gender role are criminalised in some way.'⁹⁹

Thus, through reappropriation and refusal to conform to such expectations, the researched material places a female detective who turns gender roles upside down at the centre of its narrative, connected to other popular sub-genres, particularly the hard-boiled, through its contestations of conformity. The troubled spatiality of the lesbian detective can be said to derive also from this disconnection from the past, as this figure needs to carve a place out for herself while making sense of an inherent sense of displacement caused by queer trauma.

⁹⁶ Horsley, p. 160.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*, p. 45.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

1.7 Precursors of Anglo-American Lesbian Detective Fiction: Lesbian Pulp Fiction

Before tracing major precursors and influences of early lesbian fiction, this section discusses the antecedent of lesbian detective fiction in the shape of lesbian pulp fiction. But before there was lesbian pulp fiction, there was the doomed, lonely lesbian portrayed in famous novels such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928). As Lillian Faderman's research demonstrates, this notable literary lesbian harked back to subjective diagnosis of early twentieth century pathological sexuality studies:

[t]o nineteenth-century sexologists such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, men and women who were attracted sexually to the same sex, and those whose gender identity didn't match their anatomical sex, were all "sexual inverts." In the twentieth century, the sexologists' conflation of sexual orientation and gender identity was reflected in popular culture.¹⁰⁰

The doomed and damned lesbian was not simply a product of literary imagination: if her sexual preference became of public knowledge during the McCarthy witch-hunts periods, she became literally outlawed. During the labour-hungry years of World War II the authorities' interrogations and checks of military personnel became perfunctory, but during peaceful times queer individuals faced expulsion from military and government jobs. In the growing business of 1950s pulp fiction, the lesbian became a sensational character. Romantic excess, forbidden desire, and social marginality were, in the public's mind, represented by the homosexuals' cross-dressing. Homosexuals were understood to have been born different and that their bodies and their clothing reflected this specificity. This element helped significantly in making the lesbian a sensational character in romance pulp fiction.¹⁰¹

Typical of much of the mainstream literature from the 1950s and 1960s, sexuality was a constant presence in pulp fiction, albeit it was not articulated beyond simple clichés.¹⁰² Indeed, pulp fiction could be said to have drawn attention to the psychoanalytic construction of

¹⁰⁰ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 16. Google ebook.

¹⁰¹ Martha Vicinus, "'They Wonder to Which Sex I Belong': The Historical Roots of the Modern Lesbian Identity", *Feminist Studies*, 18.3 (1992), 467-497, (pp. 489-490).

¹⁰² Munt, p. 20.

lesbianism ('the masculine soul in the female bosom manifests itself'¹⁰³) typical of the Freudianism which served to normalise the post-war nuclear family. Summarily speaking, lesbians were sick. As Munt writes, '[a] paradigm of deviance, drugs, and urban decay located these literary lesbians in lonely antithesis to the security of the suburban American dream.'¹⁰⁴ Lesbians started to figure as more important characters in dime novels, and the sheer popularity of these sensational sex stories suggests a fascination for the Other. These dime novels were primarily about sex, supposedly for the secret enjoyment of the straight male reader, but undoubtedly lesbians read these texts too, and likely for the same reason.¹⁰⁵ From the 1950s to the boom of queer genre literature in the 1980s, pulp novels became the main source of queer representation. The rough-edged crime story had made its way into the pulp novel of the 1920s, but they were joined by queer romances in the 1960s. These gritty narratives were mostly enjoyed by heterosexual men and were meant to fulfil sexual appetite. Therefore, along with the occasional queer mystery were a plethora of sordid sensational novels such as the *Strange Sisters: The Savage Novel of a Lesbian on the Loose* by Robert Turner (1962), *The Shadowy Sex* by Hilary Hilton (1963), *Twice As Gay: Lesbos in High Heels and Leather* by Nan Keene (1964), *Lesbians in Black Lace—They were Twilight Girls, Black Nylon Lovers* by Claire Arthur (1963).¹⁰⁶ They often featured gay and lesbian characters who were overly sexualised and pathologised, which is another aspect that the lesbian detective needs to acknowledge in the way she inhabits certain spaces.

As Munt claims, 'the lesbian crime novel has its origins in the lesbian pulp fiction of the 1950s and early 1960s.'¹⁰⁷ During the 1960s the fervour of political activism enabled queer content creators to come together, organise and enable the rapid growth in queer publishing in the United States. The priority was authentic visibility, meaning the display of the whole spectrum of the lives of queer people needed to be portrayed, not just the worst-case scenarios. Thus writers of this sub-genre strove to present not only the positive but also the negative aspects of lesbian life: the highly personal and the community issues, the contentious relationships, friendship, parenting, and emotionally heavy topics such as the closet, coming out, family rejection, and gay bashing.¹⁰⁸ All these themes and more have been reprised and

¹⁰³ Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study* (London: Forgotten Books, [1984] 2021), p. 280.

¹⁰⁴ Munt, p. 121.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Munt, pp. 121-122.

¹⁰⁸ Markowitz, p. 6.

further developed by the mystery plots of early novels and proved to be an invaluable bedrock for in-depth literary interpretation in this thesis.

It is not just the theoretical framework of the 1980s and 1990s, or the historical background of the community that informs the spatiality of the lesbian sleuth, the foundation of this thesis' argument is also built upon a careful analysis of the genre's themes. As shown in the introduction of this thesis' representation and visibility are key elements of early lesbian popular literature, and sometimes such elements are of paramount importance to the writers, even more crucial than the mystery plot. Therefore, significant narrative length is dedicated to exploring the lesbian sleuth's conscious and subconscious personality, as well as inter-personal relationships. Stoner McTavish's nightmare quoted at the opening of this thesis is emblematic of this trend, where every aspect of the nightmare carries a rich symbolism in regard to the protagonist's characterisation. Because of this substantial effort, the analysis of the lesbian sleuth's spatiality needs to be carefully framed in relation to what kind of feminist and lesbian representation came before it, which is what this second half of the chapter is doing.

1.7.1 Precursors of Anglo-American Lesbian Detective Fiction: Coming Out Stories

One recurrent theme in any genre of LGBT+ literature is the process of "coming out of the closet." This revelation can be personal, as when the character admits to themselves that they are queer, but is more commonly known for its interpersonal nature, as when characters make their sexual identity known to others. Many 1980s and 1990s lesbian novels included plot development informed by the *Bildungsroman*. The growing up of the characters often necessitated coming out and there were even novels which were centered on the process of sexual awakening and self-acceptance. These so-called coming out stories were popular well before lesbian authors tried their hands at genre literature. For instance, one of the most popular early examples is Patricia Highsmith's *Carol* (1952), her only known explicitly lesbian novel and with a happy ending, originally published as *The Price of Salt* under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. It is not difficult to imagine why autobiographies and coming out stories were popular from the 1950s to the end of the 1970s.¹⁰⁹ In the United States and the United Kingdom homosexuality was illegal, and despite a lack of clear, restraining laws, Australia and New Zealand still retained for the most part the conservative heterosexism of Europe. In contrast,

¹⁰⁹ Specifically in the United Kingdom, homosexuality was decriminalised in 1967.

this new literary tradition often showed feisty heroines who, through a series of tribulations, eventually regarded their sexuality as natural and normal. In the 1990s and 2000s the bildungsroman element in lesbian literature portrayed the continuing quest for freedom in repressive countries and communities.¹¹⁰

Wilson is one of the pioneers of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, her *Murder in the Collective* was published in 1984, this was also the year of publication of Mary Wings' *She Came Too Late* and Forrest's *Amateur City*. Both the latter and *Murder in the Collective* feature members of the main cast of characters who come out of the closet during the story. Wilson's protagonist and Forrest's love interest come to terms with their homosexuality in the first instalment of the series, not without a substantial degree of self-doubt and internalised homophobia. A year later, Dreher's *Stoner McTavish* also contained a love interest who goes through internal turmoil over her attraction to the protagonist and the same happens three years later in *Lessons in Murder* Claire McNab.

Why the sustained focus on coming out sub-plots? Coming out stories contained heavy emotional baggage, but they were also appealing to vicariously exorcise one's own internalised homophobia, and finding one's own true self over and over meant reaffirming the dignity of this true self's existence.¹¹¹ The element of coming out is prevalent in mid- to late twentieth century American lesbian romance and crime stories also because this was an extremely sensitive and loaded subject at a time when LGBT+ civil rights were fiercely fought for. Moreover, the revelation of the Self in the coming-out narrative can be related to the revelation of the murderer in the detective novel. In both cases a person's true self is unmasked for the betterment of society and in pursuit of truth and justice. The way the lesbian sleuth engages with the metaphorical space of the closet is expanded upon in the following chapter.

1.8 Late Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction Developments

Late twentieth century crime fiction increasingly concentrated efforts in portraying the long-term effects of societal issues on victims' and detectives' damaged minds and bodies. A notable figure in this development is Grafton's Kinsey Millhone (1940-2017), a hard-boiled private

¹¹⁰ Emma Parker, 'Contemporary Lesbian Fiction: Into the Twenty-First Century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. by Jodie Medd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 211.

¹¹¹ Markowitz, p. 192.

eye imbued with aspirational feminist principles, from demonstration of dominance against criminals to mundane things such as not pandering to trends in diets or fashion.¹¹² Horsley points out to the contradictory nature of the female performance of this macho role, '[t]he 'in-between locus' of the female dick is intended to undermine the essentialized masculine norms of hard-boiled fiction.'¹¹³ Millhone's narrative voice foregrounds a no-nonsense attitude and confident self-reliance from the beginning of the first novel of the series, *A is for Alibi* (1982),

I'm a private investigator, licensed by the State of California. I'm thirty-two years old, twice divorced, no kids. The day before yesterday I killed someone and the fact weighs heavily on my mind. My apartment is small but I like living in a crammed space . . . one room, a "bachelorette." I don't have pets. I don't have houseplants. I spend a lot of time on the road and I don't like leaving things behind.¹¹⁴

Intriguingly, the only expression of self-doubt in this introduction involves the use of deadly violence, which, as Messent points out, reveals, 'an awareness of possible moral culpability unusual in the majority of her male predecessors,'¹¹⁵ which is often found in feminist-influenced crime fiction. A similar sense of troubled conscience occurs in Paretsky's *Killing Orders* (1985), where Warshawski shoots a gangster in the leg and pries information from him from his pain and threat of further pain. Warshawski's immediate reaction, though, is remorseful as she describes, '[n]ausea at the depths of my own rage. How like a mobster I had behaved – torture, threats. I don't believe the end justifies the means. I'd just been plain raving angry.'¹¹⁶ This self-awareness conveys an ambivalent attitude to violence visible in many feminist-influenced female sleuths, where on one hand the investigator may need to exert more force to obtain results or to defend herself, while on the other hand she may find herself increasingly contrary to her conscience. The fact that this type of conscientious use of force originates from a heterosexist upbringing reinforces the Insider/Outsider status reading of early lesbian sleuths. As Messent argues in support of this ambivalent attitude,

[t]he necessary self-protection, anger, and (often) fear felt by [women] detective protagonists does commonly spill out in violent action. But, however immediately

¹¹² Munt, p. 46.

¹¹³ Horsley, p. 262.

¹¹⁴ Sue Grafton, *A is for Alibi* (New York: Holt Paperbacks, [1982] 2010), p. 3. Amazon ebook.

¹¹⁵ Messent, pp. 89-90.

¹¹⁶ Sara Paretsky, *Killing Orders* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, [1986] 2008), p. 225. Amazon ebook.

justified, the nature of such a response generally sits uncomfortably with a feminist ideology that views aggression and rage as damaging “masculine” traits, normally countered by women’s more nurturing and accommodating virtues.¹¹⁷

Like Millhone, most early lesbian sleuths are butches, meaning that their manners, physique, emotionality, and sometimes clothing adhere to traditional notions of masculinity. They skirt the line between stern professionalism and romantic fluff, and between the identity of enforcers of higher order and combative champions of a repressed minority. The second point quoted can also be discussed in respect to early lesbian investigators: the 1980s novels are chronologically placed so that the events portrayed are embedded in crucial, sensitive topics among LGBT+ and feminist activism at the time, among which is the critique of the butch/femme dichotomy as representing an indelible entrenchment of traditional gender roles. Thus, is the butch detective becoming soft-hearted for the femme partner in the best interest of the longevity of this type of detective figure? The decrease in critical engagement with twenty-first versus twentieth-century Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction might point in this direction.

Signals of the post-1980 counter-tradition turn of the genre, described in detail in the following section, emerged as early as the Nancy Drew figure. Since the 1960s there has been an explosion of women-centred crime novels, where gender roles issues are progressively more assertively addressed. Messent links this upsurge to post-1960s feminist activism, and dates it back to Amanda Cross’ Kate Fansler and P. D. James’ Cordelia Gray.¹¹⁸ Cross’s (Carolyn Heilbrun) Kate Fansler (1964-2002) is an outspoken professor of English at Harvard and amateur detective in an increasingly feminist-influenced series. This is highly indicative of a feminist shift within the genre, considering that the victim of *Death in a Tenured Position* (1988), Janet Mandelbaum, holds a well-known antipathy for feminism within the institute. In fact, Munt remarks that the real criminal of this novel can be identified as Harvard itself, which symbolises the guilty institutional power and is part of a wider argument that can be extracted from most early novels,

[i]n a sense Harvard is guilty; Mandelbaum’s death is ultimately revealed as suicide, and the text clearly and painfully makes explicit the hostility which caused it. This

¹¹⁷ Messent, p. 90.

¹¹⁸ Messent, p. 89.

central hermeneutic can be read as a microcosm of women's incursion into the academy; in the form of content or executors, women are concertedly ridiculed or reviled.¹¹⁹

Kinsman reinforces her point on Kate Fansler's relevance in the history of the genre (and the shift towards the post-1980 identitarian turn) by stating that the series 'is an important marker in the project of re-imagining the narrative roles open to women in this historically masculinist genre with its canonical tradition of confining women to the roles of victim, vamp, villain or sidekick.'¹²⁰

Great Britain provided another notable example for this upsurge in the shape of Cordelia Gray, protagonist of James' 1972 *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*. In Kinsman's words, Gray comes across as the sort of protagonist who 'resists the stereotypes of the passive woman, dependent on male protection; or of the sexually predatory woman, threatening to masculine identity.'¹²¹ This female private eye is endowed with several key elements of the hard-boiled formula, since James does depict a remarkably intelligent, tough-minded, and sexually savvy young woman, who foregrounds her subjective narratorial voice and tackles difficulties alone. Despite having been dropped by the author after one more case, it is undeniable that Gray seized a position in hard-boiled writing, 'a traditional bastion of fictional maleness'¹²² as Martin Priestman puts it, for herself. Maureen T. Reddy reinforces this critique with her own research, emphasising similarities between Gray and the traditional hard-boiled private eye, '[l]ike the male hardboiled detectives, Cordelia is solitary and alienated from her surroundings; also like them, she repeatedly encounters resistance to her investigation and challenges to her authority.'¹²³

As is the case with most lesbian sleuths, this resistance often originates from gender biases, a fact underscored by James' novel's title, *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, a stratagem that several lesbian authors used to foreground their lesbian feminist affiliations. A similar case is found in the title of Rose Beecham's *Fair Play* (1995), referring to both the BDSM play in the lesbian club where the murder occurs, and the fact that fairness is on the side of the initially

¹¹⁹ Munt, p. 34.

¹²⁰ Margaret Kinsman, 'Feminist Crime Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Catherine R. Nickerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) pp. 148-162, (pp. 153-154).

¹²¹ Kinsman, p. 154.

¹²² Martin Priestman, 'Post-War British Crime Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 173-189, (p. 187).

¹²³ Maureen T. Reddy, 'Women Detectives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 191-207, (p. 196).

suspected local lesbian community. The local lesbian club-goers engage in fair play by respecting each other's boundaries, while the victim's boyfriend engages in foul play by both taking revenge on the victim for exercising her right to abort, and staging the murder as if it were a BDSM session gone wrong. Other times lesbian authors reveal feminist influences by ritually punishing the dramatised symbol of patriarchy, such as in Wilson's *Murder in the Collective*, where the criminal is a manipulative rapist and the protagonist does not denounce the two women who kill him; a ritualistic revenge plot where, as Munt pointedly argues, 'the death of the patriarch paves the way for the discovery of a symbolic mothering, in feminist sisterhood.'¹²⁴

Priestman continues his assessment of Gray by stating 'such heroines,'¹²⁵ and I would include early hard-boiled lesbian sleuths such as Micky Knight, 'exploited the private eye's outsider status to show how society is stacked in favour of male, as well as financial and political, power; the main drawback being that, once the initial fun is over, the private eye remains a figure of fantasy.'¹²⁶ The first sentence of this quote can be partially applied to the lesbian sleuths examined for this thesis and listed in this study's Appendix; even those who are not private eyes demonstrate an ambiguous and intriguing peculiar spatiality as Insider/Outsider to the male-favouring traditional society. The latter sentence can also be attributed to the aspirational indomitable self-reliance embodied by most early lesbian sleuths, such as Micky Knight, Cassandra Reilly, or Lindsay Gordon, who face even the most daunting situations and overpowered institutions head-on, something that officers such as Kate Delafield and Amanda Valentine would be limited in.

1.8.1 The Post-1980 Identitarian Turn

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction authors, with their unabashed handling of injustice and crime in the topics, successfully figured out how to bring political consciousness to fiction, which made their works all the more appealing for the time, when lesbian activism was a widespread ethic, as demonstrated for instance by Wilson's works, which are thinly-disguised debates about sensitive lesbian feminist topics of her time. The sleuthing lesbian often deals with cases of murdered queer individuals, cases that are seen to be easily dismissed by the

¹²⁴ Munt, p. 149.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

police force, as shown in Forrest's *Murder by Tradition*, dramatising highly sensitive issues without preaching directly to the readers. This stratagem rendered the researched sub-genre a powerful educative tool, but also a devastatingly honest mirror of the state of the Anglo-American lesbian community's politics in the 1980s and 1990s. Interviewed by Markowitz, Wilson admits how self-aware the pioneer authors were, and how driven in their literary quest, '[w]e 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.'¹²⁷

As indicated by Millner, arguably the most significant innovation of the American detective novel of the 1980s and 1990s is the explicit engagement with politics of racial and gender difference. From roughly 1980, a number of American crime fiction authors foregrounded gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation as key concerns, '[t]heir narratives forthrightly critique oppression of minorities and women and introduce representations of female and minority detectives with agency.'¹²⁸ This agency is usually dramatised in the ability to solve cases using knowledge provided by the detective's racial and gender identity. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw several American feminist writers, independently of each other, developing a new turn to the genre. Positioned at the centre of the narrative, in the first-person perspective of the hard-boiled tradition, characters such as Marcia Muller's Sharon McCone, Kinsey Millhone, and V. I. Warshawski were created with enhanced agency, intelligence, and action-driven attitude. Kinsman argues on the significance of this turn: '[t]hese were pioneering constructions of the modern female detective figure; as more women writers featuring strong central women characters came on board throughout the 1980s and 1990s, from both the USA and the UK, a range of feminist sensibilities came to bear on the genre, and it has never looked back.'¹²⁹

A notable example among Kinsman's references of post-1980 feminist-influenced serial detectives is Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski series (1982-). Warshawski's outspoken feminist personality leads her to expose the ways private and public urban spaces are related in terms of race, class and especially gender biases. In 1995, within the chronological framework of analysis for this thesis, geographical studies scholar Schmid depicted Paretsky's writing as representative of 'the richest notion of the symptomatic nature of crime in a capitalist and patriarchal society,'¹³⁰ praising Paretsky's villains as 'truly personifications of the social and

¹²⁷ Barbara Wilson quoted in Markowitz, p. 193.

¹²⁸ Michael Millner, 'Identity Politics in Crime Fiction', in *A History of American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Chris Raczkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 236-49, (p. 236).

¹²⁹ Kinsman, p. 148.

¹³⁰ Schmid, p. 263.

economic order from which they have literally and metaphorically profited.’¹³¹ This description fits well with early Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, but more noteworthy is the similarity between Paretsky’s feminist protagonist and lesbian detectives. Schmid also praises Warshawski not as an ideal of how women should occupy certain spaces on their own terms, but as the representation of the consequences of such occupation, including becoming the centre of violent plots against her and her support group.¹³² For the private detective protagonists this situation can be paralleled with ease with the violence routinely encountered by the protagonist, her family members and friends due to the protagonist’s recklessness in pursuit of justice. However, for the police procedural, a parallel will be repeatedly drawn between the criminal world vs police force type of violence represented in heteronormative crime fiction, and the sexual identity-based violence that the lesbian detective faces on top of this violence.

Paretsky utilises hard-boiled fiction tropes abundantly, such as the first person perspective and copious night-time action, but while, for instance, Marlowe symbolically stares at his own lone reflection in the mirror, Paretsky’s endings usually feature dinners and conversations between Warshawski and her best friend and care-giver Lottie, punctuated by reinforcing statements regarding Warshawski’s quest towards true justice. This signal that the detective’s crusade will continue is a common feature of crime fiction, but the pivotal difference between early masculinist hard-boiled and early feminist hard-boiled is the emphasis on existential angst, different subjectivities, perspectives, codes of ethics, and the contrast between solitude vs community. And the latter is a substantial feature of the primary source material of this research, as most concluding sections of the novels read for this thesis engage in either a resolution of the romance sub-plot, with the protagonist reconciling with her girlfriend or wife, or present a collective situation featuring neighbours, colleagues, or friends. In contrast to Marlowe’s solitary pursuits such endings acknowledge links across differences of age, gender, and ethnicity, and encourage a sense of community.¹³³

In addition to identity-oriented trends in fiction, there has been an extensive scholarly literature based on post-1980 identitarian writers; important scholarship by Jessica Mann, Reddy, Munt, and Klein delineates the way post-1980 detective novels value the representation of minority identities, the way identity itself is a social construction, and the ways in which the classic detective genre’s patriarchal heteronormativity is deconstructed and then reconstructed

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Kinsman, p. 150.

in alternative forms. Academics eagerly drew attention to the genre's unexpected turn to identity politics; after all, the mid-century hard-boiled is not generally concerned about exploring gender, racial, ethnic, or sexual difference. However, the development of the identitarian turn was advanced by this sub-genre too, bringing sensitive issues to a vast and increasingly diverse audience. This expanding, diverse reading public and academic criticism's growing interest and recognition of hard-boiled and noir aesthetics in popular culture resulted in the post-1980 literary trends which enabled different perspectives to emerge, including lesbian ones.¹³⁴

1.9 Into the Spaces of Anglo-American Lesbian Crime Fiction

After having taken a snapshot of the way several detectives in the history of crime fiction interacted with their settings, the following chapters shift to the main subject matter of this thesis, the way the lesbian sleuth interacts with certain spaces and demonstrates an innate liminality between the roles of insider and outsider to the establishment and the LGBT+ community. The first perspective studied in-depth in this thesis is the one of the space of the closet. As the following chapter sets out to argue, the long residence of the early lesbian sleuth (for most the protagonists analysed for this thesis are closeted and they are for the whole or most of the duration of their series) in the closet has taught her that her best defence is isolating herself and entrenching herself in her work, which is characterised as a traditionally masculine environment. When coming out does happen, usually forcefully by external parties, the spatial disorientation of the lesbian detective is even more apparent. The following chapter delves into the explanation of these points and connects them with the Insider/Outsider role of the lesbian sleuth and the history of queer trauma, creating an interwoven fabric of interpretations between the next chapter, the closet, and the third chapter, the clinic.

¹³⁴ Millner, p. 237.

Chapter Two: The Closet

Because of their basis in reality, in their dealings with the real fears of society, and because the police, by virtue of their status as employees of the State, are strongly linked to the politics of the day, police procedurals are particularly sensitive to cultural issues such as race and gender and are strongly indicative of national attitudes to and conceptions of criminality and crime.¹

This chapter discusses these situations and how closeted or out characters engage with the symbolical space of the queer closet. And while this introductory quote by Heather Worthington refers to police procedurals, it pertains to the general content of this chapter in so far as Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction is a sub-genre which deals with real fears of the LGBT+ community, its relationship with the state and with politics, and its attention to sensitive issues within the community. One of these issues is naturally homophobia and its consequences. Homophobia can be found in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction from its formative years, which is a testament to the self-awareness and knowledge of lesbian authors, as well as to the swiftness and adaptability of detective fiction and genre literature to discuss contemporary, relevant topics.

As Emma Parker writes, the researched sub-genre highlights ‘distinctly lesbian themes and concerns: it highlights homophobia; resists the pathologisation of homosexuality; critically reassesses heterosexuality; critiques gender norms; and subverts dominant cultural narratives that uphold gender and sexual inequality.’² Parker here refers to twenty-first century lesbian fiction, but this quote is still highly relevant for the novels published in the 1980s and 1990s. Analysing the researched sub-genre within the interpretive key of the lesbian sleuth who is perpetually stuck in an Insider/Outsider contradiction and suffers the consequences at a very deep psychological level, a specific space stands out distinctly: the closet. The closet is a by-product of homophobia, a scourge that the lesbian sleuth has to face not only as an external force but also, at times, as an internal threat, as seen in self-effacing, self-hating quotes from Sarah Dreher’s Stoner McTavish and Wilson’s Pam Nilsen series. Studying the space of the

¹ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xx.

² Emma Parker, ‘Contemporary Lesbian Fiction: Into the Twenty-First Century’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Lesbian Literature*, ed. by Jodie Medd, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 204-218, (p. 207).

closet also sheds light on the pathologisation of homosexuality and its lingering effects, such as queer trauma, which is a core point of this thesis. Queer trauma is the main cause of the lingering sense of destabilisation in the lesbian sleuth's social spatiality. The closet also serves to reassess heteronormativity by displacing it from the centre-stage it usually enjoys in mainstream detective fiction.

As the authors of the essay 'Complicating the Coming Out Narrative' contend, traditional concepts of LGBT+ identity have theorised coming out of the closet as a linear process that all queer individuals must follow, otherwise these individuals are to be considered unhealthy or maladjusted. However, such concepts are exceedingly rigid and lack a dynamic understanding of the coming out process,³ which early authors demonstrate a more fluid understanding of. These early research projects described a progression of these coming out stages as starting from a phase of confusion and defensiveness about one's own sexuality, followed by gradual acknowledgement and tolerance, eventual experimentation, and finally acceptance. Significantly, these stages were theorised to start from a feeling of difference and incongruity and were thought to end with the integration of the individual with a queer community of their own. This final stage was characterised with denunciation of societal norms, recognition of constructed heteronormativity as outrageous, and rejection of heterosexuality. In other words the individual shifts from a state of different-ness to a subversive, self-aware state of different-ness, from a state of Other to a state of Self, with the process of coming out as integral middle step.⁴ What I propose with my reading of early primary source material is a state of indelible disorientation brought by the recognition, exposure, and acknowledgement/acceptance that the society the lesbian detective protects is one which creates the need for these stages.

Being closeted entails living without disclosing one's sexual orientation or gender identity, also known as being "in the closet." The process of coming out may be as immediate as the utterance of a sentence, or it may be an undertaking spanning long periods of time.⁵ Most of the coming out scenes of researched novels pivot on personal and professional circumstances. In the main these scenes showcase a variety of contexts, modes, and consequences of coming out partly or completely, which as Judith Markowitz asserts, is a

³ Kate Klein, Alix Holtby, Katie Cook and others, 'Complicating the Coming Out Narrative: Becoming Oneself in a Heterosexist and Cissexist World', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62.3 (2015), 297-326, (p. 297).

⁴ Klein, p. 298.

⁵ Mary Lou Rasmussen, 'The Problem of Coming Out', *Theory Into Practice*, 43.2 (2004), 144-150, (p. 144).

distinguishing trait of homosexual detective fiction,⁶ and as Susan Gair states, was considered a crucial moment of personal and communitarian growth in the 1970s and 1980s, '[g]ay Liberationists stressed "coming out" and claiming an identity as crucial to self-esteem and social change.'⁷

Rubin argues that the 1980s were a decade where sexual behaviour was scrutinised especially closely. Sexual discourse played a significant role in the Republican electoral success of 1980. In the run-up to the election, conservative opposition to sex education, homosexuality, pornography, abortion, and pre-marital sex became predominant topics in the political landscape of the time, especially with right-wing commenters and religious crusaders rallying public attention towards them. Organisations like Moral Majority (1979-1989) and Citizens for Decency (1956-) saw a massive increase in members, funding, and media clout in the 1980s.⁸ This was also the decade of the initial AIDS outbreak, thus it is no wonder that attention to sexual mores was quite high. According to Rubin, 'it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality.'⁹

This dangerous craziness is also reflected in the repeated presence of homophobic remarks in the 1980s and 1990s novels analysed in this thesis. In contrast, later Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction novels focus more on the investigative and romantic plots, for example the Gerri Hill series, the Gun series, and the Johnston and Riley series. There are minor preoccupations to homophobia within and without the workplace, and one of the co-protagonists is closeted because her family is upper class and trained her to look forward to being a so-called proper wife.¹⁰ This is a lighter treatment in comparison to the tension between protagonists such as Kate Delafield and Pam Nilsen and their family members. While it is true that the co-protagonist of the Johnston & Riley series is closeted, she does not agonise over this like Kate or Pam do. The murder case depicted in *Amateur City* is a prime example of the shift towards a more light-hearted focus on relationships and investigative plots. In recent Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction novels read for this thesis, the crime is often related

⁶ Judith A. Markowitz, *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 2004), p. 6.

⁷ Beverly Decker, 'Building Lesbian Sandcastles on the Shore of Relational Psychoanalysis', in *Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011), pp. 79-91, (p. 82).

⁸ Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 8.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gerri Hill, *Keepers of the Cave* (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, 2012), p. 78. Bella Books ebook.

to revenge, jealousy, financial hardship, and power dynamics within a bloodline. In 1980s and 1990s novels, crime is often related to fear of being seen as homosexual, gay bashing, sexual abuse against homosexuals, and anti-pornographic attitudes.

The 1980s were a highly polarised decade in terms of public opinion centred around the queer community. On one hand, this time prepared the ground for a better understanding between the queer community and the armed forces. A better understanding between these forces was necessary at the time, since the police had been an outstanding antagonist to the queer community and would largely continue to be so well into the 1990s. In the 1980s, major cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco created liaisons between the gay and lesbian community and officials of the district attorney, the City Council, and the state executive office, responsible for accounting and financial reporting of the cities' resources. Sex equity task forces were introduced to the Board of Education, and police departments staged recruiting campaigns to promote the inclusion of queer officers.¹¹ On the other hand, these changes saw a massive intensification of socio-political efforts to demonise homosexual behaviour. In Cold War United States a public preoccupation with homosexuality arose in scientific and popular media. The medical profession asserted authority over the psychological nature of sexual identity, religious crusaders rallied their supporters to stand up for the perceived sanctity of the hetero-normative lifestyle, and politicians warned that homosexuality threatened domestic stability and international security.¹² Consequently, police crackdowns on homosexuality activity in drinking establishments, parties, meetings, and on the streets, went largely unmonitored.

Understanding this context and the marginalisation of the Anglo-American lesbian community in mass media, the importance of the socio-political existence and distribution of the researched material emerges. Many authors, like Forrest, publicly denounced the societal homophobic bias of their time. This is a major reason why the sub-genre is pervaded by socially sensitive issues that are not present in mainstream detective fiction. The founding works of Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, published in the 1980s, were proudly vocal about such injustice and they became a powerful legacy for the genre. In mainstream crime fiction the police, the judiciary authorities, the private and amateur detectives are meant to restore

¹¹ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 296.

¹² John Howard, 'Place and Movement in Gay American History: A Case from the Post-World War II South', in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. by Brett Beemyn (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 214.

order and stability. Reading brazenly accusative declarations like those made by Kate towards the LAPD amounts to a political action of self-education and subversiveness.

In Glassgold and Iasenza's study, Karine J. Igartua and Pascale Des Rosiers claim that in times of fervent activism such as the late twentieth century, the significance attributed to coming out as an act beyond the personal, as a political act more precisely, applies excessive psychological pressure on closeted individuals, potentially alienating people from seeking professional or community support:

[t]he lesbian and gay community canonizes public coming out as a sign of maturity, strength, and mental health. As well, from a political point of view, the more the community is visible, the more successful it can be in demanding equal rights and recognition. For these reasons, patients may get pressure from those close to them as well as from the wider community to come out of the closet. They may therefore assume that their therapist will share this agenda.¹³

Going forward, it is important to keep in mind that this immense psychological pressure to come out of the closet is inextricable from the characterisation of the early lesbian sleuth, a woman already singled out in a hyper-masculine profession by her gender, let alone by her homosexuality. The way this thrust towards public recognition of one's own inner self contrasts with the highly hostile working environment of the lesbian sleuth is a necessary founding element to discuss to build the argument of this thesis.

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick describes in *Epistemology of the Closet*, many Western cultures are ridden with age-long systematic homophobia and progress towards legal protection of LGBT+ citizens has depended on the strength of queer activism. Progress cannot be mobilised from within the closet; it requires risky and affirming acts of explicit self-identification with queer community.¹⁴ The closet poses an obstacle not only to societal progress, but also to the psychological well-being of queer individuals; as Adrienne Rich warns, the closet represents a secret, double life which erodes the psyche of the individual and impedes emancipation.¹⁵ Sedgwick also indicates how inherent the closet is to the fabric of society and

¹³ Karine J. Igartua and Pascale Des Rosiers, 'Transference and Countertransference in Therapy with Lesbian Patients: Contrasting Views from Lesbian and Homosexual Therapists', in *Lesbians, Feminism, Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2014), pp. 123-141, (p. 131).

¹⁴ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 85.

¹⁵ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5.4 (1980), 631-660, (p. 657).

can shape queers' lives; an openly queer person is likely to deal with interlocutors who are unaware of their sexuality and it is difficult to guess if and how much the knowledge would be relevant to the interlocutor. For many queer people the closet is a fundamental feature of social life, only a fortunate few enjoy unrelenting support in their immediate surroundings during their formative years.¹⁶

To describe how impactful the closet can be on social life, Sedgwick offers the example of an American eighth grade science teacher, Acanfora, who in 1973 was transferred to a non-teaching position by his Board of Education on the basis of his homosexuality alone. More specifically, the Board had discovered that Mr. Acanfora had been involved with a homophile association in college, and had this been known earlier, Acanfora would have never made it to a teaching position in the first place.¹⁷ This is part of what was anticipated in the introduction of this thesis, where I explained the layers of my literary analysis: before presenting the literary analysis and interpretation, relevant notions of the theoretical framework and anecdotes of the historical context are carefully selected and laid out to frame space as an oppressive heteronormative context. This delineates a history of queer trauma which informs the Insider/Outsider spatiality of the lesbian sleuth.

The element of detection adds remarkable depth to the space of the closet. The historical and theoretical framework of the closet indicates that gendered and sexual conceptions of power and knowledge shape a detective's agency, determining how she navigates societal spaces. In crime writing power and knowledge determine who can detect, how they detect, and what they detect, and the vitality of early novels in exposing the artificiality and inequality of gendered and sexual hierarchy can also be attributed to its capacity to interrogate the structural inequalities, cultural anxieties, and psychic pressures of its settings on the characters. As this section introduced, the interpretive key of queer trauma as a fundamental part of the frame of 1980s and 1990s lesbian detective characterisation is largely informed by queer studies of the closet such as Sedgwick's, Rich's, and Lillian Faderman's, quoted throughout this chapter, but also by psychological studies of queer patients conducted by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza, Kathleen Klein, and Peter Hegarty.

¹⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 68.

¹⁷ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, p. 70.

2.1 The Split Self of Sarah Dreher's Stoner McTavish

Sarah Dreher (1937-2012) was an American novelist and playwright, best known for her serial amateur sleuth Stoner McTavish (1985-1998), in novels set between 1985 and 1990. This series counts seven completed novels titled *Stoner McTavish* (1985), *Something Shady* (1986), *Gray Magic* (1987), *A Captive in Time* (1990), *Otherworld* (1993), *Bad Company* (1995), and *Shaman's Moon* (1998). In the case of Stoner, the queer closet impacts her characterisation so profoundly that it constitutes a major source of trauma. Stoner is characterised with a high level of defensiveness about her sexuality, derived precisely from her queer trauma. The detailed description of this characterisation is outlined in this section.

The most harrowing dramatisation of queer trauma among the novels analysed for this thesis is the characterisation of Stoner, especially as portrayed in the last novel of the Stoner McTavish Mystery series. Stoner lives with her homophobic parents until the age of sixteen, when she runs away from home and travels to Boston, seeking refuge with her Aunt Hermione. Combining the romance and mystery narratives in an endearing soft butch amateur sleuth, Stoner humorously incorporates a common element of the lesbian identity: the motif of the misfit, but underneath the endearing blunders is a tragic premise, the dramatisation of identity confusion as a result of conversion therapy. To describe Stoner's identity confusion, her family situation needs to be addressed first, starting from her name. Stoner McTavish is a highly peculiar name; it is derived from the feminist activist Lucy B. Stone and was chosen by Stoner's feminist lesbian aunt, Hermione.¹⁸ In contrast, Stoner's parents, who are very homophobic, named her Antonia at birth.¹⁹ In the last novel of the series, *Shaman's Moon*, it is revealed that Stoner felt herself to be different to the daughter her parents wanted since her early childhood. She did not identify herself with the image her parents wanted to impose on her, and thus with the name her parents called her. When Stoner grows up into a girls-loving tomboy, when it is clear to her parents that she will not conventionally chase after boys, she is forcefully admitted to a mental hospital. This is a deeply traumatic experience for Stoner, which she revisits during a mystical out-of-body experience, guided by Aunt Hermione. In this astral plane, Stoner finds her Aunt Hermione sitting by a root-like threshold, holding a three year old girl. At first, Stoner thinks that this girl, who calls herself Toni, is part of her aunt's Self, but eventually a realisation strikes her:

¹⁸ Sarah Dreher, *Stoner McTavish* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1985] 2015), p. 10. Amazon ebook.

¹⁹ Sarah Dreher, *Shaman's Moon* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1998] 2015), p. 225. Amazon ebook.

that was when she remembered. Their cruel laughter, the terror of that trip to the mental hospital, the smells of urine and vomit and disinfectant. The beatings, her parents' refusal to call her by her real name, the name her Auntie Her had given her and which she loved. They called her Antonia. Taking the name Tony, privately and to herself, because that could stand for "Stoner," too, and if she accidentally told someone "Tony" was her name, no one would guess. Other people could call her Stoner if they were safe people, but she'd never, ever let her parents call her that again. [...] After a while, her parents stopped calling her Antonia. They didn't call her anything at all.²⁰

This is arguably the most powerful scene of the detrimental side-effects of the queer closet and of the medicalisation of queerness in early Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction. This scene can also lead towards the core argument of this thesis, that the lesbian detective navigates heteronormative spaces as an uncertain Insider/Outsider entity, unmoored in her role of subversive figure and enforcer, pivoted on what I call queer trauma.

In this scene queer trauma is dramatised by Toni, a piece of Stoner's soul which dissociated itself due to the traumatic experience of complete familial rejection and of being subjected to conversion therapy. This part of Stoner's consciousness was Othered by society, and especially by two fundamentally important institutions of modern society, the family and the medical establishment; its existence negated so strongly that it dissociated itself from the rest of Stoner's personality. It is extremely fitting that Stoner finds her way back to it during an investigation into an alleged attempted murder of her aunt, who, as mentioned, is an avowed lesbian feminist, which corroborates one of the premises of this thesis' argument, that the figure of the lesbian investigator in is the result of decades of feminist and queer activism and battles for dignity and rights.

The brilliance of *Shaman's Moon's* mystery plot can be explained through what W. H. Auden argues about the test of a good detective story, '[t]o surprise the reader when the identity of the murderer is revealed, yet at the same time to convince him that everything he has previously been told about the murderer is consistent with his being a murderer.'²¹ In *Shaman's Moon* the identity of the criminal is not an individual or a criminal organisation, but homophobic heteronormative institutions such as the traditional conformist family and clinical pathologisation of homosexuality, outlined in the following chapter. In the meantime, the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ W. H. Auden, 'The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict', *Harper's Magazine* (1948), 406-12, p. 409.

Stoner McTavish example is an excellent introduction to the main piece of literary analysis of this chapter, focused on the Kate Delafield Mystery series.

2.2 Coming Out as Unmaking of Self and Other

Perhaps the most emblematic representation of a closeted lesbian sleuth can be found within Katherine V. Forrest's Kate Delafield Mystery series. The Kate Delafield Mystery series consists of ten novels spanning three decades: *Amateur City* (1984), *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987), *The Beverly Malibu* (1989), *Murder by Tradition* (1991), *Liberty Square* (1996), *Apparition Alley* (1997), *Sleeping Bones* (1999), *Hancock Park* (2004), *High Desert* (2013), and *Kate* (2022). Unlike most of the other lesbian detective series of the 1980s, Forrest's does not begin with a coming out story; as the series begins, Kate's lesbianism is an established fact that readers simply have to accept,²² as Markowitz points out, '[s]eries with plots that have little or no connection to the gay/ lesbian community sometimes shift gay and lesbian issues to the main character's personal life and professional interactions. This is the situation for Katherine V. Forrest's police detective, Kate.'²³

This chapter argues that while the Kate Delafield series undoubtedly focuses mainly on mystery rather than LGBT-related plots, it nonetheless contains an underlying coming out story plot in respect to the closeted/out tension in the protagonist's characterisation. The fifth chapter, on the bar, will further examine the connection between mystery plot points and the LGBT+ community. This chapter specifically considers the relation between the lesbian detective's closeted or out characterisation and queer trauma foregrounding Kate's emblematic example. The first half of the Kate Delafield section discusses how constantly re-performed and reproduced traditionally masculine/feminine characteristics constitute the foundation of the confines of the closet. The closet in the researched material is closely related to misogyny and by rejecting the traditionally feminine passive role in her relationship, Kate demonstrates deep-seated introjection of the closet. This reveals how inextricable a closeted identity is to Kate's characterisation, and thus how emblematic she is for the Insider/Outsider argument of this thesis.

²² Maureen T. Reddy, 'Women Detectives', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 191-207, (p. 200).

²³ Markowitz, p. 7.

In the analysis of how the lesbian sleuth interacts with the space of the queer closet, insightful points about the detection formula of the detective novel can be inferred. Namely, there is a noteworthy relation between the revelation of the self in the coming-out narrative, and the revelation of the murderer in the detective novel. Both unmask true selves, both serve to make society better, both serve the purpose of truth. The way the queer reader perceives these revelations is visceral and completely different from the perception of non-queer reading response.

Take the progress of the classic detective story. Usually, the final section of the detective novel involves the apprehension of the criminal and the confession of his or her deeds.²⁴ But before readers even developed a taste for detective novels, they enjoyed either gothic stories or true confessions of criminals. As shown by research on eighteenth and nineteenth British criminal literature, such as Worthington's, the criminal's supposedly repentant story was framed by religious and moralistic undertones, but in order to be appealing to the general public such stories were coloured by descriptions of the thieves' *modus operandi*, as well as by (mostly invented) gory details of murders, turning the stories into entertaining romps.²⁵ These 'voyeuristic pleasures of reading about sensational crime and punishment'²⁶ would later turn into the pleasure in unmasking the criminal, who, at the turn of the twentieth century, was framed by such an elaborate mystery plot as to be presented, as Joel Black points out, 'not only as a murderous butcher but also as an artist.'²⁷ Moving forward in time, at the onset of the Golden Age of the detective novel, most of the reader's interest is channelled into the methodology of the crime and the build-up to the identification of the criminal. The main problem for the writer has long since consisted in concealing the identity of a (generally speaking) astute and methodical individual until the moment of denouement, increasing the reader's anticipation towards the moment of revelation increasingly formidable clue puzzles.²⁸

The relation between the potential coming out of the protagonists of the analysed novels and the revelation of the criminal's identity pivots on the reader's anticipation of these scenes. Murder is generally the most used criminal act in detective fiction. As Symons asserts, '[t]he murderer is an appropriate villain, and society's permanent scapegoat,'²⁹ representing evil,

²⁴ John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 90.

²⁵ Heather Worthington, 'From *The Newgate Calendar* to Sherlock Holmes', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 11-27, (p. 14).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Joel Black, 'Crime Fiction and the Literary Canon', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 76-89, (p. 79).

²⁸ Auden, p. 409.

²⁹ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1972), p. 19.

their unmasking and punishment ensures the return to a state of order. This skeleton hanging in the closet of society is dramatised in the form of homosexuality in the researched novels. Because of the fear of workplace homophobia, the vast majority of the protagonists depicted in the novels read for this thesis remain closeted for most if not all instalments. Because of this, in the researched sub-genre fiction, the reader's anticipation is split between uncovering the identity of the criminal and wondering whether, when, and how the protagonist will come out of the closet. Assuming that the average reader of the primary source material is queer-friendly or queer themselves, and assuming that the lesbian detective is entrenched in a homophobic society, like Kate is for example, there is an underlying tension in the narrative.

This tension shifts between the expectation of unmasking and marginalising crime, evil, deviancy, and the same anticipation directed towards breaking down the queer closet to uncover (and maybe even expunge) a different kind of deviancy. Society's enjoyment in unmasking identity, in this case both of the villain and of the detective's sexuality has been intertwined with homosexuality for a long time. The identities of turn of the century cross-dressing women, for instance, came to light in specific ways, often when the passing woman came into contact with a regulatory body. One common scenario of this unmasking was by the police, law courts, or prison authorities after the arrest of the passing woman (usually related to falsifying her identity on official documentation, passing as a man); another scenario of unmasking was as a consequence of wounds or maladies.³⁰

The tension between the closet and literature of crime is a strong emotional knot for the reader also because it is centred around the protagonist. Traditional crime literature criticism has repeatedly asserted the idea that the protagonist needs to be a transparent character, while the perfect criminal is the least likely person. The criminal is traditionally presented not as a suspect but as a victim, and remains a rather marginal figure in the investigation until they are unmasked at the end. Other characters talk about this person, but they appear only in a few scenes and in the main, in the detective novel formula the reader is not privy to the culprit's viewpoint.³¹ In detective fiction the reader is invited to immerse themselves in the subjectivity of the detective, to place their trust only in this lone figure who shoulders a knowable lawful order in contrast to the chaos of animalistic urges.

³⁰ Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull, *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex between women in Britain from 1780 to 1970* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 11.

³¹ John G. Cawelti, *Mystery, Violence, and Popular Culture* (Madison WS: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 113.

But what is the trust of the reader reduced to if the protagonist has something to hide? And how does the reader process the detective's alignment to good if they continuously hide their true self from friends, family, and colleagues? The queer identity of the protagonist aligns with the Self of the reader and heterosexual characters stand for the Other. This relatability is further enhanced by the persistent presence of the closet and the difficult position that lesbian detectives would find themselves in if they came out to a homophobic workplace. Instead of confronting the prejudice directly, instead of seeing the heroine come out of the closet in full glory and challenge the establishment, the position of the protagonist as an enforcer of the establishment complicates and emotionally draws the reader further and further into the text. The fact that detective fiction pivots on the unmasking of the criminal, someone with something horrible to hide, and that closeted protagonists, from a homophobic viewpoint, also have something horrible to hide deepens the issue of the closet as a safe place for closeted individuals but a setback for the queer community at large. Closeted detectives reinforce a positionality of homosexuality-as-irredeemably-Other and the literary value that they bring to the researched material can be considered to be among the highest overall.

The link between criminality and the queer closet is thorny yet insightful to discuss. The link between criminality and homosexual deviancy harks back to the pseudo-scientific classification of lesbianism constructed near the end of the nineteenth century. Faderman criticises this classification as one created by male sexologists, informed by conservative morals and by theories of evolution. Pseudo-scientists considered degenerates those who did not contribute to the advancement of the human race: criminals, the lower classes, and sexually aberrant individuals. Backward behaviour was thought to be based on genetic defects,³² which falls in line with the above-mentioned anti-homosexual screening process designed by American military officials from the beginning of the World War II. Regulations encouraged examiners to be wary of 'effeminacy in dress and manner' or a 'patulous [expanded] rectum' in prospective male soldiers,³³ in line with the theory that sexual identity is a natural quality of the body. The same notion was applied for criminality by pseudo-scientists in the second half of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, as mentioned above.³⁴

A personal interpretation of Kate's closeted identity also reveals a noteworthy, positive note. At the beginning and at the end of the series, it is reiterated how Kate is convinced that

³² Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 40.

³³ Quoted in Allan Bérubé, *Coming out under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, [1990] 2010), p. 29.

³⁴ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 40.

she is not effectively closeted at work. It can be argued that this aspect of her characterisation is beneficial for Kate's mental health. In the last novel Kate's therapist summarises Kate's career path, mentioning this issue, "[twenty-six years ago] you were not out as a lesbian on the job." "Not true. People knew. I did not make an announcement." "In these years since, did you ever make one?" "Everyone knew," Kate insisted and gestured expansively.³⁵ This exchange recalls Kate's internal monologue in the first novel, when she protests about how she does not need to share personal details at work because everyone *allegedly* knows about her secret. The analysis advanced for that passage is valid for this quote, too. There is no proof other than Kate's words and they should not be counted as infallible because of Kate's extreme fear about homophobic repercussions.

But how can such a conviction be positive for Kate's mental health? First, being convinced that she has always been out of the closet grants Kate a modicum of peace of mind and honesty, a space where she can be herself, without forcing herself to be either traditionally feminine nor traditionally masculine. Unfortunately, Kate's closet still renders her so paranoid that she ponders her every move very strictly. This attitude invariably tears down her relationships with her unit partners and with her lover beyond any hope of repair. Second, this conviction liberates Kate from the haunting prospect of being forcibly pushed out of the closet by the scoop-hungry media, and this is a danger several lesbian fiction authors elaborated upon, such as Claire McNab and Laurie R. King. Both Carol Ashton and Kate Martinelli are swept up by the media frenzy pivoting on chronicling the discrimination of openly gay police officers in the 1990s, denouncing how most of the discrimination these characters face occurs after the mass media reveal of their sexuality. Forrest dispenses with having to portray this issue by having Kate both stubbornly closeted and rhetorically out. Finally, this conviction has a positive outcome for Kate's characterisation because the absence of it would have led to tragedy. Kate's anxieties and constant reinforcing of her glass-walled closet are so consistent that if there were not the conviction of her being out already, her lifestyle would lead her to even heavier drinking habits, shorter unstable temper, and possibly violence. This is what King portrays in *The Art of Detection* (2006): The victim of the novel is an older man who writes Sherlock Holmes queer erotica and impersonates a Victorian gentleman from time to time. His psyche is stuck so deep in this persona that he cannot tolerate his own homosexuality, leading to a fatal fight with his lover.³⁶

³⁵ Katherine V. Forrest, *High Desert* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, 2013) Google ebook

³⁶ Laurie R. King, *The Art of Detection* (London: Bantam, 2006) Amazon ebook

Kate's agency of coming out is always-already taken away from her and from the text. What is left to analyse is Kate's attitude towards her own sexuality, but because this is similar to the behaviour of any other closeted character of this subgenre, and because there are not enough textual cues of an actual coming out by Kate, this thesis defines Kate as mostly closeted. She explicitly comes out to one character only, her brother, and their bond is immediately repudiated because of his homophobia. She also implicitly comes out to her unit partners, her superior officer, the Nightwood Bar costumers and the patients of the hospice in *High Desert* because she does not make an effort to pass for heterosexual when they infer otherwise. As important as these bonds are, the majority of Kate's character is constructed on the tension between her public role as a detective and her closeted identity. What is the point of origin of this identity? Textual elements point at Kate's parents, who both disapproved of her 'boyish ways.'³⁷ Like her brother and his wife, her parents must have always suspected her for a long time and tried to curb their queer children's sexuality by giving them the most punishing and hurtful messages of condemnation in a futile attempt to prevent the emergence of queerness. This treatment is effective only in instilling self-loathing and self-doubt in queer individuals, who are often not as self-aware or self-confident as Forrest's lesbian characters in recognising their desires as natural and worthy of expression.

Kate is a loveable character not only because she is brilliant and dedicated, but also because she is as flawed as any gay person might have been after being born to a homophobic household in the United States in the 1940s. Her background is not as tragic and extreme as Stoner McTavish or Micky Knight, she is more relatable. For the entirety of the series Kate wears the effects of familial, internalised and societal homophobia like a chip in her shoulder. The closet part of her characterisation is one of the gravest and most magnetic among the novels read for this thesis. It can be argued that a closeted identity is as crucial if not more for the characterisation of Stoner McTavish and Carol Ashton. The first is left so traumatised by the forced hospitalisation she had gone through as a child (in order to cure her homosexuality) that she needs a mystical, deep meditation to retrieve those memories. The second is forced to abandon the custody of her child to her ex-husband, forever regretting it. However, Dreher relegates the analysis of Stoner's psychological closet to the final novel of the series, whereas McNab's analysis of the societal closet ends when the protagonist is forcibly outed by a televised talk show. This section claims that out of the protagonists analysed for this thesis,

³⁷ Katherine V. Forrest, *Hancock Park* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [2004] 2013), p. 105. Google ebook.

Kate is the most representative of Sedgwick's pronouncement, '[t]he closet is the defining structure for gay oppression in this century.'³⁸

In extreme cases a childhood defined by the structure of the closet can bring about the permanent destruction of the queer child's biological family unit. Some teenagers run away like Kate's nephew, while others are disowned, like Kate's best friend.³⁹ Forrest wanted to depict this issue, but also tie loose ends by the end of the Kate Delafield Mystery series. In *High Desert*, where Kate regularly visits Maggie in a nursing home, she reconciles an elderly woman with her gay nephew, '[o]ur whole family should look into their hearts, what we did was wrong. It was cruel and awful. Jon's managed to find it in himself to forgive me. After all these years.'⁴⁰ This is a symbolic admission of guilt by homophobic families towards both their castaway queer children, represented by Jon, and those who could not live their own life truthfully for fear of repression, represented by Kate. Of course there is also the wider apology to the audience. Every reader is invited to fit this scene into their living situation and claim the confession and apology, if they wish. The family reunion of *High Desert* is a nod towards the ideal LGBT+ individuals and allies should work towards to change society for the better. Homophobia has been ingrained in the US for so long that while the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by mecca-like gay ghettos in the big cities, many did not trust civil rights changes, continued to be fearful of losing their jobs and be disowned by their families should their sexuality be known. But there have been increasingly fewer objective reasons to harbour such years in recent decades.⁴¹

2.3 Traditional Gender Norms and the Closet

A major point of synergy between lesbian identity, gender roles, the closet, and the Insider/Outsider spatiality of the lesbian detective is best introduced by providing an insight into what professional context the lesbian sleuth works in. There were queer soldiers in the United States prior to World War II, but the second worldwide conflict marks the first time when millions of individuals enlisted *en masse*, with significant numbers of homosexuals joining the ranks. The World War II enlistment is also the first time when the governmental

³⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and the Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 170.

³⁹ Forrest, *High Desert*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ Forrest, *High Desert*, p. 70.

⁴¹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 298.

anti-homosexual survey system was cast nation-wide.⁴² This historical context is closely related to Kate's characterisation. Textual clues lead to 1968 as the date when Kate was in her last year of college,⁴³ and at that time recruiters routinely toured universities to encourage youths to enlist and serve their country in the cause of the Vietnam War.

Kate's decision to enlist is based on societal homophobia and is framed within her relation to the closet. 'She understood only in retrospect that enlistment was her own protest—her first significant defiance of a peer group which had dictated too many aspects of her life.'⁴⁴ Why does Kate feel so disconnected from her peer group? First, because of traditional gender and sexual norms, where she does not fit in at all; second, due to treatment of the queer community at the time which made her feel constantly under surveillance, controlled, constrained, while opposingly, her masculine physicality and self-reliant personality made her long for emancipation. This contrast is what originates Kate's Insider/Outsider dilemma. She has always felt that thanks to her able body and sharp mind she could go everywhere and do anything, but the laws of her country and the attitude of her peers constrain her. Societal homophobia and queer trauma are thus exacerbated with expectations of traditional gender norms, rendering the closet a sort of safe space for Kate.

What exacerbated Kate's early feeling of estrangement is her entry into the American military, which was influenced by homophobic lawmakers and exponents of the medical establishment. Due to this history of near invisibility of lesbianism, there were no procedures in place for screening out lesbians until the end of World War II, but even before then the focus of the higher military ranks was to detect and ostracise any form of effeminacy, since any trace of what was regarded as feminine was deemed unfit to enter the ranks of the armed forces.⁴⁵ During the medical examination, 'female masculinity, unlike male effeminacy, was not considered to be a disqualifying defect, reflecting the military's need for women who could perform traditionally male work'.⁴⁶ The same screening affected the Vietnam War recruits and law enforcement recruitment a couple of decades later,⁴⁷ influencing Kate's decision to remain closeted while in the armed forces and later in law enforcement.

⁴² Bérubé, p. 21.

⁴³ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1987] 2011), p. 28. Bella Books ebook.

⁴⁴ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Bérubé, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Bérubé, p. 29.

⁴⁷ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 122-123.

To compound this dilemma, Kate also feels estranged from the lesbian community the reason why can be traced back to a scene depicting Kate's first visit to a lesbian bar. Instead of being imbued with a sense of community and inclusivity, Kate perceives lesbian bars (and lesbian life by correlation) as entrenched in segregationism. She is left with the impression that, for the few heterosexual customers present in the bar, lesbianism is acceptable only in so far as it is a spectacle that can be witnessed voyeuristically, from a distant anonymity, without risk of "tainting" oneself with it. This is why Kate deems the lesbian bar as 'a ghetto of the exiled, of the classified hopeless.'⁴⁸ Therefore, although Forrest does not explicitly state that Kate enters the military because of societal homophobia, this is what led 1960s queer people to organise leisure activities in segregation, to form a whole culture around gay bars. Homophobia is what emphasises Kate's feelings of exclusion and disorientation, which guide her decision to join the military, where her estrangement and disorientation are compounded by the homophobic screening process and training. These factors provide the basis for Kate Delafield's deeply closeted character and contribute to the long-standing uncertain relationship with the space of the queer closet.

The paragraphs above prepared for the argument that anti-homosexual military screening procedures exacerbated feelings of exclusion and disorientation (thus related to the Outsider side of this thesis' argument) which had already taken root in Kate Delafield. She is emblematic for this thesis because her situation can be utilised to interpret the ways in which other lesbian sleuths interact with the closet to form a cohesive pattern within the sub-genre. Even Kate's experience of the war, which reinforces her sense of the closet as a physical and psychological safe space, can be transposed to other traumatic experiences of other lesbian sleuths, with the result that the vast majority of the sub-genre's protagonists remain closeted throughout the course of their series despite the longing to belong to a community, either law enforcement or the queer community.

The novels imply that Kate detested feeling unmoored in her youth, and thus she joined the military in order to feel more active and purposeful. She must have felt elated at finally being able to take advantage of her muscular figure and uncover her full potential. However, the Officer Candidate School included 'lots of classes about how to be *feminine* and a soldier',⁴⁹ learning the 'fine points about being a *proper woman* Marine officer'.⁵⁰ Military school

⁴⁸ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 27.

⁴⁹ Katherine V. Forrest, *Liberty Square* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1996] 2013), p. 62, my emphasis. Bella Books ebook.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

emphasises the importance of traditional gender norms, which is something that leaves Kate deeply unsettled. From a societal perspective, due to her sexual orientation, Kate can never genuinely fall into the neat patterns of life established by traditional gender norms, which is why she remains closeted. Coupled with the fact that her line of work consists of unmasking criminals, the outliers/transgressors of society, the result is an inevitably unreconcilably, unstable spatiality.

In the Kate Delafield series homophobia is often represented as the perceived threat of male effeminacy and of women's masculinity encroaching on men's masculinity. This is narrativised, for instance, in the mystery plot of the first novel of the series, *Amateur City*. The novel follows the murder of a head of department at a big marketing company by a lower rank employee. Forrest narrativises many societal issues such as workplace harassment, rape, racism, favouritism, and nepotism by portraying the victim as a tyrannical bully, but unexpectedly the motive is homophobia and more precisely the threat of encroachment of the criminal's perceived effeminacy on the victim's perceived superior masculinity. The text does not clarify whether this perception is true, but Kate notices that the criminal of the novel, Guy Adams, does his best to pass as heterosexual. This is evidenced, for instance, in his over-zealous flirting with female peers, as described in an exchange between Kate and a homophobic secondary character,

“[I]ike I said, Fergus stomped everybody. But he didn't dislike everybody, if you get the difference. Except for the coon. And Guy Adams. Called him a fag all the time.” [Kate] asked with interest, remembering Guy Adams' too friendly handshake, his staring at Ellen O'Neil, “Is he?”

Grayson shrugged. “Sometimes he seems a little faggy. But I think he's okay. And I never heard that from anybody else, just Fergus.” He added with a challenging glare, “But he'd never make a pass at me, now would he?”⁵¹

This prejudiced character, for instance, introduces the motive for the murder: Guy Adams, who may or not be a closeted gay man trying to pass as heterosexual, is constantly denigrated and surveilled by his peers for any signs of deviancy, such as advances to male colleagues, however unlikely targets these colleagues may be. This contemptuous attitude lays the ground for the crime, for the representation of homophobia's and the closet's detrimental influences on society.

⁵¹ Katherine V. Forrest, *Amateur City* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1984] 2011), p. 57. Bella Books ebook.

In fact, in respect to my argument, this passage also serves the purpose of framing the protagonist's closeted identity. This prejudiced character is emblematic of the corporate urban environment of the Kate Delafield series and the systemic societal homophobia that the lesbian sleuth would encounter upon coming out publicly. This psychological environment is framed by queer trauma due to the compounding of heteronormative political, cultural and religious preconceptions, which causes the lesbian sleuth to remain a liminal figure.

To connect the quoted passage to the argument of the preceding paragraph on the closet and traditionally perceived masculinity and effeminacy, Guy Adams' confession to the murder reads like a man (possibly a homosexual man) killing another person to instinctively defend his masculinity against the accusation of effeminacy,

“I walked to the door. He stood up and said, ‘Where you going, boy? You stealing my letter opener, boy? You gutless little fag?’ Called me a fag.” [Guy Adam's] voice broke. He coughed, swallowed audibly. “I'd put his letter opener in my pocket... He started to laugh, and laugh and laugh... And he said, ‘I got you right by your so-called balls, you little fag.’”

His breathing was rapid, ragged. “He was standing there—a howling puffed up creature from hell—nothing God could ever mean to have on this earth...Ellen, you'd throw a stone at a snake or a rat...wouldn't you? I threw what I had in my hand. I threw it...”⁵²

Leaving aside whether Guy's voice breaks at the moniker 'fag' due to the stress of recounting the act of killing another person or due to the hurtful nature of the moniker towards himself, this passage reveals exemplary connections between homosexuality, queer trauma, the closet, and femininity/effeminacy. Since homophobic contempt is linked to negative actions and attitudes such as running away (referring to '[w]here you going, boy'), stealing ('stealing my letter opener, boy'), cowardice ('gutless'), and obviously effeminacy (referring to 'got you right by your so-called balls'). The last expression refers to the perceived superiority of the male towards the so-called less-than-male, or more precisely towards the female, which presence supposedly manifests itself in the homosexual.

In this quote, homosexuality is abhorred because it is believed to cause a shift from masculinity to femininity in the personality of the 'affected' individual. The protagonists of the analysed novels exist in a place of particular interest, the space between masculinity and

⁵² Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 185.

femininity. The usual description for lesbian detectives made by other queer characters is that they are ‘very good at [their] work, very tough and capable.’⁵³ To such remarks one of the homophobic characters of *Amateur City* responds: ‘a woman detective? In charge? A tough and capable woman? What’s happening to this world? Where have all the men gone?’⁵⁴ This dialogue demonstrates how the adjectives ‘tough’ and ‘capable’ are commonly attributed to male detectives, and shows how it is jarring for traditionally-minded individuals to shift this perception onto female detectives. There is a sense of paranoia in these quotes, where does it originate? One probable source may be the Kinsey survey. Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* was published in 1948 and it was reviewed by all major newspapers and magazines. Kinsey and his team interviewed 5,300 men to reveal that 46% of American males had experienced sexual reactions with both women and men, while 37% admitted to having had homosexual sexual experiences, and 10% disclosed that they identified as homosexuals. The high numbers of Kinsey’s survey impacted on and lingered in the medical profession and among lawmakers. Consequently, the opinion that homosexuals could be anywhere and anyone exacerbated societal paranoia, which turned into tolerance towards the unscrupulous policing of queer life in the second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁵

The paranoid confinement of people into an orderly set of gender behaviours and the threat represented by outliers calls upon the underlying tension between gender expectations and conformity, or more precisely, gender nonconformity. Reason, detachment, firm decision-making, and coolness of mind are qualities essential both to successful detective work and to larger systems of authority and power, as opposed to the stereotypical feminine traits of intuition and emotion. A notable example of this opposition in the canon of the crime fiction genre can be found in Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four* (1890), where Sherlock Holmes manifests his disappointment upon hearing the news of Watson’s engagement, ‘love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things. I shall never marry myself, lest I bias my judgment.’⁵⁶ Emotions, traditionally linked to feminine demeanours, are opposed to ‘cold reason,’ the essential tool of the detective, a traditionally masculine skill. What is crucial to this thesis is how central a position Holmes enjoys in the detective fiction canon, together with his model of the male detective who stresses

⁵³ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 60.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 5.

⁵⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four* (London: Penguin, [1890] 2001), p. 197, Google ebook.

the importance of reason and rationality, science and technology, to restore order.⁵⁷ Therefore, it is understandable how one of the major hurdles lesbian detectives face is the apparent incongruity between their sex and their profession. They are always under scrutiny because the femininity/masculinity boundary that they cross threatens hegemonic power, but their role in society is exactly to restore the lawful (hegemonic) systems of power.

Before feeling excluded for her homosexuality, Kate feels excluded for her physical prowess and commanding presence, masculine traits which sit awkwardly in a female identity. Moreover, thanks to such traits Kate obtains a position of authority in her department, where she occupies the second highest rank at the beginning of the series, and the highest rank in later novels. Kate is resented for intruding upon a position of authority in a hypermasculine, traditional profession that is designed to safeguard the authorities' power: '[s]he had been the woman reluctantly singled out in her division of the Los Angeles Police Department for one advancement after another as LAPD, in stubborn fighting retreat, gradually succumbed to increasing pressures for change.'⁵⁸ The LAPD promotes Kate reluctantly, stubbornly, succumbing to societal changes brought by movements such as the women's liberation movement and feminist campaigns for equal rights among genders. This hostile atmosphere plays a major role in Kate's characterisation and closeted identity. Kate's professional advancement is detested also because of homophobia. Female encroachment is resented because femininity is traditionally regarded as weak, passive, an object of sexual consumption at the hands of the (male) active counterpart. It is noteworthy that from a Christian viewpoint female identity is also a source of defilement for mankind. Michel Foucault traces the roots of this opposition to ancient Greece. The dichotomy of passivity and activity was then essential to sexual roles, more so than gender identity,

it was not hard to see how a man might prefer males without anyone even suspecting him of effeminacy, provided he was active in the sexual relation and active in the moral mastering of himself. On the other hand, a man who was not sufficiently in control of his pleasures—whatever his choice of object—was regarded as “feminine.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 84.

⁵⁸ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, [1984] 1990), p. 85.

What are nowadays considered signs of effeminacy: indolence, avoidance of rough activities, fondness of beautifying products, softness of manners, were not, in ancient times, associated with homosexuality. They were associated with mindless yielding to pleasure.⁶⁰ Reading Foucault and the ideas of ancient Western civilisations on sexuality, the modern regimen of homophobia appears arbitrary and absurd.

Men who depart from dominant definitions of masculinity because they are homosexual, effeminate, or judged weak, either physically or psychologically, are subjected to constant verbal harassment and discrimination; reminders that the status quo of the inequalities of the gender order should not be disturbed. Of course there are other elements which cause harassment, such as class difference, nationality, religion, race, but the focus of this thesis is on gender and sexuality.⁶¹ When traditional gender roles determine an opposition between masculinity as the active part and femininity as the passive one, the femininity of men and the masculinity of women are perceived as grave transgressions. All these elements contribute to Kate Delafield convincing herself that remaining closeted for life is her best option, a conviction she shares with other lesbian sleuths such as Carol Ashton, Micky Knight, Dez Reilly, and Jay Savage. This self-preservation instinct collides with the instinct towards community belonging, creating deep-seated insecurities and anxieties. Sarah Schulman considers the ramifications of remaining closeted within the family in her *Ties That Bind* (2009) and her findings can be transposed to the current argument. Schulman claims that no matter the range and the degree of homophobic treatment one receives, it creates a feeling of essential inadequacy within the queer individual, '[t]his punishment has dramatic consequences on both our social experiences, and our most trusting, loving sexual relationships.'⁶² This is highly relevant for early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction closeted protagonists, who indicate deep-seated trust issues and stunted emotional growth in the workplace, among their friends, and with their partners.

Familial and societal homophobia consistently reinforced and worsened young Kate's identity confusion and eventually led to alcoholism, transphobia, and to a life-long conviction that the closet is the only safe space for a homosexual woman in law enforcement. In terms of gender identity, Kate's characterisation is shaped by societal heterosexism, which comes into play in the way she relates to certain spaces, including and especially the queer closet. Several

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Raewyn Connell and Rebecca Pearse, *Gender: In World Perspective* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), p. 7.

⁶² Sarah Schulman, *Ties That Bind: Familial Homophobia and Its Consequences* (New York: The New Press, 2009), p. 12. Google ebook.

elements underline Kate's liminality in terms of gender identity, she perceives disappointment from her father for being female,⁶³ she feels excluded from her peers for growing up taller and stronger,⁶⁴ even among uniformed women she is 'resented for her unusual physical strengths and command [sic] presence',⁶⁵ and when she joins the LAPD she is singled out for being first a token female officer and later for being a successful female officer.⁶⁶ During her youth, the closet keeps Kate isolated in a state of hopelessness,⁶⁷ and in the LAPD she feels surrounded by resentful homophobia that might even put her life at risk.

But is Kate completely in favour of maintaining this status quo? In reality she is not, as evidenced by her most outspoken outburst against the closet in law enforcement found in *Amateur City*. In this scene Kate explains to the love interest of the novel, Ellen O'Neil, the pervasiveness of the toxic masculinity in the police force and describes how the presence of homosexuals among the ranks is viewed as a risk of emasculation for the whole community, which ties this section back to the first section of the Kate Delafield series in this chapter, which focused on homosexuality, the closet, and traditional gender roles in this series. As Kate states,

[t]hink about the fact that being a cop is one of the big macho trips of the western world, the cop is today's cowboy. They pay you to wear that uniform, all that leather, that gun on your hip. They pay you to control and intimidate. [...] there's still a whole masculine self-image built up around being a cop. [...] All the straight cops I know hate the idea of gay male cops with a rage that's simply indescribable. How dare any faggot invade their macho world and think he can be brave and strong and tough? The gay men out on the lines are all in the closet.⁶⁸

This extensive denouncement of homophobia is tellingly placed in the first instalment of the Kate Delafield series and sets the atmosphere of her working environment as highly hostile. This is also a justification for why Kate remains closeted for most of the series, and partly explains why Kate increasingly relies on alcohol to cope with work-related stress instead of confiding in her loved ones or in professional help.

⁶³ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 29.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 168.

The previous quote is part of one of the longest and most vehement denunciations of homophobia among all the novels read for this thesis. In this scene, the love interest of the novel naively asks Kate why she lives a mostly closeted life, and Kate bitterly claims that her homosexuality is most likely an open-secret at work, which often sickens her to think about:

[t]he brass loves me because I don't call in with problems about my kids, I don't take maternity leave. And the men love me because they're convinced any woman who wants to be a cop must be suffering from penis envy and my being a lesbian confirms that. And the men can tell their wives, 'Yeah, honey, I'm working with a woman but not to worry because she's a lez.' And so the men's wives love me too. So I'm the perfect woman cop. Everyone can respect my work but still be contemptuous. So women can do the job, they tell themselves, but only because they're pseudo-men.⁶⁹

As the previous quote was a mouthpiece for male homosexuals in the police force, this quote should not be read as a recounting of Kate's experience, but as a mouthpiece for closeted police officers. There are no references to high-rank officers being aware of Kate's sexual identity until Captain Walcott makes a reference to Kate's partner Aimee Grant in the last novel of the series, *High Desert* (2013). Kate does not have offspring, so she never requests days off to tend to children, she has never asked for maternity leave. There are textual cues which imply that Kate's male colleagues are lukewarm at best towards her, but none of them openly remarks about her sexual identity. Additionally, considering Kate's abrasive work methods, it can be argued that the frosty relationship between Kate and her colleagues is due to their misogyny and her brisk manners rather than an alleged homophobia. And finally, there are no mentions about colleagues' families or relatives, and what opinions they harbour towards Kate. Therefore, the quote above is better explained as a denunciation of homophobia and sexism in 1980s law enforcement rather than a comment about Kate's specific situation.

The homophobia in the LAPD explains why Kate remains in the closet when she becomes a police officer. Forrest goes a step further in her denunciation of societal homophobia in the LAPD in *Apparition Alley* (1997). In this novel, LAPD police officer Luke Taggart sets in motion Kate's investigation into the shooting of Luke's ex-partner Tony Ferrera. Kate soon figures out that Ferrera was gay and was in the process of coming out publicly and denouncing LAPD's systemic homophobia, just like officer Mitchell Grobeson did in 1985.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Forrest actually refers to the Grobeson case explicitly. Grobeson provided a list of at least a dozen names and a hundred John Does who participated in unjustified discrimination against him, creating a hostile, highly dangerous environment for him. To raise the stakes, Forrest also provides Ferrera with a list: one containing the names of every LGBT+ officer at LAPD. By giving this list to tabloids and newspapers, Ferrera wishes to shed light on the significant number of queer officers in Los Angeles, offering inspiration for a potential nation-wide movement. At first, Kate believes that Ferrera was targeted by homophobic cops, but she eventually finds out that Ferrera's own brothers silenced him forever to protect the family's reputation.⁷⁰ This is a prime example of the argument that early novels are deeply concerned with societal and familial homophobia in that these forms of hate are routinely at the centre of the mystery plot and closely inform the characterisation of the protagonist.

The fear of the fictional LAPD officers who are about to be thrust out of the closet in *Apparition Alley* is fully embodied by Kate. She knows that she and most of her colleagues are not ready for this ground-breaking step. Mitchell Grobeson's attendance at the 1991 Gay Pride festival prompted a couple of lesbian officers to come out of the closet in the following years, but Grobeson remained the sole openly gay officer of the 1980s and 1990s:

[i]f loathing of gays was more selective in its context and expression, it was no less existent or vituperative. Gay officers were deeply hidden because the police hierarchy had made no genuine effort to eradicate from the ranks the conviction that fags did not and could not belong with the band of real men protecting the citizens of Los Angeles.⁷¹

Kate's musings are filled with a sense of entrapment tinged with familiarity. She always discusses being closeted as a way of life that she accepts in order to be able to do her job, which is the most important thing in her life. Life in such psychological self-managed isolation is, for Kate, a comfortable enough trade-off.⁷² While not all readers may agree with Kate's assessment of the value of her profession, it is undeniable that work is a crucial part of a person's life, it is what sustains a person's life-style, providing stability and possibilities for future developments.

⁷⁰ Katherine V. Forrest, *Apparition Alley* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1997] 2010) Amazon ebook

⁷¹ Forrest, *Apparition Alley*, p. 54.

⁷² Forrest, *Apparition Alley*, p. 69.

2.3.1 Butch/Femme Roles within the Closet

Further into the topic of constricting gender roles, one aspect of Kate's characterisation that must be taken into account to discuss the closet, traditional gender roles, and liminality is the influence of butch/femme sexual roles on the character. Kate's inception, as Forrest herself asserted, is imbued with a fantasy of empowerment that is typical of early lesbian crime novels, representing 'an opportunity to portray a lesbian in a high visibility, high pressure, and most unusual profession.'⁷³ This description implies a characterisation that is designed to convey level-headedness, professionalism, and self-reliance, a person who 'approaches her grim business in pretty grim fashion.'⁷⁴ This traditionally regarded masculine characterisation connects the argument of queer trauma, liminality, and the Insider/Outsider status of the lesbian detective with the close ties this character has with butch/femme sexual roles. In fact, my interpretation that early lesbian detectives are affected by queer trauma is also informed by twentieth century butch/femme trends, as research on this front indicates that masculine performativity impacts lesbian individuals differently, more profoundly, than heterosexual people. Influences of butch development in the psychosexual field of childhood to adulthood is a complicated pathway which does not usually diminish or refocus in puberty, usually because of a lack of role models to assist in integrating gender and identity with sexual orientation into a coherent, self-aware organisation of Self.⁷⁵

This unstable foundation is visible, for instance, in *The Beverly Malibu* where Kate confides in a lesbian friend of hers, bemoaning the unusual butch-like initiative-taking behaviour of her femme-looking partner Aimee. Confronted with a femme woman who likes to take the initiative in bed, Kate questions her identity as butch, revealing that there are aspects of her identity that are quite fragile.⁷⁶ Contrarily, Stoner McTavish firstly considers herself butch,⁷⁷ but when she discovers that her partner Gwen likes to take the initiative in sexual matters, Stoner sort of retreats into a soft butch attitude and is steady enough in her identity to joke about it several times, as in the line from *Something Shady* (1986), 'Stoner grinned. "You can be butch the first and third weeks of every month."⁷⁸

⁷³ Forrest interviewed by Markowitz, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Forrest interviewed by Markowitz, p. 20.

⁷⁵ Lee Zevy, 'Lesbian Tomboys and "Evolutionary Butch"', in *Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011) pp. 143-158, (p. 144).

⁷⁶ Katherine V. Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1989] 2013), p. 138. Google ebook.

⁷⁷ Dreher, *Stoner McTavish*, p. 68.

⁷⁸ Sarah Dreher, *Something Shady* (Hereford AZ: New Victoria Publishers, [1986] 2015), p. 248. Amazon ebook.

The magnitude of the threat perceived by the heteronormative status quo regarding this female presence is not limited to the spaces in which the lesbian detective solves crime; it is also part of her world, as demonstrated in an exchange between Kate and her unit partner, Detective Ed Taylor in *Amateur City* regarding the possible motive of the murder,

“[b]ut Fergus Parker didn’t do the things to Adams he did to people who worked directly for him. I know he referred to Adams as a fag, but I can’t see that being enough to kill anybody.”

“It would be for me,” Taylor growled. “I got nothing against it,” he said with a quick glance at Kate, “to each his own. But anybody ever suggested I had a limp wrist, I’d paint cement red with the bastard’s face.”

Kate thought of Gretchen Phillips, her struggle for her success. How can women ever be equal, she thought, when the accusation of femininity is always the ultimate insult to men?⁷⁹

This exchange reinforces the connection between homosexuality, femininity/effeminacy (or the afore-mentioned less-than-male element evidenced in the ‘limp wrist’ expression), and the closet. The heterosexist establishment, represented by Taylor, vehemently rejects equality in gender and sexual roles, the male, masculinity, and heterosexuality can only be at the top, while anything else can only be less-than, and cannot be tolerated. As part of an institution, law enforcement, which not only protects and enforces this status quo but also espouses an enhanced version of this worldview, the lesbian detective has no place where she fully belongs. Notably, this quote contains a very rare occurrence in the Kate Delafield series, which involves Taylor guessing something correctly during the investigation. Why does he correctly guess the motive but the protagonist does not? Because Kate, in all her liminality as an insider to the mind of the establishment but as an outsider to its heart, cannot empathise with such a degree of rejection for what is partly her own community, which hinders her investigation because in this case she needs to be completely, in body and in mind, an insider to the establishment, like Taylor is.

⁷⁹ Forrest, *Amateur City*, pp. 140-141.

2.4 Killing Effeminacy: Connections between *Amateur City* and *Murder by Tradition*

Perhaps the most dangerous influence of queer trauma on the closet is abnegation. The confession scene from *Amateur City* quoted above contains a foreshadowing of the fourth novel of the series, *Murder by Tradition*. In the first novel Kate Delafield fails to unmask the criminal (both as a criminal and as a homosexual, I argue) because she fails to unmask herself as a liminal figure, while in the fourth novel she successfully unmasks the criminal (both as criminal and as homosexual) because she risks being forcefully unmasked in her all queer liminality. The plot in *Murder by Tradition* revolves around the murder of a successful gay restaurateur and the conflict between Kate's pursuit of the murderer vis-à-vis her department's passivity towards the case (since it involves an openly gay victim) and Kate's own fear of being outed as a lesbian during the trial for this investigation.

The novel closely follows Kate's testimony in the courtroom, pitting hard facts against the criminal's and his attorney's true and tried "homosexual panic" defence tactic. This type of defence is called the gay/homosexual panic excuse and the core of the criticism within *Murder by Tradition* is aimed at this type of defence that has been historically used in trials involving gay-bashers. As Sedgwick describes, homosexual panic used to be the private form in which twentieth century queer men experienced their vulnerability to societal homophobia: they felt the pressure of the figure of the proper man and internalised their heterosexual desire as aberrant homosexual desire.⁸⁰ But in time homosexual panic has become an excuse used by heterosexual homophobic individuals to justify any acts of violence in response to alleged homosexual advances, with many gay bashers abusing the fact that juries accepted this excuse and viewed the existence of homosexuality as hostile encroachment into the so-called normal life of heterosexuals.

How is this homosexual panic excuse connected to the closet? To see this connection one need only look at the so-called reasoning of the establishment for protecting this tactic for so long. Laws that micro-manage sexual behaviours have always been highly relevant for the queer community. For Anglo-American, sex laws and their enforcement vary dramatically with the local political situation. Gayle Rubin points out that the punishment for violating measures regarding sex statutes in particular is disproportionate to any harm that may have befallen the participants, since matters of sexual behaviours are closely monitored by society and

⁸⁰ Sedgwick, *Between Men*, p. 89.

homosexual acts have been treated especially unfairly in the West until the twenty-first century.⁸¹ Across the 1990s reported hate crimes based on sexual orientation of the victim were still rampant, counting in the thousands of victims, with several deceased. What most enraged the LGBT+ community was the presence of articles on the alleged propensity of homosexual men to be assault or murder victims as evidence that gays and lesbians bring such violence upon themselves. While considerable progress had been made from prior decades, Laura S. Brown's research shows that the mid-1990s witnessed a regressive period in which a new victim-blaming perspective gained traction. Maintaining the myth of the willing victim means both pathologising the victim for their supposed willingness and failing to question the social structure that perpetuates this victimisation.⁸²

The murder case of *Murder by Tradition* re-enacts the mobilisation of masculine bias already portrayed in *Amateur City*. In *Amateur City* Detective Taylor connected with the criminal's (and the heterosexist establishment's) logic when he quickly arrived at the correct conclusion: the motive is grounded in homophobia (possibly internalised homophobia) and more precisely the rejection of effeminacy and reinforcement of the closet. In *Murder by Tradition* this dynamic returns as Taylor bonds with Kyle, the criminal, over the homosexual panic defence strategy. This bond is portrayed in many scenes throughout the novel, so below are quoted the most emblematic ones,

“[what happened is t]he same tired shit. Teddie picks this guy up, they come back here, snort coke, Teddie wants to get down to screwing and the guy turns Teddie into his personal dart board.”

“The same tired shit,” [Kate] echoed contemptuously.

“Come on, Kate. They live like that, they ask for it.”⁸³

Jensen exhaled smoke through his nose and moustache with an audible snort. “He was a fag, man. He wanted to suck my cock.”

“Okay. What did he say, what did he do? You want to help yourself, you gotta tell us the detail how you got into self-defense with him.”

“Makes me sick, man.”

⁸¹ Rubin, pp. 3-44

⁸² Laura S. Brown, ‘Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), p. 106.

⁸³ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder by Tradition* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1991] 2013), p. 21, Google ebook.

“Sure, I know.” Unbuttoning his jacket, Taylor leaned back on two legs of his chair and hooked his thumbs under the straps of his shoulder holster. “But you gotta help yourself here.”⁸⁴

“What’s to tell? They aren’t men. They’re faggots.” [Taylor] raised a hand, waved it limply. “Mincy little faggoty fake-men.”

“[...] not all of them are effeminate. Look at Rock Hudson,” [Kate] argued, [...]. “Some of them are really masculine.”

“Rock Hudson was a pervert, not a faggot. All those masculine-type guys are perverts. They use the faggoty men like some guys use sheep or a piece of liver. [...] Some people are freakish, but they’re still men or women. Faggots, they want to be fucked, so they turn themselves into women. If you’re a real man, then you aren’t a woman.”⁸⁵

Apart from depicting a commonly held stereotype about the rigidity of sexual roles (femininity/passive vs masculinity/active), the scenes also depict a misguided, homophobic belief that gay men who undertake chores considered feminine, such as cooking, or who have so-called feminine interests or mannerisms, must want to be women. In this skewed view of society, gender biases support heterosexual men as the social unit that should be preserved, with heterosexual women coming second.

The hidden irony of the plot of *Murder by Tradition* is that the criminal, Kyle Jensen, is a closeted homosexual, but while Guy Adams’ kills the symbolical source of societal homophobia by killing his boss, Kyle both kills the symbolical inner queer Self and the embodiment of the queer community. This contrast is, ironically, portrayed through the same simile. In one of the previously quoted scenes from *Amateur City*, an expression was included which consisted of the lines, “[Guy Adam’s] breathing was rapid, ragged. “He was standing there—a howling puffed up creature from hell—nothing God could ever mean to have on this earth...Ellen, you’d throw a stone at a snake or a rat...wouldn’t you? I threw what I had in my hand. I threw it...”⁸⁶ This comparison between *Amateur City*’s victim mirrors the one with *Murder by Tradition*’s victim made during the trial, stated by Kyle’s lawyer during his closing speech, “[t]he violence of the incident at Tradition comes out of two elements: Mr. Jensen’s drug intoxication and his revulsion. [...] If you were confronted by a coiled snake, aside from

⁸⁴ Forrest, *Murder by Tradition*, p. 54.

⁸⁵ Forrest, *Murder by Tradition*, pp. 60-61.

⁸⁶ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 185.

its threat to you, wouldn't you lash out at that snake from sheer, natural revulsion?' These comparisons reinforce the argument of this thesis by showing how the two parties, the homophobic establishment and the LGBT+ community are irreconcilable in the primary source material. Consequently, the figure at the centre of this irreconcilable relationship, the lesbian detective is trapped within this dilemma. Non-heterosexual desire is not represented as a different type of desire among a spectrum of sexual drives or choices, but as a sub-human instinct that belongs to the realm of excessive, uncontrollable, bestial sexual appetite, a perversion of the only acceptable mode of human intimacy, that is heterosexuality. This recalls the less-than-male argument made previously in this chapter regarding effeminacy and is part of the mobilisation of masculine bias which aims at elevating and protecting hyper-masculine heterosexual behaviours.

These similes are tied to the relationship between the closet and the protagonist. As the series progresses Kate is forced to face her liminality again and again, which deepens her understanding of the closet, as evidenced by the fact that while Kate does not arrive at the correct conclusion in *Amateur City* due to her detached outsider position from the homophobic logic of the establishment, she instead immediately recognises Kyle's repressed homosexuality and self-loathing in *Murder by Tradition* due to a doubling process between her, the victim, and the criminal. Essentially, the way Kyle and Kate deal with their homosexuality is based on covert ways in which they try to pass as heterosexual and this link stands in opposition to the novel's victim's homosexuality, who lives as an openly out, self-assured gay man. Both Kate and Kyle live in a liminal space between the safe isolation of the closet and the potential welcome of the LGBT+ community, but while Kate's investigations force her path to intertwine time and again with her community, Kyle remains isolated. This divergence is in fact ironic when one thinks about the restraint and oppression of a lesbian detective vis-à-vis a private citizen who has complete control over their free time and is not subject to public scrutiny as members of law enforcement are. Yet the person who has potentially more to lose from being outed is the person who constantly fights for the justice of LGBT+ victims.

This erosion of the Self in favour of the community is a consequence of the severity of queer trauma and the disorder of society, where absurdly the only ones who genuinely care to seek justice for LGBT+ victims are queer detectives, who have the highest personal and professional stakes in such cases. This is a state that the lesbian detective combats, as she negotiates between conceptions of civilised life and fears of further repression from the heteronormative establishment against her and her community. Another particularity of the lesbian detective's Insider/Outsider status emerges during the murder plot of *Murder by*

Tradition. Kate's investigative methodology in this novel involves understanding/reliving the crime from the perspective of both the victim and the criminal. Thus, two instances of doubling occur in this novel: Kate's embodiment of the victim's will to justice, as well as her understanding of the criminal's rejection of a part of himself that has been deemed sub-human by society. The classic heterosexual detective is arguably less implicated and less threatened by the underlying destabilisation of this double perspective than a closeted lesbian police officer like Kate, who occupies a perpetual liminal position which is exacerbated every time she navigates the space of the closet.

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction contains a broad range of disempowered characters, surpassing the heterosexual detective's relatively limited sociocultural reach by constantly blurring the boundaries of marginalisation and centralisation, male and female, masculine and feminine, naturalness and unnaturalness, cold reason and passions that are central to mainstream crime fiction. This blurring of boundaries is an on-going process in the Kate Delafield Mystery series and in many novels analysed in this thesis and lays at the foundation of the liminality of the detective in the context of the metaphorical space of the queer closet. The protagonists, their lovers, and their queer or queer-friendly friends, are cast against a world where being masculine women, feminine men, homosexuals, bread-winner women and child-rearing men, is simply unacceptable, they are simply outsiders in this aspect of their characterisation. Similarly, a world where female soldiers, female police officers and female detectives operate is also unacceptable, as shown in the following sections. This series is too emblematic and sophisticated to be summarily dismissed and the closet is a core space of the argument of this thesis, warranting a proper in-depth analysis of its literary portrayal.

2.5 The Liminality of the Closeted Lesbian Detective

Kate's queer trauma is arguably the most sophisticated out of all the novels read for this thesis it is what sets her apart from all other lesbian sleuths. The closet's paradoxical ability to grant the lesbian sleuth both safety (in that she does not run the risk of being harassed and her life being potentially put in danger by homophobic colleagues) and cause harm (in that the psycho-emotional isolation can cause Self-erasure) is attractive for crime fiction, the reason why has been anticipated in chapter one. Due to the nature of the mystery plot, the spatiality of the detective is bound to attract the reader's attention, particularly the ways in which the detective interacts with or avoids certain spaces, which is usually indicative of their importance in the

plot and/or of the detective's reasoning process. Chapter one mentioned how the spatiality of certain major detectives can be interpreted in various ways, such as Holmes' superior deductive skills can be considered as a vertical spatiality, while Marlowe's prowling of the 'mean streets' can be considered horizontal. The way Kate interacts with the closet though is emblematic of the stagnant and disoriented spatiality of the early lesbian sleuth, with perhaps the exception of the Cassandra Reilly series, where the protagonist's time of being closeted is barely present.

To summarise the Kate Delafield's case study for the space of the closet, why is Kate's psycho-emotional characterisation emblematic of the closeted lesbian sleuth and of her liminality? A traditional psychoanalytic approach explains persistent trauma by digging into the person's past, especially traumatic conflicts in childhood. Cathy Caruth's definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (henceforth PTSD) is dated and can be considered biased towards its element of unspeakability,⁸⁷ but for the purpose of this thesis' argument it is still relevant and a valid starting point. As Caruth writes,

[w]hile the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. [...] The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event. And thus the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted, simply, as a distortion of reality, nor as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished.⁸⁸

Kate's trauma stems from three major factors: the loss of her partner, her experience in the army and her experience of the closet. This chapter considers more closely the second and third factors. The pressure of being constricted into a hetero-sexist persona and the self-conviction

⁸⁷ Marinella Rodi-Risberg, 'Sophie Hannah's *Hurting Distance* as Crime Trauma Fiction', in *Transnational Crime Fiction: Mobility, Borders and Detection*, ed. by Maarit Piiipponen, Helen Mäntymäki and Marinella Rodi-Risberg (Cham, CH: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 279-294.

⁸⁸ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John's Hopkins University Press, 1995), pp. 3-12, (pp. 4-5).

that this constriction might be in her best interest to protect her career and privacy, weigh on Kate's mind throughout the series. Kate's fragmented Self is emblematic of the identity confusion described by Hegarty⁸⁹ and acts as a symbol of the scarring of the queer closet, and her inability of walking either path, either fully out or fully closeted, is, as I argue, a sign of her liminality as Insider/Outsider.

Kate's liminality in the space of the closet is best represented by her repeated vacillations between considering the closet a prison that keeps her from enjoying communal queer life, as evident in her relief in attending the Gay Pride parade at the end of *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*,⁹⁰ and being overwhelmed by the idea of coming out. I would argue that for Kate, the closet ultimately represents a psychological safe place. She places so much importance on her profession and its perceived stability (not to mention Kate also regards the police as family),⁹¹ that remaining in the closet, with its related professional safety, becomes her preferred choice. This preference is depicted, for instance, in *The Beverly Malibu* where Kate's best friend argues about the benefits of coming out for LAPD officers. Kate's refusal is adamant, as she states, '[w]e have over seven thousand police officers and nobody's out, not a soul. You can't begin to fathom the homophobia. My life would be hell, I wouldn't be able to function.'⁹² Because of this hell, Kate's life is tied to a fundamental illusion. On the one hand she tries to behave as 'normally' as possible, trying to blend in with heterosexual individuals by means of speech, mannerism, and clothing. On the other hand, Kate half-knows, half-fears that most if not all of her colleagues and acquaintances know about her lesbianism and are simply waiting for the right moment to strike, to use her sexuality against her.

What prospects does have Kate if she came out of the closet as a lesbian police officer? Her colleagues can falsely accuse her of seducing female suspects and witnesses, they can accuse her of being morally degenerate and thus more prone to undue brutality or unwarranted lethal force. They can also use a popular excuse during the McCarthy era which claims that queer sexuality is socially shameful and thus queer officers are susceptible to blackmail. All these prospects have real-world historical basis, so Kate is objectively justified in fearing that her professional life would turn into hell. Probably worst of all, the presence of an out-and-proud homosexual would encourage members of the LGBT+ community to come out of the

⁸⁹ Peter Hegarty, *A Recent History of Lesbian and Gay Psychology: From Homophobia to LGBT* (London: Routledge, 2018)

⁹⁰ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, pp. 171-172.

⁹¹ Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu*, p. 176.

⁹² Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu*, p. 44.

closet, which would mean unforgivable encroachment by what is considered a weaker minority who is not fit for law enforcement work.⁹³

Although Kate finds a loving community in the Nightwood Bar group of the second novel, she is never out in the sense Cassandra Reilly, Micky Knight, Lindsay Gordon, Amanda Valentine, Lauren Laurano, C. Johnston, or Tori Hunter are openly out. Granted, most of these protagonists do not actively share information about their orientation, but they do not need to. They do not conform to traditional images of feminine dress, manners, speech, and attitude, they express their sexual orientation without needing to enunciate it, whereas in Kate's situation, the scenes where she interacts with her lesbian friends are few and in enclosed settings (removed from the public gaze of other characters).

In scenes where Kate interacts with heterosexual friends, she always tries to block any inquiries about her personal life, especially her love life. A representative scene of this attitude is Kate's relationship with her third and last unit partner in the series. In the seventh novel, *Sleeping Bones* (1999), Kate is partnered with Detective Joseph (Joe) Cameron. First and foremost, even before preoccupying herself with Cameron's on-field performance, Kate is concerned with what gossip Cameron may have heard about her private life. Appraising Cameron's attitude towards her, Kate thinks back about her workplace policy. '[Kate] had always made it her practice to volunteer nothing about herself, neither asserting nor denying her sexual orientation, deflecting personal questions with light remarks and generalities.'⁹⁴ This attitude is characteristic of Kate's personality throughout the series. It is also the pivoting trait of the complicated tension between Kate's public and private life. Kate's expertise at deflecting personal inquiries is driven by her fear of losing her job if her sexual identity is exposed.

As mentioned in the sections above, Kate's position was achieved through many heterosexist trials, and is now the only stable element of her life. Kate's closeted status is also a major factor in the fracture that eventually destroys Kate's relationship with Aimee Grant, the main love interest of the series. In *Sleeping Bones* Aimee is still encouraging Kate to be more open about her work-related stress at home and about her personal life at work. This soft approach is not effective on Kate, who is constantly haunted by the prospect of being discriminated against and even fired, 'Kate had given up trying to convince [Aimee] that any announcement of sexual orientation would focus a spotlight on a senior officer like herself, and

⁹³ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 168.

⁹⁴ Katherine V. Forrest, *Sleeping Bones* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1999] 2013), p. 38. Google ebook.

the recent, highly publicized coming out of a commander had done nothing to diminish that belief.’⁹⁵ This is why the anxiety related to societal homophobia and the closet cannot be stressed enough in the Kate Delafield Mystery series: it is the core characteristic of Kate’s characterisation. This makes a compelling case for the Insider part of the argument of this thesis: it can be in fact argued that she introjected the might of the state of order, of the inevitability of pre-existing social dynamics, that she self-sabotages her own radical drive, which sheds light on the insidious nature of heteronormativity and reinforces my argument of the inescapable Insider/Outsider spatiality of the lesbian detective.

This sense of being surrounded by enemies and oppression is obviously poisonous for the mind and body of the individual. In Kate’s case, her body can be described as the uncontainable of the abject. It is too revealing, meaning she appears queer to many characters even when she makes an effort to blend in. Because Kate lives in a society where such division is clearly marked and fiercely protected, she tries to blend in in both worlds but her gender and sexuality performance is awkward however hard she tries. She has no husband, boyfriend, or even enough close male friends to play at being heterosexual, nor does she interact with the queer community enough to be knowledgeable about it or appear like a fully integrated member. This is most obvious in *Hancock Park* where Kate needs to find her wayward nephew but ends up being psychologically lost in the queer parts of 2010s Los Angeles.⁹⁶

Kate’s emotional turmoil is created by intertwined societal, familial, internalised homophobia. Her prickly personality is a response to the constant threat emanated from an exorbitant outside and inside, from a hatred that is too widespread and long-standing to withstand, the intensity of which is absorbed by the psyche beyond the scope of the discernible. The lack of therapy also contributes to its continued festering. The issue lies in the fact that Kate, like Carol Ashton and Stoner McTavish, belongs to the pre-Stonewall generation, when individuals stepped out of the closet at high personal risk.⁹⁷ Carol’s relationship with the queer closet is similar to Kate’s in many aspects. Carol’s relationship with the closet is similar to Kate’s under several aspects. Carol is fairly well-adjusted in her own sexuality, but once she enters a relationship with Sibyl, she becomes increasingly attached to the stability of her workplace and is increasingly fearful of blurring the lines between the spaces of the workplace and of the home, exacerbating her place in the closet. This is reminiscent to the way Kate is

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Forrest, *Hancock Park*.

⁹⁷ Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation*, (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2019), p. 54. Google ebook.

even fearful of receiving phone calls by her partner Aimee while she is working, and the text implies that this is due to the possibility of Kate's colleagues hearing a female voice from the phone and asking her about it or even worse draw their own conclusion about her home life.⁹⁸ Another reason why Carol is cautious with keeping her public and private lives separate is because homophobia ruined her first marriage and led her to give up the custody battle for her son.⁹⁹ Carol herself relays her story with perfunctory details and unemotional economy,

[s]he had met Justin Hart while studying at Sydney University, and, attracted by his formidable mind and legal talent, had married him. In due course she produced a son, David. Because they both had demanding and time-consuming careers, they lived, in the main, separate lives. Perhaps they would have continued reasonably happily, had Carol not fallen in love with a woman.¹⁰⁰

Carol is completely taken by this woman and is ready to live with her permanently. Carol's husband cannot bear the public shame of having been deceived by a homosexual, and demands a divorce that disfavours Carol (she only retains weekend visitation rights). The ex-husband's 'arguments' comprise of popular homophobic excuses meant to keep middle- and upper-class queer members in the closet, 'wasn't it best for a child to have a normal background? When he was older would David be happy to find he had a deviate for a mother? Was Carol intending to live with Christine? How would David explain the situation to his friends?'¹⁰¹ In the end, Carol is unable to keep her lover. Repudiated by her husband as an 'unfit mother'¹⁰² corrupted by 'unnatural behavior'¹⁰³ and considered a dalliance, a phase of uncontrolled passions, by her lover, Carol acquiesces to her ex-husband's demands. This fall-out causes her to harbour life-long resentment towards coming out publicly.

Carol is not so much bogged down by internalised homophobia, but her resentment towards society's judgement is so deep-seated that she is as firmly stuck in the closet as Kate is. Investigating the case of the murder of Christine's husband, one of her old circle of friends from her marriage days tries to warn Carol off of the case, threatening to make public, '[w]hat's called in polite society unnatural practices.'¹⁰⁴ In the same novel, Carol's unit partner suggests

⁹⁸ Forrest, *Sleeping Bones*, pp. 38-39.

⁹⁹ Claire McNab, *Lessons in Murder* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, [1988] 2011), p. 112. Google ebook.

¹⁰⁰ McNab, *Lessons in Murder*, p. 136.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² McNab, *Lessons in Murder*, p. 112.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Claire McNab, *Fatal Reunion* (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, [1989] 2011), p. 75. Google ebook.

that she should take a sudden trip overseas because of the risk that her relationship with Christine will be made public during the highly media-publicised trial.¹⁰⁵ Such situations frustrate Carol significantly and exacerbate her position within the queer closet. Heterosexuals are not threatened with the public exposure of their sexuality, but closeted queer individuals need to be constantly vigilant. This creates a nervous tension between one's sense of Self as an upstanding citizen and/or devout believer, and one's own sexuality, something which is unavoidable and harmless, but is turned into a weapon by society.

Back to the impact of the closet on Kate's characterisation, one could argue that the way she and other lesbian sleuths from her generation navigate certain spaces so uncertainly is because they refuse therapy; in other words it is their own fault. I would argue that lack of therapy is also part of the history of LGBT+ repression and closely related to queer trauma, since a connection can be drawn between pre-World Wars generations, feminism, and psychoanalysis. LGBT+ psychologist Marla Kahn postulates a link between feminism, lower self-doubt and high chances of openness in therapy, 'a feminist attitude is associated with lower levels of internalised homophobia, more open behaviour and more positive expectancy regarding disclosure'.¹⁰⁶ This explains why Kate is characterised as closeted and suffering from internalised homophobia in this thesis. It can be argued that she comes out at the end of *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, but subsequent behaviours frame this scene as inconsequential in her overall characterisation. Further proof towards the theory that Kate remains fundamentally closeted until the end of the series lies within the psychological scarring of the queer closet. In the closet, the Self lies in a limbo and cannot be assimilated with either the heteronormative or the queer world.

Tragically, Kate's longing to belong is constantly stumped, first by others and then, subconsciously, by herself. Kate is tormented by worries, grief, fascination and desire to belong to a community as fully as possible. She wants to belong to her family but her father almost always neglected her emotional wellbeing, her mother died when she was very young and their relationship was strained, her half-brother is homophobic, and Kate's aunt disdains her so much that Kate grows up convinced that she is the cause of her mother's death and that her family hates her for it.¹⁰⁷ She wants to belong with college life and young queers but rejects casual sex which she sees as the primary lifestyle of college-aged queers in her time. She yearns to

¹⁰⁵ McNab, *Fatal Reunion*, p. 85.

¹⁰⁶ Marla J. Kahn, 'Factors Affecting the Coming Out Process for Lesbians', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 21.3 (1991), 47-70, (p. 67).

¹⁰⁷ Forrrest, *Liberty Square*, pp. 85-87.

belong in the army but is either too female or too strong for her hetero-sexist superiors and peers. She wants to belong in the LAPD but she is convinced that everyone knows about her sexuality and is ready to use the knowledge to her detriment. And finally, she wants to belong to the queer community, but realises that she is too late and the inter-generational gap of knowledge and experience excludes her.¹⁰⁸ Always seduced by the pull of belonging, Kate's subjectivity lives in constant apprehension, sickening desire, regret, and rejection. Kate is a prime example of the toxicity of building one's own identity based on negation, abjection. Her psyche can be represented by 'a vortex of summons and repulsion'¹⁰⁹ which displaces the subject.

The only positive aspects of Kate's queer trauma emerge from her relationship with the Nightwood Bar's group of regular customers. This tightly-knit group of lesbians teaches Kate a more well-adjusted approach towards the queer community, the customs that used to alienate Kate, and how to blur the butch/femme sexual roles without suffering from gender confusion and self-flagellation. In conclusion: how does Kate engage with the closet throughout the series? From the beginning to *High Desert*, Kate's position in the closet does not alter remarkably until the very end. At the beginning of the novel Captain Walcott asks Kate about Aimee's whereabouts, but Kate immediately shuts her captain down with a '[m]y business,'¹¹⁰ indicating that Kate's sexuality is known in the department or at least among the upper ranks, but Kate permits no outright acknowledgement of this.

This refusal, this entrenched position within the closet corroborates the argument that queer trauma casts an indelible psychological shadow on the lesbian sleuth of early crime fiction, leading her to behave in self-effacing, self-harming ways which is the core of the macro liminal Insider/Outsider argument of the thesis. One could argue that at the end of *High Desert* Kate comes out to a couple of patients of the retirement home where her best friend died, and that Kate's decision to become a volunteer in this retirement home promotes a future where Kate is openly out. I would argue that the scope of this community, as it stands by the end of the novel, is too limited and sporadic to contradict my interpretation of Kate's queer trauma, but the hopeful, aspiring atmosphere of this course of events is undeniable.

¹⁰⁸ Forrest, *Hancock Park*.

¹⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* (New York: University Presses of California, Columbia and Princeton, 1982), p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Forrest, *High Desert*, p. 14.

2.6 Closing the Closet

The existence of the closet shapes heteronormative society whether it is revealed or not. It is necessary and loathed simultaneously. The closet is, as Sedgwick aptly describes it, ‘an excruciating system of double binds, systematically oppressing gay people, identities, and acts by undermining through contradictory constraints on discourse the grounds of their very being’.¹¹¹ Therefore, there is an underlying tension between lesbian authors’ effort towards queer emancipation and empowerment and the knowledge of the catastrophic consequences of forceful coming out. Therefore, as this chapter has argued, in the representation of the closet of early Anglo-American lesbian detective novels there is an underlying tension between the portrayal of the closet as confinement and safe space. The presence of this tension does not preclude the authors’ beliefs being entirely different, in fact the researched fiction thrives on literary devices that lend themselves to be read as a fantasy of empowerment as well as on devices that contradict and obstruct this fantasy. Despite the abundance of socially relevant topics in the researched material, it is vital to remember that it is created and published for both entertainment and financial ends. Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction novels are not comparable to political pamphlets or newspaper articles. When sensitive topics are concluded in a conservative fashion, such as the queer closet in the Kate Delafield series, narrative cohesion should be prioritised over the political radicalness of the story. Indeed, Kate is a closeted person by the end of the series of novels, but the closet is so entrenched in her characterisation that Forrest cannot be faulted for writing coherently until the very end. Thus, Kate’s relation with the queer closet does not detract from the subversiveness with which Forrest presents other, equally impactful, topics.

¹¹¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1990), p. 70.

Chapter Three: The Clinic

This chapter argues that the prolonged medicalisation and particularly pathologisation of same-sex desire during the twentieth century caused community-wide trauma, which enables the argument for the indelible liminal presence of the early lesbian sleuth in the spaces of heteronormative society. As in the previous chapter, the space analysed in this chapter is intended as largely metaphorical. The queer closet is a metaphorical space and its chapter analysed critical scenes regarding the closeted characterisation of early lesbian sleuths. However, this chapter discusses the clinic both metaphorically, as the history of the pathologisation of queerness, and literally, as lesbian sleuths do end up in hospitals and in counselling rooms.

Almost all the protagonists of the novels read for this thesis have a traumatic past that informs their present identity and because this trauma, which this thesis refers to as queer trauma, cannot be fully assimilated, the part of their psyche that is destabilised by heteronormativity remains just out of reach, something that they cannot fully grasp and heal. Queer trauma is deeply internalised and its dynamic is inter-group rather than intra-group, namely queer trauma is mainly instigated by the hetero-sexist norms, by non-queer communities, but queer trauma causes such a deep-seated damage to the queer individual's formation of Self that they cannot find a steady footing in the places embedded in norms that reject them. I have mentioned the psychological impact of the closet, but it bears reiterating because it is a core concept of the Insider/Outsider spatiality of the lesbian detectives.

Analysing the space of the clinic in early novels of the sub-genre under examination invaluable insights into the ways queer trauma is inherent to the characterisation of early literary lesbian sleuths and the ways in which this characterisation translates to an Insider/Outsider liminality of the protagonist's spatiality. This analysis also sheds light on the ways in which the detective investigates murders related to illnesses and pathologised behaviours, often relating her own experience to the victims'. These novels can be considered a space in which collective trauma is dealt with, by the characters, by the authors, and by the readers.

The first half of this chapter depicts the space of the clinic in a metaphorical way, as a space where psychological trauma is exposed, and healing is attempted. Psychological issues inscribed in the protagonists' characterisation can be found in every novel of the Appendix, they sometimes constitute the root of the protagonists' motivations and of twists in their

personal relationships. This chapter explores the way the history shared by the medical establishment and the LGBT+ community has influenced the representation of sickness in this sub-genre. Aside from the corporeal reality of a disease, minorities that have been deemed psychologically ill by the medical establishment carry a long-lasting psychological scar, a collective queer trauma. Consequently, lesbian detectives navigate the space of the clinic with engrained uncertainty and anxiety. The second half of this chapter features the space of the clinic in a more physical sense, discussing how the researched material confronts death outside of criminal intent, such as the case of terminal diseases, in particular cancer and AIDS. The second half of the chapter shifts from a reading of the space of the clinic as a conductor of psychological healing, to the clinic as overrun by a disease that has seeped into society, complicating the detective's work. On the realist level this disease is identified as AIDS, whereas on a metaphorical level it is identified with several societal issues geared towards purging homosexuality from humankind, such as problems with accommodating lodging for the sick, failure in protecting their privacy as patients, and perpetrating unfounded prejudices about their medical condition. Examples of these issues are extracted from Jaye Maiman's Robin Miller series, J. M. Redmann's Micky Knight series, and Katherine V. Forrest's Kate Delafield series.

This chapter discusses how the lesbian sleuth is trapped inside the space of the clinic, that is, inside the history of clinical homophobia, the pathologisation of queerness, identity confusion, and queer trauma. This history of suppression indicates an intent towards detecting and containing queerness, as if it were a disease. This highly hostile history affects the psyche and work of the detectives, who at any time remain conscious of the fact that by upholding the law, they do not always work for good, merely for the hegemonic powers in their society. When these powers actively or passively oppress the queer community, it is a shattering awakening for the detectives' belief in their mission for good. This conflict is what is defined here as queer trauma, and is studied in the physical and metaphorical space of the clinic or hospital.

3.1 The Treatment of Homosexuality as a Pathological Sexual Condition

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction exposes how society puts the lesbian detective under the microscope for her wayward sexual behaviour. While criminals are judged for their actions, the lesbian detective is continuously judged for what she is, both as a woman in a hyper-

masculine workplace, and as a lesbian in a heteronormative society. One of the hidden aspects of this judgement includes the treatment of homosexuality as a pathological condition, which constitutes the major foundation of queer trauma. This chapter confronts the influence of this diagnosis on society, elaborates on the concept of queer trauma and explains the connections between the clinical perspective on homosexuality and the Insider/Outsider position of the lesbian sleuth in various literary spaces.

As anticipated in chapter one, delineating a brief history of crime writing, in twentieth century crime fiction there is a trend of associating deviant sexuality and gender transgression with criminality. As Gill Plain points out,

[w]ith the easy answer of evil identified as the problem or contaminant, society is free to continue its veneration of an equally intangible and potentially damaging notion of the pure: a concept which, historically, has underpinned everything from imprisoning gender prescriptions for women to the repugnant ideologies of the Nazi master.¹

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction expertly challenges gender prescriptions and exposes the artificiality and fragility of dominant ideologies. As Sally R. Munt indicates, authors of this genre masterfully utilise the concept of the heroic ‘to explore notions of selfhood, set against a corrupt and hostile society.’² As this chapter postulates, the space of the clinic is also deeply corrupt and hostile towards the lesbian detective, despite the clinic (particularly in a psychological context) being a pivoting point to explore notions of selfhood. The clinic is a particularly useful space for my argument, because it is a setting that hides a tortuous history with the queer community, particularly from the perspective of identity-based scholarship. As Munt goes on to state, ‘dominant (patriarchal) society is hence the evil world of crime, and the lesbian feminist perversely the perfect citizen, the repository of morals and all goodness and truth.’³ Far from being perverse or criminal, homosexuality constitutes a natural expression of desire, and the fissure between the repressive history of the clinic and this truth is a deep-seated psychological shadow that the lesbian sleuth carries within her.

Twentieth-century psychology has generally split its categorisation of sexual behaviours between normal and abnormal, playing a major role in the exacerbation of

¹ Gill Plain, ‘From ‘The Purest Literature We Have’ to ‘A Spirit Grown Corrupt’: Embracing Contamination in Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction’, *Critical Survey*, 20.1 (2008), 3-16, (p. 14).

² Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 194.

³ *Ibid.*

homophobia and the queer closet. Until the 1980s-90s, discussions of psychology appeared in popular magazines and newspapers regularly. In the early decades of the past century there was widespread belief in the value of the psychoanalytic enterprise, an optimism that resulted from Freud's findings and early success in the field of therapy, aptitude testing, and profiling in business, education and the armed forces.⁴ In the United States, the success of such analysis resulted in the public conflation of psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychiatry, a confusion which was reinforced and perpetrated primarily by the popular press.⁵ Twentieth-century medicine is tied with both crime writing and the history of the LGBT+ community for having influenced discourses about what is considered healthy or ill in human behaviours. The connection between medicine and crime fiction that this section presents can be introduced and envisioned with a quote from Maiman's Robin Miller Mystery series,

“[w]ithout all the facts, I really can't help you much. Think of it as just another type of investigation, Rob. A good physician has to trace disease as surely as you trace clues in a criminal investigation.” The comparison didn't exactly have me jumping for joy. Beth had no idea how much of my job was sheer guesswork. Or maybe she did. The possibility further unnerved me.⁶

This scene, an exchange between the protagonist Robin and her nurse friend, sheds light on the core argument in this chapter: that the lesbian detective does not and cannot navigate medical spaces without triggering queer trauma because she is tasked with investigating/diagnosing the failures of societal control, limitations, and rotten parts of heteronormative, patriarchal institutions, trying to keep the festering criminality at bay like a doctor who operates on a cancerous body. This imagery is subversive because, as this chapter sets out to demonstrate, historically the person who has been subjected to investigation/diagnosis has been the queer individual, while the entity who tried to keep queerness from festering and infecting society has been the heteronormative establishment.

Queer trauma needs to be historically situated as closely associated as possible to the subject matter of this thesis but discussing the history of unilateral diagnosis of homosexuality without referring to the origins of this practice would be detrimental. To introduce this

⁴ Alexander N. Howe, 'The Detective and the Analyst: Truth, Knowledge, and Psychoanalysis in the Hard-Boiled Fiction of Raymond Chandler', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 24 (2006), p. 16.

⁵ Howe, p. 17.

⁶ Jaye Maiman, *Under My Skin*, (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, 2011 [1993]), p. 74. Bella Books ebook.

chapter's topic there is no need to go further than the late nineteenth century, when sexology became an important turning point in the field of sexuality studies and gradually expanded to medical and popular discourses,⁷ remaining popular through most of the twentieth century.⁸ Due to the pioneering nature of the work of early sexologists, studies such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1889) began a slow process of knowledge creation directed at the primary audience of the time, namely psychologists. In regard to female sexuality, which more precisely pertains to this thesis' argument, early research was often based on two premises: women's supposed lack of desire and the supposed necessity of heterosexual genital sex for a healthy life. Homosexuality obviously did not and does not fit into this narrative, thus pseudo-scientists concocted a series of arbitrary associations to denigrate same-sex desire, including perversion, lack of self-control, and degenerating genetics. The by-product of such associations consisted in absurd assumptions on the behaviours not only of the LGBT+ community but of the populace at large, such as the idea that lesbianism created female masturbation, which was considered a corrupting bad habit for all women that was passed onto their descendants.⁹

One of the main arguments of early sexologists was the division between congenitally inverted homosexuals (born with the condition) and individuals who acquired homosexual tendencies in the course of their life. This latter category was seen as particularly deviant and pathological, and potentially recuperable through treatments. These increased from the 1920s and 1930s in the form of quasi-medical debates and, in mainstream distribution, in marriage manuals, especially sections dealing with problems in marriage.¹⁰ Changes occurred during the middle of the twentieth century, but not for the better. In the 1950s American psychologist Evelyn Hooker administered projective tests, such as the Rorschach Ink Test, to homosexual and straight male test subjects. Experts in interpreting such tests attempted to guess the sexuality of the men from the test results alone, but the interpretation in no way resembled reality and was reduced to a guessing game. This is understood as the starting effort towards defeating social prejudice with empirical psychology.¹¹ Hooker's experiment was the steppingstone for LGBT+ psychologists but progress was slow-going. The de-pathologisation of homosexuality by the American Psychiatric Association and the American Psychological

⁷ Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull, *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex between women in Britain from 1780 to 1970* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 94.

⁸ Oram and Turnbull, p. 54.

⁹ Oram and Turnbull, pp. 93-94.

¹⁰ Oram and Turnbull, p. 95.

¹¹ Peter Hegarty, *A Recent History of Lesbian and Gay Psychology: From Homophobia to LGBT* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 3.

Association occurred in the 1970s, but it was not until the 1980s that feminist therapy became a pivotal space in which lesbian-affirmative perspectives developed.¹²

The 1970s were tumultuous years for the queer community as LGBT+ groups led by Frank Kameny, a lead figure in the first formal homophile society, applied civil rights movements' direct action techniques to counter the slanderous, prejudiced classification of non-heterosexual desire within the medical establishment. Only the decade before the genre's development, LGBT+ activism mobilised itself to dismantle the diagnosis of queerness as sexual pathology. In 1974 a task force of American LGBT+ and Allied psychologists started working towards a ground-breaking notion, namely that '[h]omosexuality per se implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capacities.'¹³ In addition, mental health professionals were urged to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness associated with non-heterosexual identities, placing increasing emphasis on similarities between sexual orientations, instead of differences, because the latter were most commonly regarded as deficiencies. Furthermore, homophobia became a legitimate psychological concern that could lead to unstable emotional and psychological states, until it started to be considered as a probable cause for motive during criminal investigations.

In the main, activists started protesting at meetings of the APA (American Psychiatry Association) from 1970 onward and developed and propagated queer-friendly gender and sexuality theories such as those in the *Furies*' magazine and the radical lesbians debates.¹⁴ This proliferation of practical and theoretical projects to counter the hegemonic diagnostic model shows how pervasive and deep-set the pathologisation of queerness was. Also considering the experiences of queer patients and the opinions of experts, Kameny and the activists he rallied demanded the deletion of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, where it had been listed as a psychiatric disorder since the manual's first edition in 1952. In 1973 the matter was put to vote and for the first time the question of whether homosexuality was to be considered a psychological disease was methodically debated among the majority of American psychiatrists. The APA ended up listing homosexuality as a pathology from its foundation in 1944 until the 1973 debate and vote. Many American psychologists and psychiatrists agreed with Hooker's campaign in removing sodomy laws, and many more preferred to lead their patients to self-acceptance rather than imposing a sexual orientation on their psyche. The majority voted to repeal the diagnosis, although a new diagnosis called "sexual orientation

¹² Hegarty, p. 1.

¹³ Hegarty, p. 10.

¹⁴ Hegarty, pp. 7-8.

disturbance” was introduced in order to continue the treatment of the patients who wanted to be treated. This was the beginning of a shift towards the normalisation of same-sex desire, although the classification of homosexuality as a pathology in the World Health Organization manual continued until 1990.¹⁵

3.1.1 Relevant Medical Theories on Female Sexuality and Their Connection to Early Anglo-American Lesbian Crime Fiction

The history of the treatment of lesbianism by the medical establishment is intertwined with the broader treatment of homosexuality, however this section intends to clarify several points specifically considering female sexuality. For instance, the diagnosis of homosexuality as pathology was not created in a vacuum. Foucault famously dates the start of the pathologisation of homosexuality to the 1870s with the proliferation of texts about sexual inversion. And this is also the time when the New Woman becomes a social issue in Europe. Sexologists viewed sexual inversion as a sign of psychopathy (neurosis), and while many queer women rejected this view, Faderman’s research reports that a surprising number of women reacted in a polarised fashion: they either felt enabled by this diagnosis, as they perceived real benefits by asserting themselves as congenital inverters, or they internalised this diagnosis to the point of developing closet-related trauma.¹⁶

Influenced by narratives of poor heredity and degeneration, sexologists categorised physical and psychological masculine traits and looked for them in female inverters. Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull summarise several aspects of turn-of-the-century pathologised female sexuality, asserting,

[i]t has been strongly argued by many historians that the construction of categories and labels of deviance serve a regulatory purpose. Hence the authoritative discourse of the science of sex in relation to women and to marginal sexualities not only pathologized love between women, offering very limited versions of lesbian identity, but also emphasised the dangers inherent in female friendship and in celibacy, thus enforcing patriarchal heterosexuality. Furthermore, it is suggested that the scare figure of the

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 57.

lesbian produced by sexology was mobilised to undermine the feminist movement and its critique of male sexuality.¹⁷

Medical and pseudo-medical research was hugely influential because it showed lesbians as deeply disturbed individuals, but early sexologists and psychoanalysts largely built their theories on cases of hysteric women and only verified their own assumptions by internal reference. The systemic challenge to these theories developed in the 1960s, not in small part thanks to political debates about legalising gay male sexual practices and concurrent discussions on the social mobility of women.¹⁸ But to retain the historical development of the medical side of queer trauma, the category 'lesbian' began to be regarded as a pathological sexual condition from the early twentieth century and became increasingly subjected to pejorative interpretation. Oram and Turnbull's extensive research into the British side of this pathologisation of queerness demonstrates that this prejudiced diagnosis was rampant in the middle decades of the twentieth century, albeit diverse in application,

[w]hile the most common approach may have been the assumption of neurosis or mental illness, this was by no means ubiquitous. Before and after World War I, the awareness of a large number of single women who were unlikely to find husbands stimulated some discussion and advice by doctors about their appropriate lifestyles and friendships. [...] Some authors warned of the dangers of obsessive friendships, but others were much more tolerant, even supportive, of sex between women. But demographic shifts and anxiety about low birth rates in the 1930s and 1940s also meant that lesbians could be associated with that most gross form of feminine deviance, refusing motherhood.¹⁹

As demonstrated by this quote, Oram and Turnbull link the pathologisation of lesbianism to a number of social changes, including progressively lax boundaries between women's and men's social worlds, developments in middle-class women's education and employment and bodies of psychologists, clergy, educationalists and sexologists involving themselves in categorising sexual practices. Moreover, as Glassgold's and Iasenza's study indicates, the pathologisation of female sexuality lingered in medical and popular contexts until the end of the twentieth century, which reinforces this thesis' premise of utilising the concept of queer trauma as

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Oram and Turnbull, p. 96.

¹⁹ Ibid.

inherent trait of the lesbian detective's characterisation upon which her liminality pivots. These are characters created and animated during the course of these discourses on deviancy and perversity. Glassgold and Iasenza assert that the marginalisation of lesbians in psychoanalysis persisted 'as significant works in the 1980s continued to pathologize lesbian development [...] and the new feminist works ignored lesbians almost entirely.'²⁰ They go on to demonstrate that, '[i]nto the 90s lesbians continued to be marginalized within psychoanalytic institutions.'²¹ To summarise, despite its emphasis on different forms of desire, gender difference, and sexuality of current psychoanalysis, queer studies demonstrate that the medical establishment has had a vexed history with the LGBT+ community. In 2007 Heather Love pointed out '[w]hile some queer critics embrace psychoanalysis, for many it is associated with a general politics of normalisation and with the specific pathologisation of homosexuality,'²² indicating the continued strife between queer theorists and feminists and psychoanalytical studies of female sexuality and homosexuality, which speaks to the complicated relationship between the medical establishment and the LGBT+ community so central to this chapter.

This chapter explores the heteronormative narrative of the queer as lesser, as abnormal, as sexually deviant and pathological, and demonstrates how an underlying common premise in the characterisation of the early lesbian sleuth, referred here as queer trauma, influences the attitudes and behaviours of this character in the selected spaces. Freud, his contemporaries and the few pioneering clinicians who preceded him discovered the basic symptoms of trauma, linking it (and hysteria) with the growth of industrial revolution and of the bourgeois family.²³ On the topic, Ann E. Kaplan points out something that closely pertains to this thesis, claiming that

[the bourgeois] family became the site for female hysteria (caused partly by that family's patriarchal and puritanical codes), while industrialization (that required the bourgeois class and was, circularly, produced by that class) provided the social conditions for the train and machine accidents, and for large-scale wars.²⁴

²⁰ Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza, 'Introduction: Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave', in *Lesbians, Feminism, Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011) pp. 11-18, (p. 11).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Heather Love, 'Feminist Criticism and Queer Theory', in *A History of Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007) pp. 301-321, (p. 316).

²³ Ann E. Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), p. 25.

²⁴ Ibid.

Interestingly, the major impact analysed by early trauma studies involves the relationship between women and patriarchy, and between soldiers and the establishment (which here can symbolise both the conservative conformist middle class and the state, since soldiers receive their orders from the highest ranks of state power). The lesbian detective embodies both of these conflicted relationships (woman/patriarchy, soldier/establishment), and in respect to the argument of this thesis, the fact that the earliest focused studies on trauma discussed two figures who can be compounded within the lesbian detective reinforces the interpretation that the characterisation of this type of character is influenced by trauma.

When the dominant culture is expressed and perpetuated at the detriment of anything else, this constant presence and threat of repression towards non-confirming entities shapes long-held views and attitudes within society, becoming, in Laura S. Brown's words, 'a continuing background noise rather than an unusual event.'²⁵ This transformation, the traumatic event becoming background noise, is reprised in at the end of Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), where Gregg Bordowitz' points out, 'if you look historically at the ways in which people with AIDS have been presented, on television for instance, we have been placed behind potted palms, given masked or scrambled faces, and pictured pretty much the same way as criminals, prostitutes, terrorists have been.'²⁶ LGBT+ people have been lumped together with criminals for long that the ensuing trauma is not even registered as such by the establishment, but it has become such an important part of minority communities that queer trauma motivates the lesbian detective's crusade for justice.

Michael Millner's study on trauma asserts that the inter-generational and gendered origins of queer trauma 'destabilize any optimistic or simplified idea of identity as coherent, completely comprehensible, and a holding environment,'²⁷ and he goes on to argue that in on-going community trauma this becomes increasingly difficult to approach and solve:

[b]ecause of the difficulties of integrating traumatic experience into the self, the trauma further motivates a delving into identity. The case of identity can never quite be solved. It's left open, and must be returned to repeatedly, making the unresolved questions of

²⁵ Laura S. Brown, 'Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995) pp. 100-112, (p. 103).

²⁶ Cathy Caruth and Thomas Keenan, "'The AIDS Crisis Is Not Over': A Conversation with Gregg Bordowitz, Douglas Crimp, and Laura Pinsky', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) pp. 256-272, (p. 258).

²⁷ Michael Millner, 'Identity Politics in Crime Fiction', in *A History of American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Chris Raczkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 236-249, (p. 241).

identity as much the point of the novels as solving the questions of the cases themselves.²⁸

Caruth and Millner encapsulate the essence of the significance of the analysis of the clinic in early Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction. A detective's vigilance can be paralleled to the psychoanalytic vigilance of the doctor's with the patient but also of oneself with one's own past, that is to say one's identity.²⁹ Thus, within the context of clinical analysis the role of the protagonist investigating her community and society to detect the sickness, that is, the criminality, the role of the reader accompanying the protagonist during this journey, and the role of the therapist exploring origins and responses to trauma can be likened and linked via question of identity.

The underlying tension between the queer community and psychology becomes clear within the historical context linking the United States' military, the pathologisation of queerness, and Kate's characterisation. Due to the fact that medical institutions have historically relied upon biologically-based theory to explain concepts such as criminality and non-heterosexual desire, there is a wealth of queer literature tackling sensitive LGBT+ issues. Due to the major influence of second wave feminism on early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, feminist and queer feminist literature has long since struggled against the preconceptions spread by early twentieth century medical studies. As Teresa De Lauretis points out,

[t]he common usage of the term "heterosexuality" to denote sexual practices between a female and a male, as distinct from homosexual or same-sex practices [...] presents the former as "natural" in opposition to the latter, "deviant" or "unnatural" acts. Thus, the very term tends to obscure the unnaturalness of heterosexuality itself – that is to say, its socially constructed nature, its dependence on the semiotic construction of gender rather than on the physical (natural) existence of two sexes.³⁰

Early novels tackle this legacy in a variety of ways, and this thesis specifically considers the way lesbian sleuths navigate metaphorical and physical spaces related to mental and physical

²⁸ Millner, p. 241.

²⁹ Millner, p. 246.

³⁰ Teresa De Lauretis, 'Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness', *Feminist Studies*, 16.1 (1990), 115-145, (p. 129).

health. So how does the researched sub-genre tackle this specific legacy? This has been anticipated in the introduction and in the previous paragraph: by applying feminist principles of queer reappropriation, narrativised criticism, and grassroots education and organisation. For instance, by showing the protagonist challenging problematic discourses on naturalness and pathologies, as well as showing the struggles of the protagonist with therapists, as will be presented in-depth shortly in this chapter. Faderman's historical research on the topic contextualises the feminist influences on the literature under study:

[b]y the early 1970s there were active lesbian-feminist groups in most states, [...] They attempted to create economic cooperatives, child care centers, food co-ops, health clinics, halfway houses, and skills centers, and they dreamt grandiosely about multiplying their institutions all over the country so that their values would eventually predominate.³¹

Although considerably dated now, De Lauretis' and Faderman's works help identify the variables in 1980s and 1990s Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction novels, revealing that under certain conditions, in the most fertile period of the market, women had more power, more prestige, and/or more influence than gender biases would lead to believe.

More recent work on the topic of the pathologised queer has been conducted by Hegarty, stating that, '[b]y the early years of the twenty-first century a full quarter of the psychological literature on homophobia, heterosexism, or sexual prejudice was about *internalised* homophobia.'³² As further proof of how this pathologisation was geared towards exonerating heteronormative restrictions, Hegarty explains that homosexuals have always been free (and in many cases encouraged) to appeal to mental health professionals for help in 'correcting' their sexual orientation. In the early 1970s, less than a decade before the primary source material first emerged, 'ex-gay' public figures circulated conversion narratives of 'coming out of *homosexuality* rather than *as* lesbian or gay.'³³ With such an organised propaganda as counter story, it is no wonder that the space of the clinic emerges so often in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, especially in Forrest's Kate Delafield series and Sarah Dreher's Stoner McTavish series, showing scenes of *pathos* in their representation of the emotional turmoil and difficult paths of healing that the protagonists embark upon.

³¹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 219.

³² Hegarty, p. 17, emphasis in original.

³³ *Ibid*, emphasis in original.

Specifically related to the first half of this chapter and the analysis of the protagonists' mind is the underlying tension between crime literature and psychoanalysis. Both psychoanalysis and modern detective fiction developed around the turn of the twentieth century, an era where humanity turned to logic and reason as ways to govern the world.³⁴ As Munt asserts, psychoanalysis and crime fiction are closely entangled:

[t]he relationship between psychoanalysis and crime fiction is one full of interlocking themes, patterns, devices, and desires. At the heart of both is the investigation of a conflict, with the intention of effecting resolution and closure. The figure of the psychoanalyst doubles with that of the detective, as an agent bent on interpreting clues and symbols, a figure of power who applies ratiocinative skills to a particular text.³⁵

A notable example of this involves Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes; Doyle himself was a physician and he based Holmes' character on his medical professor, Dr. Joseph Bell, and the latter's gift for forming hypothesis based on seemingly inconsequential details, weighting clues in a unique manner compared to his peers.³⁶ Amy Yang's research supports this reading, asserting that

[i]f psychoanalysis brings a new tool to uncover the rationale behind the crime, it also ultimately undermines the traditional concept of narrative by its own nature. Traditional detective progression dictates the discovery of truth via didactic reasoning and compulsive attention to details. There is no place in the Holmes tradition for the alternate truth. Yet the Freudian narrative emphasizes the metaphorical, in which languages remain figurative and intentions hypothetical.³⁷

The lesbian crime novel and the lesbian pulp are suitable examples of this Freudian narrative, the pathologising construction of lesbianism as a psycho-sexual illness has caused detrimental inter-generational reverberations within and without the queer community. In the wake of this pathologisation the queer community has strived to challenge this narrative while homophobic society has weaponised this association to detect, forcibly disclose, and restrain

³⁴ Amy Yang, 'Psychoanalysis and Detective Fiction: A Tale of Freud and Criminal Storytelling', *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 53.4 (2010), 596-604, (p. 596).

³⁵ Munt, p. 147.

³⁶ Yang, p. 599.

³⁷ Yang, p. 601.

sexual minorities. The lesbian sleuth is a metaphorical angel of justice and revenge, empowering lesbian subjectivity by investigating the legacy of dominant cultural constructions standing for everything rotten and corrupted in heteronormativity. The psychoanalysts and the protagonists of the researched primary sources both address the patients/suspects ‘not as harbingers of a disease, but as human beings experiencing turmoil from their embattled mind.’³⁸ Analysing the space of the clinic unravels the relation between disease, crime, psychoanalysis and detection, explaining how the novels under examination interrogate LGBT+ issues so effectively.

In traditional detective fiction, there is a sense of ‘unavoidable defilement’³⁹ of society by criminality, but in early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, minority oppression stands for criminality, subverting the prejudice that the pathologically depraved queer contaminates society. Analysing the way the early lesbian sleuth interacts with spaces related to malady and healing makes it clear that this sub-genre mobilises a counter-narrative of contamination and resistance. As Peter Messent comments, the formula of societal innocence and guilt is often portrayed in crime writing ‘in terms of the contrast between stereotypical normality (all who live under the umbrella of the dominant value system) and individualism (the sign of danger and of difference, of the failure to conform).’⁴⁰ The primary source material tackles this ‘failure to conform’ over and over again, representing it as a conflicted, hard-worn victory instead. Homosexuality, regarded as a perverse aberrancy by the public, the embodiment ‘failure to conform,’ and even momentarily categorised as sexual pathology by psychologists, becomes the natural state of things for the researched narratives. Theirs is not a failure to conform, theirs is the repudiation of conformity and the celebration of subjective expression. From this position lesbian authors freely interrogate the sense of rightness, justice, and societal values analysed through the symbolism of disease and infection.

The clinical preoccupation with the queer individual is not simply a response to generic fear of sexual violation or of degeneration; it also represents the too rigid empiricism of the measuring of reality or truth itself. There are references to general understanding of psychology in the novels under examination, such as in scenes portraying therapy sessions, or in discussions about socially sensitive topics. In Barbara Wilson’s Pam Nilsen series, for instance, the protagonist and her twin sister are well-read feminist activists and during the sensitive cases

³⁸ Yang, p. 603.

³⁹ Plain, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Peter Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 13-14.

discussed in the novels several feminist journalists and authors are mentioned, including Susan Brown, Andrea Dworkin, Phyllis Chesler, Susan Griffin, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde.⁴¹

Barbara Wilson, pen name of Barbara Sjöholm (1950-) is one of the earliest and most politically argumentative authors of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction. Wilson dedicated herself to incorporating highly sensitive lesbian feminist issues of her time into her Pam Nilsen trilogy – *Murder in the Collective* (1984), *Sisters of the Road* (1986), and *The Dog Collar Murders* (1989) – and this trend continued in the Cassandra Reilly quartet – *Gaudí Afternoon* (1990), *Trouble in Transylvania* (1993), *The Death of a Much-Travelled Woman* (1997), and *The Case of the Orphaned Bassoonists* (2000). The third Pam novel *The Dog Collar Murders* discusses rape, prostitution, and teen prostitution from several perspectives. The tone of the series can be conveyed by the following quote, ‘I stopped being interested in treating depression medically and got interested in treating it politically. [...] I got involved with Rape Relief [...]. I began to redefine myself as a feminist therapist.’⁴² This line, pronounced by a psychologist who works at a women’s support centre, properly conveys how there is a trend in the sub-genre to treat many LGBT+ issues as problems inherent to the wider heteronormative society and part of a long history of systemic homophobia and queer trauma. This trend is further proof of how the researched sub-genre is deeply informed by cultural and scientific developments of the time, including feminist research and activism, as anticipated in the introduction to this thesis.

Both Stoner and Trish end up being judged for what they *are* instead of what they *do*, but the authors’ message is clear: instead of condemning these women for not fitting into arbitrary categories, the characters who imprison their identity are the true criminals and should be judged for their actions. The fact that this judgement never occurs is further proof of the criticism towards the mainstream narrative of the homosexual as ‘cultural contaminant.’ Because the sub-genre’s heroine is a homosexual woman, authors invite the readers to pay careful attention to how feminine and homosexual identities are constructed and monitored by society, which sometimes harms them to the point that they need professional help to reconnect with their true self.

⁴¹ Barbara Wilson, *The Dog Collar Murders* (New York: Open Road Media, [1989] 2013), pp. 88, 94. Google ebook.

⁴² Wilson, p. 88.

3.2 Queer Trauma in the Carol Ashton Mystery Series

It has been mentioned before that the primary source material of this thesis narrativises a wide-reaching critique of queer trauma by situating the detective in a perpetual Insider/Outsider position in society. Instead of focusing on single individual acts that threaten the status quo (especially the lives, money, and property of the privileged classes) like the traditional detective novel, lesbian authors critique the world of stereotypes, conformity, fitting-in, de-individualisation, and other flaws and failures in the society of their time. This critique is not always carried out in a simple, straight-forward manner, as it may not be focused on one or few scenes where the issue is presented and criticised openly but may be spread out across one or more novels in a series. For instance, as explored in the previous chapter on the closet, in the Kate Delafield series, Forrest engages with the widespread homophobia in law enforcement, which refuses to consider homosexuals as victims, regardless of proof to the contrary. Forrest's criticism is spread over the whole series, at times appearing as a seemingly random line, as in *Amateur City* (1984) when Detective Taylor claims that retaliating with violence is expected for a man who is accused of being a homosexual;⁴³ or it can appear as a fully developed discourse as in *Murder by Tradition* (1991), where Detective Taylor states that the victim deserved to be stabbed to death for making sexual advances on a man.⁴⁴

This homophobia can also be internalised, leading the characters to think that their own desires are wrong and unnatural, creating deep psychological trauma. Penned by Australian author Claire McNab, the Carol Ashton Mystery series is an excellent counterpart to the Kate Delafield Mystery series in terms of spatial literary analysis. The series includes seventeen novels written between 1988 and 2017. McNab's abundant works were published in the United States for both prints, first by Naiad Press then by Bella Books, but all the novels, with the exception of *Under Suspicion*, are set in Sydney, Australia. The main romantic relationship in the Carol Ashton Mystery series presents a suitable scenario to showcase the long-lasting effects of queer trauma.

In *Lessons in Murder*, the protagonist Carol and the main love interest Sybil Quade become a couple after a series of passionate yet troubled interactions. It is Sybil's reticence that casts a shadow on these meetings, oscillating between her attraction to Carol and her belief that same-sex love is unnatural. Sybil voices this prejudice in front of Carol, saying 'that kiss was

⁴³ Katherine V. Forrest, *Amateur City*, (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1984] 2011), p. 140. Google ebook.

⁴⁴ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder by Tradition*, (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1991] 2013), pp. 20-21. Google ebook.

wrong, but it was so exciting.’⁴⁵ Carol, who had already fallen in love with a straight woman before the events of the series and had been rejected in the same way, becomes confrontational, ‘[w]hat can I say to you, [...] when you think *to kiss is wrong*?’⁴⁶ This line conveys Carol’s correct analysis of the situation; namely, that Sybil’s reticence stems from a societal preconception of homosexuality as abnormal, which has been long internalised. Such preconceptions were not created and perpetrated by psychoanalysis alone, but the influence of psychoanalytic discoveries cannot be understated. The representation of seemingly inconsequential exchanges, such as the one between Carol and Sybil quoted above, is a crucial element of the researched material because it permits the authors to create a baseline of societal homophobia in contrast to which they develop a queer counter-narrative showcasing how artificial and arbitrary this scenario is. In the case of Carol and Sybil, Sybil soon resolves the conflict between internalised homophobia and her own feelings, and becomes a zealous lesbian feminist activist, symbolising the development of a queer narrative in contrast to traditional ideology.

The mixture of identity, representation, and the reappropriation of a gay-identified narrative is a crucial point for the argument of this thesis, especially for the ambiguous Insider/Outsider position of the lesbian sleuth. As Lee Edelman postulates, heterosexuality has been able to reinforce its own narrative as natural for centuries; its status perpetuates itself as, ‘unmarked, authentic, and non-representational [...] defining the straight body against the “threat” of an “unnatural” homosexuality.’⁴⁷ Edelman’s mention of the ‘non-representational’ aspect of heterosexuality is particularly relevant for the source material of this thesis, where the protagonists’ interpretational skills are put to the test on two parallel lanes, one to figure out who is lying and who is telling the truth, and to identify where other characters lie in the LGBT+ and LGBT-friendly spectrum. In Carol’s and Sybil’s case, Sybil is represented as a lesbian who suffers from queer trauma, as depicted in Sybil’s constant vacillating between the idea of homosexuality as wrong and her own feelings in *Lessons in Murder*. The devastating effects of the prejudice of the pathologised homosexual desire can also be seen in Carol’s failure to distinguish between societal and internalised homophobia, a distinction which challenges even her hardened investigative skills. In the scene analysed above, Carol succeeds in detecting Sybil’s fake narrative that she has nothing to do with the crime, but fails to parse the narrative of internalised homophobia, and actually thinks that Sybil considers their affection

⁴⁵ Claire McNab, *Lessons in Murder* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, [1988] 2011), p. 75. Google ebook

⁴⁶ Ibid, my emphasis.

⁴⁷ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 4.

as wrong, showing just how effectively the heteronormative narrative can distort LGBT+ identity.

In the same scene between Carol and Sybil, the author further engages the heteronormative narrative of homosexuality as abnormal, in particular, of homosexuality as a forbidden guilty pleasure, a temporary experience in a life-long ‘normalcy.’ Before accepting her own feelings, Sybil ponders, ‘[h]ow long before she got over this obsession with another woman? How long before this unnatural passion burnt itself out?’⁴⁸ The concept of homosexuality as a phase was developed by Freud who, as Faderman aptly summarises, ‘believed that all children went through a homosexual phase on their way to heterosexuality. [...] Psychiatrists were now warning parents that every childhood and adolescent emotional attachment must be scrutinized in order to nip homosexuality in the bud.’⁴⁹ Faderman is commenting on the influence of psychoanalysis on the 1920s here, but the prejudice of homosexual desire as temporary resounded throughout the twentieth century. The dialogue between Sybil and Carol in *Lessons in Murder* is a perfect example of the effects of psychoanalytical heteronormative discourse.

The instance of the romance of the Carol Ashton Mystery series is a model example of the effect and connection of the medicalisation of queer identities, but what about specific character information based on the character’s medical history? Analysing excerpts from the Lauren Laurano, Stoner McTavish, and Kate Delafield series will aid in providing further contextualisation of medicalised queerness in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction and in showing how this impacts the spatiality of the protagonist. In the afore-mentioned quotes (and also in the Lauren Laurano, Stoner McTavish, and Kate Delafield series), the lesbian sleuth is judged for what she *is* instead of what she *does* because of the history of preconceptions surrounding homosexuality. Because the genre’s heroine is a homosexual woman, authors invite the readers to pay careful attention to how feminine and homosexual identities are constructed and monitored by society, sometimes destroyed to the point that they need professional help to reconnect with their true self, as in the case of Dreher’s last novel *Shaman’s Moon*. Considering that *Shaman’s Moon*, which has been discussed at length in the preceding chapter, is set in 1990, Stoner is approximately thirty-seven at this point in the series, and she ran away from home at sixteen, her parents must have subjected her to conversion therapy in the 1950s. Stoner’s queer trauma derives from a common ideology which was tackled in the

⁴⁸ McNab, *Lessons in Murder*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 89.

1970s by LGBT+ activists. LGBT+ activists were particularly incensed at by behavioural intervention techniques involving the administration of electric shocks to punish arousal from homoerotic stimuli. This practice is mentioned in Dreher's *Something Shady*, as well as in *Shaman's Moon*, indicating the author's dedication to denounce the brutal treatment of homosexuality within the medical establishment. This section demonstrated the uncertain spatiality of the lesbian sleuth in McNab's Carol Ashton mystery series. In quoting excerpts from the way Carol interacts with her colleagues, murder suspects, family members, and her partner Sybil, a baseline of societal homophobia is set and then contrasted to the way Carol's lesbian feminist personality struggles and tries to break free of the confines of minority oppression in intimate and professional contexts. In the Carol Ashton series the space of the clinic is partly represented by Carol's closeted identity, which steadily builds up tension between the public expectations of her, her private life, and the oppressive fallout following Carol's forced coming out. Additionally, the clinic is partly represented in the romantic subplots, which are fraught with negotiations over what has been introjected as wrong and depraved versus what the characters feel for each other. In summary, the Carol Ashton series offers plenty of evidence for the Insider/Outsider argument in the way its protagonist interacts with physical and metaphorical spaces, including the medical establishment, mostly in terms of trauma, vulnerability, and counter-narrative.

3.3 Queerness as Perversion and Degeneration in the Lauren Laurano Novels

This section pertains to the critique of homosexuality as perversion and as a kind of infection that threatens society's health (also referred to as degeneration in this thesis), within Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano Mystery series. The Lauren Laurano series offers salient examples of how the metaphorical space of the clinic has historically teemed with wide-reaching negative preconceptions of same-sex desires, which leads to the liminal Insider/Outsider position of the early lesbian sleuth in the analysed spaces. The concept of degeneration connected with queer trauma has been briefly anticipated in the previous section, but a further brief introduction is needed. The concept of biological degeneration has been in circulation since the seventeenth century and saw high popularity in the nineteenth century to express the perceived degradation of society. As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, degeneration is '[t]he process of degenerating or becoming degenerate; the falling off from

ancestral or earlier excellence; declining to a lower or worse stage of being; degradation of nature.⁵⁰

Historically homosexuality has been related to degeneration, in other words, same-sex desire has been considered a threat (an infectious disease) towards the lifestyle and wellbeing of so-called normal society; this image of sprawling disease serves to connect homosexuality, disease, and criminality. This reading was inspired by an off-hand observation by Munt, who states that '[t]he explicit visual presence of death in literature, expressed in such lingering detail through images of decaying, suppurating corpses, can be attributed to both *fin de siècle* fears of degeneration, and to the role that AIDS has taken on as a symbol of this disintegration.'⁵¹ Early lesbian detectives struggle in the literal and metaphorical space of the clinic, namely, how a heteronormative society views homosexuality as a source of decay that needs to be amputated. This view puts the lesbian detective in a double bind: on one hand, her investigations lead her to witness the full artificiality of this societal illness, for there is no scientific evidence that homosexuality alone leads to a criminal lifestyle and thus to the detriment of society, while on the other hand, the lesbian detective is employed by the very establishment that wishes to perpetuate this illusion of homosexuality as the psychologically weaker (thus dangerous) side of humanity.

The first of the two main tenets of the medicalisation of queerness described in this chapter is perversion. It is noteworthy to point out that historically, sexologists studied queer identities and perverse desires such as incest, rape, and paedophilia *in tandem*, as demonstrated by Michel Foucault's research into the juridical condemnation of 'strange pleasures.' He argues that

[b]reaking the rules of marriage or seeking strange pleasures brought an equal measure of condemnation. On the list of grave sins [...] appeared debauchery (extramarital relations), adultery, rape, spiritual or carnal incest, but also sodomy, or the mutual "caress." As to the courts, they could condemn homosexuality as well as infidelity, marriage without parental consent, or bestiality.⁵²

⁵⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, *Degeneration*, n., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/49060?redirectedFrom=degeneration#eid>> [accessed 10 September 2021]

⁵¹ Munt, p. 198.

⁵² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Will To Knowledge*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 38.

Joseph Bristow's extended research also demonstrates this relation, as he states that, '[n]ot only did sexology bring the figures of the bisexual, homosexual, and heterosexual to public attention, it also investigated perverse behaviours, including sadism and masochism. Sexological writings often went to inordinate lengths to classify sexual perversions.'⁵³ The apparent affiliation between queerness and sexual perversion created an abnormal expectation of the sexual appetite of queer people by those who believed such sexological theories. Therefore, from the perspective of public opinion, the heterosexual individual is discerning in his/her desire, while the queer is indiscriminating and their next target could be anybody.

Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano series offers exemplary scenes where the conformist society calls upon pathologised queerness within a metaphorical space of the clinic, which destabilises the lesbian sleuth's spatiality. American writer Sandra Scoppettone (also known as Jack Early) (1936-) is the author of the series featuring New York-based hard-boiled private detective Lauren Laurano, whose investigations are set during the 1990s in five novels titled: *Everything You Have Is Mine* (1991), *I'll Be Leaving You Always* (1993), *My Sweet Untraceable You* (1994), *Let's Face the Music and Die* (1996), and *Gonna Take a Homicidal Journey* (1998).

As for the representation of the medicalised origin of sexuality in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction, there are three main options. The first is to seek sexuality in the hereditary traits, in biology. But as this would shame countless conservative-minded heterosexual couples, it is unacceptable. The second option is what Freud defined in the pre-Oedipal stage of mammal-focused libido. It is represented by the Laurano excerpts offered in the paragraphs above. The third option consists of external causation: changes in sexual desire as an extreme emotional reaction. This reaction is depicted by Scoppettone when Lauren converses with a random secondary female character in *My Sweet Untraceable You*. The scene starts with a dark tone, with the woman asking Lauren how a young woman managed to enter the ranks of the FBI, only to leave it to become a private investigator. Lauren reveals that she had been abducted and violated at the age of 18, then aided the authorities into seeking the culprits. Next, the woman asks how long Lauren has been married. When Lauren answers with fourteen years, the lady's response is neutral and implies a social commentary by the part of the author, "[m]y God in heaven, don't know hardly any straights your age been together that long. Congratulations," she says, and sticks out her hand again. Smiling, I take it and we shake.'⁵⁴

⁵³ Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 6.

⁵⁴ Sandra Scoppettone, *My Sweet Untraceable You* (Boston: Little Brown, [1994] 2011), p. 47. Amazon ebook.

However, immediately afterwards the scene turns to the absurd, ‘Midge leans closer to me over the counter, [...] “Was it the rape that done it, honey?”’⁵⁵ By ‘done it’ the lady implies that the rape changed Laurano’s sexual orientation. The question thus reads ‘Was it the rape that caused you to be gay?’ A truly heartless question to someone who just bared a painful part of their personal history.

In this scene the pervasiveness of the medicalisation of queerness in society emerges in the most obvious way possible. The idea that sexual desire can be twisted and coerced by external circumstances also ties back to the idea of homosexuality as unnatural perversion. The next line in the same scene is a disappointing reminder of the state of modern society, ‘I’m not at all perplexed by the question. I’ve been asked it many times by the uninformed. [...] “No. I had a boyfriend because that’s what you did then. I didn’t love him. In fact, I was madly in love with a girl in my class.”’⁵⁶ Scoppettone manages to fill this scene with social commentary aimed at different homophobic prejudices. The first line hints that there have been several instances of individuals equating homosexuality with a reaction against an instance of trauma, opposite to heterosexuality, which is allegedly the normal course of one’s life. The second sentence sheds light on a practice perpetrated by who-knows-how-many queer individuals in order to survive in a homophobic hostile community. The last two lines convey how emotionally draining this practice was and continues to be for innumerable queers. I was not surprised to see the female character asking Lauren if she was ‘born this way.’ The discourse on sex and sexuality has been organised around the body since the Middle Ages and expanded into studying demography, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, ethics, and pedagogy in modern times. But the biological basis remains:⁵⁷

“[s]o are you saying you were born this way?” I shrug. “Who knows? I think it’s like alcoholism. Part physical or chemical, part emotional. I think I was disposed that way and the combination of my parents solidified it.” “Now don’t go blaming your parents, Lauren.” “I don’t blame them. It’s just the way it was. If anything I’m grateful.” Midge gives me a dubious look. “Really,” I say. “I’m very happy.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Scoppettone, *My Sweet Untraceable You*, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁷ Foucault, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Scoppettone, *My Sweet Untraceable You*, p. 47.

This dialogue shifts from the biological origin of homosexuality, the born-like-this explanation, to theorising about the origin of human sexuality. While the biological origin exculpates the parents from any trace of undesirable queerness in the offspring, in the case of the Freudian theory, the family's involvement (or lack of) in the growth of the child's sexual identity can be called into question by conservatively-minded individuals, which is what happens in the scene quoted above. By saying 'don't go blaming your parents, Lauren' the female character implicitly defends Lauren's parents' from the perceived disease that is her homosexuality, as if the parents' rearing methods were placed under trial for having failed to detect/diagnose and correct/cure Lauren's sexual orientation.

A similar example of the way the early lesbian sleuth struggles to navigate the history of pathologised queerness can be found in the second novel of the series. In *I'll Be Leaving You Always*, the murder of Lauren's best friend Megan sends the protagonist on a frantic search for the killer and for personal revenge, forcing Lauren to reluctantly dig into the past of the first friend to ever accept her sexual orientation. Questioning Megan's ex-husband, the underlying subtext of the scene implies that the man has been jealous of Lauren's and Megan's long-time bond.⁵⁹ This jealousy emerges from the man's repeated accusations of a secret affair between Lauren and Megan, especially in the following exchange,

“[y]ou've never married again, have you?”

[...]

“You know something, Lauren ... it's none of your goddamned business why I didn't get married again. Maybe once was enough. Maybe the thought of ending up with another malcontent like Meg made me wary. Maybe I never met the right one. What's it got to do with anything?”

“And maybe you never got over Meg,” I suggest.

“Maybe you didn't.”⁶⁰

This exchange proves to be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back, causing Lauren's sudden reaction, which reads closely akin to (queer) trauma response,

⁵⁹ Sandra Scoppettone, *I'll Be Leaving You Always* (Boston: Little Brown, [1993] 2011), p. 58. Amazon ebook.

⁶⁰ Scoppettone, *I'll Be Leaving You Always*, p. 61.

“[I]isten, Nick, because I’m a lesbian doesn’t mean that I lust after every woman I know. I’ve been happily married to Kip for twelve years. And besides, I never thought of Meg that way. So don’t try to turn my feelings for her into something they never were. Friends. That’s what we were. Old friends.” On the verge of tears, and not wanting him to see, I walk toward the door.⁶¹

This quote can be considered a central node in the spatiality of Lauren and the early lesbian sleuth in the context of the medical establishment. The relation between homosexuality and an excessive, predatory lust is evident through Nick’s words, thus Lauren’s sexuality is foregrounded as a blindly bestial sexual appetite, and she is likened to a sexual predator purely on the grounds of being homosexual. This quote emblematically conveys the frustrations and resentment of the lesbian sleuth, who is routinely accused of being something that she is not, abnormal, perverse, and overwhelmed by indiscriminating urges. Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction contains numerous such statements, made by a community who, in the 1980s and 1990s especially, was in the midst of challenging the most deeply-set misconceptions society had about queer life.

The reactionary rage of the ex-husband at his inadequate (heterosexual, normal, presumably long-lasting) relationship vis-à-vis Megan and Lauren’s stronger bond causes an outburst of disdainful homophobic remarks during which he claims Megan was secretly disgusted by Lauren’s homosexuality all along, as evidenced by the line, “Meg called you a dyke behind your back,” he says.⁶² This line sends the protagonist into a spiral of self-doubt:

I’m devastated. He’s managed to shake my faith in my friend and for that I feel guilt. Conflicting emotions cause my stomach to roil, and sweat beads my face like seed pearls. Which is worst, that Meg might have been involved in something illegal, that she called me a dyke, or that she wasn’t who I thought she was? [...] When I finally admit that it is possible, my confidence cracks like a cheap vanity mirror.⁶³

This quote evokes the closet chapter where the way the lesbian sleuth interacts with the closet is liminal because of the delicate balance between the mystery around her identity and the mystery around the criminal’s identity destabilises her position of Insider and muddies the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Scoppettone, *I’ll Be Leaving You Always*, p. 62.

waters between Insider/law enforcers and Outsider/criminals. In the previous chapter, the detective vacillates between the need to know oneself and the need to keep concealing one's true self from others, which threatens to rupture her sense of Self. Similarly, the quoted extracts from the Lauren Laurano series indicate that regardless of any professional achievements, the lesbian sleuth stands on unstable ground, her position in society constantly unmoored and left to fend for herself. While the context in which Lauren operates is not a hospital or a treatment facility, the connections between pathology and homosexuality forged in clinical spaces and disseminated through society have created an indelible psychological shadow on the lesbian sleuth, here often referred to as queer trauma.

Scoppettone's social commentary is the perfect ensemble of examples to showcase how queer authors are knowledgeable about scientific and pseudo-scientific theories that supposedly aim at discovering hidden depths of human behaviours but end up being regurgitated by outsiders, well after their expiry date. The scenes examined in this section connect with what Janice Radway argues about popular genres and readership, that attending to 'the ways in which various groups appropriate and use the mass-produced art of our culture,' would allow for a better understanding of the '[i]nterstices still exist[ing] within the social fabric where opposition is carried on by people who are not satisfied by their place within it or by the restricted material and emotional rewards that accompany it.'⁶⁴ In Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction the protagonist is entangled in a social fabric that seeks to dictate one dominant narrative for all: heteronormativity. Thus, the heterosexual population lives in spaces like the clinic, the courtroom, and the bar with ease, while homosexuals need to carve out their own corners of safety in these spaces.

Lesbian detectives are doubly at odds in the clinic because they are both female detectives and attracted to other women. The fact that they often have conversations like the one quoted between Carol and Sybil, or between Lauren and the nameless lady, about the perceived wrongness of homosexuality, enunciates how heteronormativity has become so deeply embedded in the legacy of crime fiction, especially the portion of the genre which lays claim to realism. Heterosexual male detectives like Marlowe and Spade are not questioned about the nature or the origin of their sexual habits, nor do they ever feel the need to explain themselves. Similarly, female detectives such as Kay Scarpetta or V. I. Warshawski are subjected to sexist remarks, especially by the criminals, but even they are not considered

⁶⁴ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill NC: The University of North Carolina Press, [1984] 1991), p. 222.

embodiments of something inherently flawed, detrimental, and threatening, as homosexuality is, simply because they are heterosexuals. Heterosexual detectives may find themselves in the space of the clinic because of mental health issues, or because of addictions such as excessive smoking or drinking, but homosexual detectives enter the clinic both because of these struggles and because their identity is deemed a sickness.

3.4 Therapy as Social Commentary on Discrimination

Despite this bleak state of things, each series analysed for this thesis embodies an inspirational brand of feminist-influenced psychology, in that no matter how traumatic the background of the protagonists is, once they undergo therapy, they embark on a path of healing. Kate Delafield for instance, despite being born in a generation where seeking professional help was considered by many to be self-demeaning, and despite her extremely reluctant entry into therapeutic treatment, eventually embarks on a positive reconciliation with the medical establishment. This also is echoed in the Robin Miller series, which contains several similarities, from a psychoanalytical point of view, in the ways Kate Delafield and Robin Miller interact with the physical space of the clinic and with the metaphorical meaning of this space contained in the treatment history of homosexuality by the medical establishment. Penned by American novelist Jaye Maiman (1967-), the series features lesbian travel guides and romance writer Robin Miller in her journey to become a private detective with her own investigative agency. The thrilling series is set in New York in the 1990s and spans seven books, titled *I Left My Heart* (1991), *Crazy for Loving* (1992), *Under My Skin* (1993), *Someone to Watch* (1995), *Baby It's Cold* (1996), *Old Black Magic* (1997), and *Every Time We Say Goodbye* (1999).

Having been an outcast in her family from a young age, Robin grows into a woman with chronic commitment and self-esteem issues and undergoes extensive therapy, emerging a more settled person at the end of the series. Kate's and Robin's narratives feature actual professional therapists, but in most other series the figure of the mental health professional is filled in by one or more secondary characters who provide emotional support for the protagonist. This is one of the ways in which feminist influence is visible in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, all these characters are gay women, the all-encompassing feminist ideology the genre is committed to brings these women together to portray a sense of community, of self-determination against heteronormative places, like the clinic, that would see them conforming to an arbitrary standard. Another way in which feminism has strived to

create a harmonious relationship between psychological help and the lesbian community is the process of un-doing the demonisation of the first in the eyes of the latter. One of the most evident traces of feminist input in female-authored crime fiction can be examined in Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski series, a detective who is less violent than the likes of Marlowe or Spade, but who is just as prepared to free herself of restraints in pursuit of justice.⁶⁵ When Warshawski is vulnerable she seeks refuge in the care of her doctor friend Herschel Lottie and in these therapeutic scenes all of the dark corners of Warshawski's mind are bared and reconciled. It is no coincidence that this healing space is inhabited exclusively by women, which is presented as a contrast to the world of patriarchal, corporate America that Warshawski is pitted against.

Like the Warshawski series, early novels (within the Appendix) create a community of female characters shielding the protagonist's psyche from the constant barrage of patriarchal violence: Kate has her therapist Calla Dearborn, and before her the only characters who support Kate's psychological well-being are her partner and the female Vietnam veterans of *Liberty Square*; Robin sees a female therapist for six novels, and her neighbours/best friends Dinah and Beth are a psychologist and a nurse respectively; Carol has Aunt Sarah, who is a feminist activist, Stoner has Aunt Hermione, who is a feminist clairvoyant; and Micky has Ellie and Cordelia, a nurse and a doctor respectively. These examples are indicative of an influence of lesbian feminist activism on early novels of the genre. The protagonists are almost always wounded by male thugs and are symbolically (and literally) healed by the lesbian community: this depicts the notion of the wider social system as a sick organism that tries to smother minority groups like theirs. The crime novel becomes a tool to dissect society's flaws and failures, to explain the wrong turns that a patriarchal establishment and the political structures which benefited from it, have taken. The strained relationship between the protagonist and her surrounding social world takes on a lesbian feminist critical edge, as the significance and morality of healing lesbian relationships stands in contrast to a patriarchal narrative of oppression and violence.

Previous analysis in this thesis has recognised the closet as a traumatic space. But considerable insights into the researched material can be drawn from analysing the clinic as a separate locus of trauma, adjustment, and eventual healing. The topic of the medicalisation of queerness fits particularly well in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction since counselling psychology was mostly developed and utilised for the rehabilitation of soldiers. However,

⁶⁵ Stuart Sim, *Justice and Revenge in Contemporary American Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 9.

theoretical developments in counselling psychology from the 1960s and 1980s focused on the affirmation of human potential, which pivoted on personal identity. This had lasting effects on queer psychology, including the explanation of identity failure as one of the effects of internalised homophobia, which is the focus of this section.⁶⁶

Kaplan's study on trauma shows the ways in which stress and trauma affect the brain. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD was introduced in formal psychology in 1984 by the American Psychological Association in its Diagnostic Manual. In those years feminist psychologists began to confront gender biases in defining PTSD. As Kaplan summarises, 'psychologists' worries arose from female patients increasingly presenting symptoms of child sexual abuse, as well as from treating more battered women who were now willing to come forward.'⁶⁷ Psychological studies about this phenomenon became best-sellers in the mainstream book market,⁶⁸ which may explain why so many lesbian authors touch upon the topic of childhood trauma, especially of a sexual nature, and the importance of sharing this burden with others. Agreeing with Caruth on the unspeakability of trauma,⁶⁹ Kaplan nonetheless affirms the crucial role of storytelling in trauma therapy, as 'telling stories about trauma, even though the story can never actually repeat or represent what happened, may partly achieve a certain "working through" for the victim.'⁷⁰ It permits a kind of empathic sharing that aids the afflicted individuals in moving forward, even if only by a little. This principle is also widely portrayed in the primary source material, where most of the traumatised characters experience an initial phase of solitary suffering, then they find a trustworthy therapist and start on a slow, winding path of healing. In the main the hopeful endings of early novels do not detract from the Insider/Outsider position of the protagonist as it has been argued in this thesis, rather they reinforce it by demonstrating that even after many vicissitudes which reiterate her position of outsider, the lesbian sleuth cannot concede her position as insider. This is mostly due to her profession, which necessarily calls for an alignment with state institutions, but also to an innate drive to belonging. In proposing the interpretation that lesbian sleuths exist somewhere between justice and criminality, Self and Other, normal and abnormal, this section evokes the inevitable, indelible liminality of the lesbian sleuth by closely considering her relationship with psychotherapy, mental health, and the process of Other-ing that psychology

⁶⁶ Hegarty, p. 15.

⁶⁷ Kaplan, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1995), p. 4.

⁷⁰ Kaplan, p. 37.

enacted against homosexuality in the early twentieth century, feeding into what this thesis refers to as queer trauma.

Based on what the introductory paragraphs of this sections delineated, a parallel can be drawn between the clinic as the space where society heals itself, and the police station (connected with the courtroom and the prison) as the space where society purges itself of disorder. At the end of the detective novel the criminal may confess their wrongdoings in a placid, almost victorious manner, or they may recall their actions in a haze of raging emotions, or, the detective or attorney may pry the truth from a web of deceptions. What these denouements have in common is the revelation of a series of events that what was supposed to remain secret, and in this way it can be said that all of society momentarily inhabits the space of the clinic and undertakes therapy. As Auden writes about murder, it is the crime that ‘abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand restitution or grant forgiveness.’⁷¹

The concept of therapy is fruitful for analysing early novels because it is a fundamental factor in uncovering, or at least attempting to uncover, the way the lesbian sleuth navigates certain space-related maladies, both physical and psychological. In the late twentieth century, crime fiction took on a progressively darker tone, depicting a world in which moral values are in decline, both in public and private affairs, a slide into a condition of widespread moral crisis. The justice and the legal system struggle to command respect amid a sense of irresistible corruption in the political and business sectors. In this web of propagated, invisible crime, storytelling serves as a kind of group therapy, so that the scenes where a weight is lifted from the protagonist’s chest as she shares her past read as smaller instances of what happens with the suspects and witnesses on a general scale. As mentioned above with Auden’s insight, where murder is involved, society takes indirect part in the investigation and it is through the sharing of personal troubles that society can achieve closure and purge itself of evil.

As Munt’s research shows, 1970s psychotherapy and discussion groups transformed the act of disclosing unconscious trauma into fruitful foundations of political ideologies; specifically, ‘[t]he inconsistencies apparent between knowledge about sexism and intellectual strategies for its refusal, and the feelings and behaviour of women towards themselves, each other, and men, threw up paradoxes which an exploration of the psyche promised to relieve.’⁷² How is this promise represented in the researched sub-genre? To answer this question, it is best

⁷¹ W. H. Auden, ‘The Guilty Vicarage: Notes On the Detective Story, By an Addict’, *Harper’s Magazine* (1948), 406-412, (p. 407).

⁷² Munt, pp. 149-150.

to analyse a few key scenes from Forrest's *Liberty Square* and particularly Kate's troubled relationship with therapy. Kate's partner Aimee is driven by insatiable curiosity about a past Kate adamantly refuses to share, especially her service as a Marine in the Vietnam War, and manipulates the two of them into attending what Aimee sees as an innocuous reunion for the twentieth anniversary of the conflict. First the couple is shot at in their hotel room, then one of the attendees is murdered, which not only embroils Kate in the investigation in a city where she has no jurisdiction, but she is also confronted by detectives who view her with contentious suspicion. In this tense atmosphere, Aimee learns that Kate has had very good reasons to hide her past when Kate's ex-troopmates start to recount atrocious experiences.⁷³ The veteran group discussions taking place throughout several chapters reads very much like one of the veterans' group sessions described by Bessel Van der Kolk in his trauma study *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), with the exception that in Forrest's novel the role of the therapist is represented by the narrator and all characters involved stand in for the patients. This form of storytelling proves therapeutic for Kate, providing the first step towards an eventual acceptance of professional help.⁷⁴

Initially Kate is as tight-lipped about her experience in Vietnam as ever, but her partner insists they attend the veterans' conversation. A significant reversal in roles occurs in this novel. Aimee, who has only ever read about Vietnam in history books, is absolutely horrified by the recounting of bloodthirsty massacres from all parties involved and later comes to regret the experience.⁷⁵ Whereas Kate, at first resentful and fearful,⁷⁶ assumes an almost serene state of mind recollecting the events in Vietnam with her fellow veterans. Kate's initial reaction involves minimising the painful past and trivialising the situation. Upon being asked to share her story, Kate is resistant, '[s]he would not be ensnared in confessional melodrama,'⁷⁷ which contains two elements of interest: the adjective 'confessional' has religious connotations, such as the ritual confession of sins to a priest in Catholicism; it implies both the uncovering of secrets in an unrestrained manner, and the wish to receive forgiveness instead of punishment. The epithet 'melodrama' can be related to most of the lesbian detectives' attitude towards therapy, specifically sharing personal history, including Micky Knight, Robin Miller, and Carol Ashton, among others. Why is this attitude so pervasive? A couple of remarks at the beginning of this section anticipated this part of the analysis, but now further elaboration is needed.

⁷³ Katherine V. Forrest, *Liberty Square* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1996] 2013) Bella Books ebook

⁷⁴ Katherine V. Forrest, *High Desert* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, 2013) Google ebook

⁷⁵ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 46.

⁷⁶ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 32.

⁷⁷ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 85.

The impromptu therapy group session in *Liberty Square* discloses several issues between the lesbian sleuth and her position in the clinic. The main issue consists of the history of discrimination and pathologisation of queerness within the United States Army around the mid-twentieth century. The topic underlies the uncertain position of the protagonist in the military and, in respect to my argument, her uncertain position as an Insider to state institutions, as indicated by the following scene,

Aimee could not ask the question whose complete answer she was most anxious to know: what had it been like for Kate as a lesbian in the elite corps of America's military? She had asked Kate, of course, and Kate had been her usual unforthcoming self: "The men all believed women had no business whatsoever in the Marine Corps. If we were there it had to be because we were whores or lesbians. I watched out for myself."⁷⁸

How was army life for LGBT+ soldiers at the time? At the onset of World War II, Selective Service officials set strict qualification standards for military service; quoting Bérubé's invaluable research on the matter, 'the armed forces decided to exclude certain groups of Americans, including women, blacks [...], and—following the advice of psychiatrists—homosexuals. [...] Officials believed that they made poor combat soldiers, their presence in units would threaten morale and discipline.'⁷⁹ Historical research shows that it was psychiatrists and their increased influence on high military ranks which developed heteronormative screening procedures to discover and disqualify queer individuals. Increasingly, results of these screenings became sensationalist headlines in newspapers, pushing many patriotic men and women out of the closet. The screening procedure also forced military officials to create an administrative apparatus to diagnose, hospitalise, survey, interrogate, and discharge queer officials, as well as to conduct mass-indoctrination on the rest of the forces.⁸⁰

What happened in the World War II screening process is a clear illustration of how the deep anxieties about the threat of homosexual infection led to a detrimental diagnosis of appearance and behaviours. This not only relates to the first half of the chapter, which focused

⁷⁸ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, pp. 74-75.

⁷⁹ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, [1990] 2010), p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

on the historical context of queer trauma, but also with the overall argument of the thesis, in the context of the Insider/Outsider liminal position of the lesbian sleuth. The military is quintessentially an Insider position to state institutions, however the pathological treatment of non-heterosexual desire Other-ed queer soldiers, forcing them into a fragile, liminal position. The screening mentioned in the previous paragraph can also be closely related to crime fiction through its methodological examination of past events and motives. The screening process was meant to trace any signs of homosexual tendencies and prevent the spread of homosexuality/disease within the armed forces. In fact, heteronormative psychologists (or indeed any heteronormative citizen) meant to publicly expose homosexuals and let societal homophobia relegating them to the margins of society.

In a similar way, the literature of crime (especially the hard-boiled sub-genre) traces an on-going chain of violent criminal actions and its relationship to a contaminated social body, in order to isolate and purge the abnormality. By commenting on issues such as teen prostitution (*Sisters of the Road*), homophobia among the army and police ranks (*Liberty Square*, *Amateur City*), sexism and homophobia in pornography (*The Dog Collar Murders*), AIDS (*Crazy for Loving*), LGBT+ families (*Gaudí Afternoon*), and LGBT+ bar culture (*Murder at the Nightwood Bar*) the genre raises direct and challenging questions about the diagnosis that queer folks have been subjected to by the dominant social order and the dignity of lesbian experience, both as individuals and as community. From this perspective, Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction sits awkwardly in the literature of crime because for all the differences that may exist in terms of the recognition of the problematic nature of social reality depicted by any sub-genre, crime fiction generally sees little changes in the final narrative results, as the status quo, however unsatisfactory, is restored.

It is crucial to examine this screening process briefly because of two reasons. First, it solidified the notion of the homosexual as a pathological identity, not just the sexual act itself; and second, the military screening adopted theories of personality development and of degeneration, one of the main tenets of pathologised queerness indicated at the beginning of this chapter. Eugenics ranks human beings into hierarchical categories based on physical and behavioural characteristics deemed inferior or 'degenerate' by a generally white, heterosexual middle-class.⁸¹ Feminine characteristics were blacklisted as stigmata of degeneration in men, including broad hips, big pectorals, lack of body hair and muscles. 'Excessive' curiosity towards the same sex, 'excessive' embarrassment in the face of personal nudity, 'abnormal'

⁸¹ Bérubé, p. 13.

masturbation practices, as well as having been approached by gay men: the examinee had to withstand such lines of questioning and any out-of-the-norm response denoted homosexual tendencies and ineligibility for the service.⁸² These conditions applied to both sides of the Atlantic, as shown by Oram and Turnbull's research, stating '[p]sychoanalytic explanations (often in a very simplistic and negative form) were clearly in evidence among British medical commentators by the 1940s, alongside a continuing dual model of inherent and acquired homosexuality, which often had some reference to glandular abnormality.'⁸³ As this quote indicates Oram and Turnbull's research unearthed a backward-looking union between psychoanalytic interpretation of sexual behaviours and pseudo-scientific phrenology-like inspections which, albeit not referring specifically to military personnel, do compound the type of arbitrary criteria in the mid-century medical field around homosexuality.

Moreover, further questioning was dedicated to detecting 'sexual perversion,' namely any intimate homosexual contact the enlistee might have had.⁸⁴ Overwhelmed by the sheer need of war-time manpower, women also started to be accepted into the ranks *en masse*, but unlike men they were not asked questions about homosexual acts, and 'female masculinity, unlike male effeminacy, was not considered to be a disqualifying defect, reflecting the military's need for women who could perform traditionally male work.'⁸⁵ Therefore, there were no procedures in place for screening out lesbians at the stage of enlistment application, enabling thousands of lesbians to enter the ranks undetected. World War II efforts required unprecedented levels of manpower, which brought large numbers of homosexuals into the ranks and consequently under public's scrutiny.

Continuing with the analysis of *Liberty Square*'s central chapters, Forrest discusses the topic of queer troops with palpable criticism, which revolves around the character named Charles A. Pearson, a fellow soldier and homosexual man whom Kate loves dearly. Due to the highly hostile environment of the armed forces, the two orchestrate a fake engagement for self-protection, "[h]e found out there was speculation over his sexual identity," Kate told Carver and Duffy. "We got engaged to help each other out, to keep people off our backs."⁸⁶ Because of this bond, Kate is distraught when Charles suddenly disappears, and even more distraught when, at the end of the novel, the criminal reveals how a group of Marines had physically and sexually assaulted Charles, 'we knock[ed] him around some. And knowing Cap's queer and

⁸² Bérubé, p. 17.

⁸³ Oram and Turnbull, p. 95.

⁸⁴ Bérubé, pp. 13-14.

⁸⁵ Bérubé, p. 29.

⁸⁶ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 106.

all, we...ha[d] a little fun with him.’⁸⁷ Thus queer trauma is intertwined with war trauma in *Liberty Square*. Forrest turns attention to the thousands of queer troops who enlisted, many of them to escape local homophobia and oppression, only to find more aggressive oppression among the ranks they served with. The social commentary about the treatment of queer troops and its history encapsulates a wider argument of detective fiction involving the concept of degeneration of society mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

When the novels analysed for this thesis depict scenes of therapy, there is always an underlying discourse of trauma related to the profession of solving crimes. For a minority like the homosexual detective, policing society is added to the policing of one’s own workplace (usually against homophobia), which is then added to the tragic backstory of the protagonist. ‘I can’t afford to think about... some things. [...] My whole life’s been involved with death.’⁸⁸ This quote from Kate reveals why she loathes the idea of seeking psychological professional help, but it also reveals a principle embedded in the space of the clinic: an overwhelming presence of traumatic death which constantly threatens to infect the life of the protagonists, and sometimes succeeds.

Loss and grief permeate the background of lesbian detectives, and a possible explanation for this may be hidden in the metonymic representation of the protagonist as the lesbian community as a whole. From this perspective, the widespread death in the protagonist’s life may represent the heteronormative establishment encroaching into the queer community, leaving it wounded and bereft. This reading finds further support in the denouement found in a portion of early novels: forty-four out of a hundred novels examined for this thesis end with the life of the protagonist being threatened by the criminal, resulting in wounds for the protagonist and in the eventual death of the criminal. This emphasis on violent ends unveils the true nature of law enforcement officials who can, if needed, become legally sanctioned killers. Andrew Pepper aptly calls this type of detective stories ‘The States’ Unwilling Executioner’⁸⁹ referring specifically to the moral outrage of hard-boiled detectives penned by Dashiell Hammett, Chester Himes and Raymond Chandler. To some extent, the hard-boiled detective’s anger at the poisoning of American public life, this visceral reaction against the imperatives of state power and corporate capitalism⁹⁰ is similar to what lesbian detectives repress towards sexism, homophobia, and female objectification.

⁸⁷ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 162.

⁸⁸ Katherine V. Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1989] 2013), p. 136. Google ebook.

⁸⁹ Andrew Pepper, ‘The “Hard-boiled” Genre’, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 140-151, (p. 143).

⁹⁰ Pepper, p. 150.

Reversing the narrative of homosexuality as perverse sickness of civil society and illuminating these issues instead, the harsh light of the space of the clinic makes it all but impossible to sustain the classical detective novel image of detachment and objectivity. Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction tends to solve this tension by maintaining objectivity during the vast majority of the investigations, but having the criminal and the detective shift to violence towards the end. This type of resolution also reflects a deep-seated moral conflict in the lesbian community as an historically oppressed minority: on one hand is the wish to expunge evil from society, on the other hand is the overwhelming sense of injustice and discrimination. From this perspective, a reading can be advanced where the detectives are ritually killing off discrimination and oppression at the end of their stories in a cycle of hurt and comfort, with the detective protagonist constantly injured by wider community and healed by the lesbian one proved by the fact that after every violent final confrontation with the criminal, an epilogue follows where the protagonist is either resting in a hospital, or recuperating at home with friends and lovers. Metaphorically speaking then, the space of the clinic is inhabited both by the injured detective who prevented evil from prevailing, and by the lesbian community that cannot help but continue fighting against systemic sexism and heteronormativity.

The solitude of the lesbian sleuth in her liminality of Insider/Outsider reflects the isolation of an entity who is pulled by two opposing sides of society, the institutions bent on suppressing abnormality and dissent, and the reactionary minorities trying to grow and emancipate themselves in a hostile environment. In the heteronormative workplace the lesbian detective is often reminded of her Otherness, of her past classification as a pathological outlier, leading to a spartan rhythm of constantly trading insults with colleagues and suspects, of being doubted and singled out even by those she considered friends. In the case of the hard-boiled detective, his spartan lifestyle is 'a sign of his difference from the surrounding world, of his ability to remain untainted by it.'⁹¹ In contrast, the lesbian detective *cannot* remain untainted. She is caught in a double bind of societal bias, because of her gender and her sexuality, both from her colleagues and superior officers, and from the suspects and witnesses. Similarly, the lesbian detective restores local order, but she needs to rely on the rest of her community to change society overall. Both the lesbian and the hard-boiled detective can withstand physical violence valiantly, both retain linguistic authority over criminals, but only the male detective can get away with wisecracks in the workplace. Both detectives solve crimes to put the world

⁹¹ Messent, p. 38.

back in order,⁹² but this sense of successful agency is less pronounced for the lesbian detective because she could return home from having closed a case and still be discriminated against her butch appearance or demeanour. The window of respite is shorter and sometimes non-existent for the lesbian detective, emphasising her solitary challenge. A bleak reading of the medicalised queer identity thus reveals the lesbian detective as destined to fight a lost battle. She represents the sickness of society and is doomed to solitary ends.

3.5 AIDS in Anglo-American Lesbian Detective Fiction

From this point onwards the literary analysis of this chapter shifts from a focus on queer trauma originating from a pathological classification within psychology, to a focus on queer trauma as part of a medical history connecting the physical body of the homosexual to disease and infection. This section focuses on one of the main prejudices stemming from the AIDS epidemic and its significance for queer trauma and the position of the lesbian sleuth in the clinic. When the popular imagination latched onto AIDS as the so-called gay cancer this exacerbated the preconception of homosexuality as a disease of society, as the virus would spread from the “weaker” citizens (because tempted by homosexual practices), to the rest of society, this wave of infections can be shifted with the above-mentioned early twentieth century argument of homosexuality as a sign of degeneration and corruption of society.

Another tenet from the troubled history between sexuality and psychology is the prejudice concerning infectious sexual appetites; the idea that non-heterosexual desires somehow strips a person of their free will, tainting every form of intimacy under coercion just to fit a traditionalist agenda. The second tenet presented in this chapter connects this infection with the idea of degeneration of society, the prospect that abnormal minorities are bogging down humankind’s evolution. What better topic to show how authors counter these arguments than utilising their narrative of the AIDS epidemic? This section argues that Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction authors engage with AIDS both as a form of self-criticism and as a form of socio-political analysis and criticism. Additionally, AIDS can be closely related to the queer closet of the 1980s and the medicalisation of queerness.

Historically, AIDS has been the catalyst for the conflation of homosexuality with disease, death, decay, contagion, and destruction. It also had an impact on the way the LGBT+

⁹² Ibid.

community accessed and lived societal spaces; it constricted the spatialisation of gender and sexuality considerably as Neil Smith asserts in 1993, '[t]he political and professional response to AIDS has involved a hardening of spatial boundaries at all spatial scales.'⁹³ For a period of time considering AIDS meant correlating homosexuality with disease and degeneration. And as Susan Sontag demonstrates in her *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (2013) mystifying infectious diseases have historically been set against a backdrop of moral and psychological judgements.⁹⁴ What relations can be drawn between AIDS, the closet, and moral judgements of infectious illnesses? This section also argues that the researched novels contain important material on the representation of 1980s and 1990s anxieties about infectious unnatural desires and sexual practices as well as the perceived, potential acceleration of the degeneration of society. The prejudice of queerness as a spreading disease marring society's order has been examined in the first half of this chapter. However, this first half primarily dealt with scenes where the supposed pathology of homosexuality involves matters of the mind, whereas the second half of this chapter centres on AIDS, where the body emerges as the primary medium for authors to develop their symbolism of corruption, stigma, and healing. This section also ties back to detective fiction as a prime medium for social commentary about what exactly degeneration is and how minorities communities such as queer folks have suffered much from medicalised prejudice, as in the history of AIDS.

In the first years of the epidemic researchers stumbled in the dark. For the first four years of the epidemic the mode of transmission was unknown and left to speculation. This lack of solid ground was deeply frightening. AIDS is not connected to homosexuality or same-sex intimacy in any way, but because it was first officially recorded in male homosexuals and spread rapidly in the gay male community, AIDS and homosexuality became closely associated in the public imagination.⁹⁵ The moral, social, political, and legal stigmas attached to homosexuality came into play in the initial response to the epidemic. Consequently, in the main a dangerous trend surfaced where the victims and the gay community were blamed for their sexual identity. It is little wonder that lesbian authors, while coming from one of the least affected communities, felt the urge to speak up about this situation, to remind their contemporaries and educate future generations of readers.

⁹³ Neil Smith, 'Homeless/Global: Scaling Places', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. by Jon Bird and others (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 87-120, (p. 103).

⁹⁴ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin, 2013) Google ebook

⁹⁵ Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), p. 266. Google ebook.

In Sontag's research diseases and treatment are linked by warfare metaphors,⁹⁶ and taking inspiration from her analysis, the homophobic propaganda against AIDS in the early stages of the epidemic can be likened to a politically-charged exploitation of undesirables. Communist polemicists called Stalinism a cancer of society, Nazi propaganda did the same with Jews, and in modern thinking city life is pitted against the bucolic countryside as something debilitating, contaminated, unhealthy for society. As Sontag argues, '[t]o describe a phenomenon as a cancer is an incitement to violence.'⁹⁷ The use of cancer in political discourse encourages fatalism and justifies "severe" measures—as well as strongly reinforcing the widespread notion that the disease is necessarily fatal.'⁹⁸ The use of cancer to convey political meanings can be transposed to the treatment of homosexuality in twentieth century medicine, and the reverberations of this imagery are deep, long-standing and traumatising for a whole community.

The link between the initial prejudices against AIDS victims and the exacerbation of homophobia and the closet can be found in Sontag's disease/battle metaphors. As she writes, '[w]here once it was the physician who waged *bellum contra morbum*, the war against disease, now it's the whole society.'⁹⁹ This war was waged on two different fronts. On one side medical experts and the queer community fought against AIDS. On the other side there was homophobic propaganda against the threat of infection/rape by homosexual individuals to heterosexuals. This initial difference in reactions is what caused devastating delays in diagnostic and curative research. Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction's mention of AIDS is supportive, aspirational, subversive, and educational: supportive because it offers refuge and comfort to HIV-positive victims of discrimination, such as in *The Beverly Malibu* (1989);¹⁰⁰ aspirational because it offers scenarios of unity and sustained, meticulous prevention and education, such as in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987), with the lesbian club helping raising funds for AIDS research,¹⁰¹ or in *Death by the Riverside* (1990), where a gay club imposes the rule that every customer must be given a free condom and an informative pamphlet to enter the premises.¹⁰² Such scenes emphasise how the queer community was the only one who was knowledgeable about HIV transmission outside of medicine. The dominant culture of the 1980s

⁹⁶ Sontag, p. 77.

⁹⁷ Sontag, p. 65.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Sontag, p. 77, emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu*, p. 143.

¹⁰¹ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1987] 2011) Bella Books ebook

¹⁰² J. M. Redmann, *Death by the Riverside* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1990] 2009), p. 11. Bold Strokes ebook.

provided no social context on how straight or gay individuals could negotiate safe sex practices. Gay sexuality and female sexuality was viciously repressed, prophylactics were not advertised in mass media, and explicit sex education was not readily and publicly available. The negotiation of safe intercourse is something that the queer community inaugurated out of necessity and neglect.¹⁰³ Most importantly, in its discourse of AIDS Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction is subversive because the centre of the stage is occupied by the most marginalised, the HIV-infected individual.

It is noteworthy to point out how educated early novels are on the subject. In Redmann's first Micky Knight Mystery novel, *Death by the Riverside* (1990), the protagonist and her client infiltrate a gay club to retrieve a piece of evidence. The bar is appropriately well-informed and informative about the AIDS epidemic: '[t]he door people took my money and handed me a condom and a safe sex pamphlet. I just smiled at the bouncer and said no way was I going to have unsafe sex with any man.'¹⁰⁴ This quote is a reminder of the expedient and efficient way in which the queer community faced the epidemic historically; this level of preparedness reflects what happened during the early AIDS outbreak. When a retroviral theory of contagion was proposed in August 1982, gay doctors Calien and Berkowitz quickly compiled counter-measures based on it, publishing their manifesto 'How to Have Safe Sex in an Epidemic in New York' in 1983. This was the fastest and, as future developments proved, the safest response to the epidemic. Additionally, this response did not demand the halting of casual sex encounters, it simply advocated minimising the risk of transmission by the use of condoms,¹⁰⁵ which is what the scene in *Death by the Riverside* depicts. The door-men hand out information pamphlets to educate the community, but they also distribute free prophylactics in order not to lose customers to the fear of uncontrolled contagion. This distribution also reinforces that what is written on the pamphlets about safe sex practices is easy to enact and encourages a deeply scarred community to continue socialising.

Another consequence of the stigmatisation of the queer as a disease of society, and therefore deserving of AIDS, is a sort of crisis of spaces that many AIDS-affected queer individuals suffered. The consequences of widespread stigma at the level of spaces were visible as, among other phenomena, the closure of locales that were renowned queer meeting places. This cold-hearted panic was continuously fuelled by the press, as it spread unfounded fears,

¹⁰³ Sarah Schulman, *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan and Bush years* (London: Routledge, 2018), p. 124. Google ebook.

¹⁰⁴ Redmann, p. 11.

¹⁰⁵ Hegarty, p. 28.

misinformation, and paranoia:¹⁰⁶ at a social level, people with AIDS faced housing and job discrimination, as Forrest's *The Beverly Malibu* portrays, and parents boycotted schools with HIV-positive students and occasionally defaced their homes. An example of AIDS-related discrimination against children in a crisis of space can be found in Robin Miller's Mystery series novel *Under my Skin* (1993), where Beth and Dinah, partners of many years wish to adopt a baby and are screened by an homophobic social worker, '[the social worker] just sat there nodding impassively [...], she smiled and said she was sure we could adopt an AIDS baby or, and I quote, "another undesirable." But the "normal" babies were reserved for "normal" couples.'¹⁰⁷ In this quote there is also the wish, on the part of the establishment, to do something that will be described in full in the fourth and fifth chapters, that is isolating homosexuality to a harder, more restrictive way of life. In this way, if the lesbian couple adopted a baby with AIDS as the social worker suggests in the quote, they would not only suffer discrimination within business and social circles because of their same-sex partner, they would also need to deal with the prejudices attached to AIDS as a disease brought about by homosexual citizens, as well as considering potential psychological repercussions on their child and on themselves.

In Forrest's *The Beverly Malibu* the issue of the restriction of spaces for sick homosexuals is depicted briefly. The landlady of the Malibu apartment complex discusses the housing crisis of AIDS-affected individuals with Kate. Such digressions during the conversations between the detectives and the witnesses are common in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction. They are usually utilised to touch on socially relevant topics that are not relevant to the investigative plot. The primary source material continuously imbues its narratives with LGBT+ elements that on the whole are as important if not more important than the investigative plot. For example, authors divide characters into good and bad by how supportive or oppressive they are towards LGBT+ characters and issues. This occurs with the topic of AIDS too. The landlady who introduces the topic of the housing crisis for AIDS victims is a prime example. "'Cyril's with this group that's looking for places that don't cost an arm and a leg. For people with full-blown AIDS.'" She looked sternly at Kate. "I want to put two of 'em in that place upstairs. Jerome and me, we agree. What's going on about those people is a disgrace.'"¹⁰⁸ The landlady's decision to house them at old rates is a clear sign of support. Such scenes are reminders that the moral, social, political, and legal stigmas attached to homosexuality determined the initial response to the epidemic.

¹⁰⁶ Schulman, *My American History*.

¹⁰⁷ Maiman, p. 76.

¹⁰⁸ Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu*, p. 143.

3.5.1 The Criminal/Victim Dilemma in AIDS-related Investigations

Detective fiction taps into contemporary cultural anxieties about the vulnerability of the human body. The imagery of the body being slowly consumed by such an aggressive virus as HIV is as upsetting as potentially productive for crime writing. However, during the early outbreak of the epidemic people affected with AIDS were silenced, they had to combat both the physical and psychological exhaustion of the disease, as well as the overwhelmingly hostile social perception around it. It is within this two-sided battle, the biomedical and the sociocultural, that literatures of AIDS developed and operate. Early authors also took part in this wide-reaching challenge to representation, as lesbians stood witness to the suffering of the gay male community during the early stages of the outbreak.¹⁰⁹ From this perspective, there emerges a need to slightly shift the discussion of the relation between AIDS, queer trauma, the treatment of homosexuality as an infection disease and the spatiality of the lesbian sleuth in the physical and metaphorical space of the clinic. This section concludes the literary analysis of this chapter by specifically considering the bond between the lesbian sleuth, the sick criminal and/or victim. How does this bond impact the Insider/Outsider identity of the lesbian sleuth? This section delineates an answer based the historical and theoretical framework and on close literary interpretation, primarily of Maiman's and McNab's novels.

At the heart of the multi-faceted phenomenon of the discussion of AIDS in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction is one dominant outcry, the need to re-appropriate one own's community's narrative. The 1980s mainstream AIDS narrative corresponds to ignorant or homophobic mass-media coverage. This problematic discourse caused a definition of LGBT+ individuals based on an infectious disease, reinforcing the stereotype of homosexuality as an immoral act, one punished by an epidemic. Because the issues of human sexuality and issues in normalisation and othering are crucial to human experience, the researched novels prove to be historically relevant in the history of queer literature for its treatment of the AIDS epidemic. First, because of the steady presence of this disease in stories from its outbreak to current times. Second, because, as this thesis showcases, authors actively took issue with mainstream narratives of the disease, portraying the gay community's lonely suffering.

¹⁰⁹ Tim Dean and Steven Rusczycky, 'AIDS Literatures', in *The Cambridge History of Gay and Lesbian Literature*, ed. by E. L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) <10.1017/CHO9781139547376.046> p. 713.

Detecting in the age of AIDS necessarily calls for its own parameters of representation. There are two modes of representation for AIDS-infected bodies: either the victim dies violently in an act of murder and the infection is discovered through the coroner's report, or the victim finds out they have been infected and wants to discover the culprit. In both cases the border between law and order becomes muddled, as well as the border between victim and criminal. In the second novel of Maiman's Robin Miller Mystery series, *Crazy for Loving*, Robin is hired by Christine, a woman with AIDS who has been infected on purpose and wants to track down the perpetrator to let him know how much she detests and resents him. This is not a case of rape, of drug dealing, or of casual encounters in bar restrooms; the sexual encounters were all carried out consensually, but naturally the infecting was not. The spatial dimension of this novel shifts from the usual landscapes of streets and private houses to hospitals and clinics in one of the most representative cases of the investigator literally detecting the infection.

Initially Christine, the victim of this case, is only interested in forcing Mike, the criminal, to face her rage.¹¹⁰ Robin increasingly sides with Christine's revenge, and is convinced that this encounter is what Christine needs to move on and focus on healing, especially when Christine's commercial business is ostracised by her clientele, endangering her financial situation and the possibility of receiving the medical care she wants.¹¹¹ Robin asks a nurse friend to break confidentiality and reveal the location of the criminal, but the situation becomes thorny when Christine suddenly decides to take the matter to court, '[t]ell him I'm going public. Civil court, criminal court. [...] I'm going to spend my last days in style. At the bastard's expense. [...] I need money. I don't care if you use blackmail, just get me what I'm due.'¹¹²

The Mike-Christine case of *Crazy for Loving* merges the spaces of the detective's office and of the hospital, as well as moral and legal issues. Christine's right to have her case solved is weighed against Mike's doctor-patient confidentiality. If Robin were a common police officer, she would have had access to search warrants, ensuring that her inquiries into Mike's whereabouts respected his and other AIDS-affected patients' privacy. Instead, Robin needs to resort to begging her nurse friend to break confidentiality. On the other hand, if Robin were a police officer, such a low-priority case (in comparison to homicide or armed assault) would have been investigated much later, when Christine's condition would have worsened significantly, and the criminal would have likely been dead. When Christine decides to pursue

¹¹⁰ Maiman, p. 49.

¹¹¹ Maiman, p. 89.

¹¹² Maiman, p. 130.

a lawsuit against Mike, the space of the detective's workplace collides with the space of the hospital, for the first prioritises the will of the client and bringing justice to the so-called victim, while the latter prioritises the privacy and care of the patients. Not only does Christine decide to take the case to court, she also resorts to blackmail; in this way the space of the clinic sheds light on the true horror of disease, the way rational individuals are driven into a state of utter desperation by their sickness, which can lead to the infection of criminality within the non-criminal mind. Mike becomes a nihilist criminal with no regard for other people's safety because he himself is about to die, while Christine's dire financial situation prevents her from accessing adequate medication, prompting her to consider blackmail. In *Crazy for Loving Mike* embodies both the sickness and criminality, and by infecting Christine she is contaminated not only with AIDS but also with a criminal mindset. This is a prime example which represents how Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction utilises small-scale crimes in order to criticise a wide-scale flaw of society.

The emergence of proof that AIDS is transmitted through infected bodily fluids regardless of the sex of the parties involved sparked a renewed public indignation towards promiscuity. This led to widespread stigmatisation of HIV-positive individuals, as evidenced in McNab's Carol Ashton novel *Dead Certain*. 'Collis-Raeburn was HIV-positive, and it wasn't from a blood transfusion. [...] The family want it hushed up.'¹¹³ Raeburn, the victim of the novel, is initially characterised as someone whom the reader should sympathise with, and since Raeburn is a famous opera singer, McNab's commentary about the stigma of AIDS is more potent than in other novels analysed for this thesis where victims of AIDS are less prominent social figures. In the early 1990s the AIDS stigma was spread and perpetrated by misinformed mass media, and the loudest voices did not belong with the homosexual community.

Collis Raeburn, the victim of *Dead Certain*, is a bisexual man; however, since his homosexual dalliances cause more shock, he is labelled as homosexual by most of the characters in the novel. This is part of McNab's commentary on the AIDS epidemic and the flattening of identity it caused. Since homosexual men were not considered to be victims in the public imagination, even though Raeburn is the one who has been poisoned and asphyxiated to death, his family is embarrassed and ashamed, expecting Carol to conduct her investigation as quietly as possible. In a couple of scenes after the discovery of the victim's infection, McNab is more direct about criticising this social stigma through an interaction between Carol and her

¹¹³ Claire McNab, *Dead Certain* (Tallahassee FL: Bella Books, [1992] 2017), p. 16. Google ebook.

superior, '[d]on't need to tell you what will happen if Raeburn's HIV status gets out. We want to spare the family that.'¹¹⁴ These are the instructions given to Carol by the Commissioner of Police, to which Carol responds, '[w]hy not advise the family to pretend the virus was medically acquired? That'll gain shocked sympathy, not loathing and disgust...'¹¹⁵ Carol's bitter, sarcastic thought reflects the irreconciled connection between the clinic as refuge for the weak and sick, a supposed haven of society, and the vehement criticism that people affected by AIDS suffered. This conflict exacerbates the position of the lesbian detective as an Insider/Outsider due to her double identity of law enforcer and member of a community which has been historically defined as pathological.

McNab's treatment of AIDS in *Dead Certain* is a prime example of how the disease transformed gay writing. AIDS confronted the community with death on a scale previously unknown. The social panic that ensued spawned a representational matrix based on images and narratives of containment, designed to isolate the uninfected from the sick. McNab's brilliant writing style comes through in the fact that *Dead Certain* engages both with narratives of uncontrolled contagion and with this discourse of containment. Although one of the two killers of the novel is an ex-partner of the HIV+ victim, the second killer was actually infected by the first. And the text alludes to 'others,' potential victims of contagion who are ignorant of the risk they pose to their partners. By calling the ground zero character victim and by calling his partners (including one of the killers) victims, the literary analysis falters into what critic Paula Treichler called 'an epidemic of signification.'¹¹⁶ Dean and Rusczycky claim that AIDS literature, 'prompts fundamental questions concerning the politics and ethics of representation. How should one bear witness to a community's trauma, suffering, and death?'¹¹⁷

Authors of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction who published in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrated that they concerned themselves deeply with 'the politics and ethics of representation.'¹¹⁸ They depicted a community's trauma in a way that encourages repeated analysis and debate. This is well portrayed in *Dead Certain*, where McNab chooses to merge the figure of the villain and the victim in the Collis-Raeburn character. By portraying him as an 'egotistical monster' who continued having casual sexual relationships without warning his partners, he is imbued with murderous selfishness which stands out even more than the actual

¹¹⁴ McNab, *Dead Certain*, p. 18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Paula A. Treichler, 'AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification', *October*, 43 (1987), 31-70, p. 63.

¹¹⁷ Dean and Rusczycky, p. 713.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

criminals. However, the manner of this character's death is nothing but slow and agonising. He is drugged, his head is encased in a bag and he asphyxiates in his own fluids for hours.¹¹⁹ How deep is the stain of spreading HIV? What kind of punishments does it warrant? Carol is mildly sympathetic towards the killers in this novel. She advises them to plead not guilty and apply for bail, she also promises future support, 'I'll do everything I can to see that you get [bail]. That way you can spend more time together.'¹²⁰

Maiman's *Crazy for Loving* and McNab's *Dead Certain* are excellent examples of how the mainstream narrative of AIDS as homosexuality's divine punishment and infection is subverted. Typically, the traditional detective novel aims at establishing a linear, chronological sequence of events that will reveal the identity of the criminal, but in the AIDS narratives examined for this thesis, the thread of culpability disperses into the anonymity of nameless characters, such as ex-partners or sex workers. Apart from the individuals who purposefully infected others, like Mike Weber in *Crazy for Loving*, Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction individuates this culpability in the homophobic prejudice of deeming everything LGBT-related as sexual perversion. It is because of this prejudice that studies on AIDS were not funded,¹²¹ developed, or propagated properly in the first decade of the ravaging, leaving the LGBT+ community to struggle not only with an epidemic, but also with their own research and publicity. As Lillian Faderman's, and Riemer and Brown's research shows, the LGBT+ community was the first to mobilise activist groups such as ACT UP and Stop AIDS Now or Else, hijack medical conventions, and advocate the usage of experimental medical treatment, as well as preventive measures such as safe sexual practices. All these measures are amply represented in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction with a crucial underlying tone of criticism. Thus the thread of culpability encompasses all the complicit parties of the 1980s and 1990s homophobic paranoia.¹²²

As the scene quoted from Lauren Laurano series shows, when a lesbian who shares the traumatic experience of having been gang-raped (*My Sweet Untraceable You*) is told that homosexuality is just a shock-reaction to a wrong sexual experience, the space of the clinic sheds light on how, when LGBT+ individuals feel most vulnerable and most deserving of sympathy, they need to deal with prejudice and pathologisation instead of care.¹²³ People who

¹¹⁹ McNab, *Dead Certain*, pp. 150-154.

¹²⁰ McNab, *Dead Certain*, p. 150.

¹²¹ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), p. 505. Google ebook.

¹²² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution* and Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2019) Google ebook

¹²³ Caruth and Keenan, p. 257.

are ill would often like a chance to talk about it, to share their grievances and find a small dose of therapeutic comfort in the experience, but finding people willing to listen is often hard.¹²⁴ The long-term absence of safety and care that this diagnosis had for queer individuals is challenged, the benign mask behind which everyday discrimination operates is exposed. The collusion of some mental health professionals with this oppressive dominance (on-going in the presence of conversion therapy) has created homophobic narratives that 1980s and 1990s novels sought to dissipate. As Riemer and Brown cite in their research, ‘[a]rticles on the so-called “propensity” of gay men to be assault or murder victims do exist and were cited by such legislative homophobes as Jesse Helms and William Dannemeyer [...] as evidence that gays and lesbians bring such violence upon ourselves.’¹²⁵

3.6 Closing the Clinic

This chapter explored the way the history between the medical establishment and the LGBT+ community has influenced the representation of sickness in the source material under examination. The more nuanced lesbian detective novels fielded a critique of the heteronormative agenda of the medical establishment, mainly through a troubled protagonist haunted by the history of repression in her community and the pressure to perform the duty she sworn to the justice system. As Munt described the significant struggle of the lesbian sleuth against the establishment, ‘[f]ractured and fragmented *yet* authentic and autonomous, this fantasy figure provides a re-entry for the marginalized into society in order to regain power.’¹²⁶

This chapter argued that apart from the corporeal reality of a disease, there is also a long-lasting psychological scar for the minorities who have been wronged by the medical establishment and have been repressed for decades as mentally ill. As a consequence early lesbian detectives navigate the establishment of medical practice with deeply engrained uncertainty and anxiety for the hard-won dignity of her sexual identity. This chapter opened the space of the clinic to bring queer trauma, this background noise in the subconscious of the lesbian sleuth, to the foreground, to acknowledge the twentieth century diagnosis of the queer as psycho-sexually abnormal had long-lasting, subtle and unsubtle repercussions.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Riemer and Brown, p. 106.

¹²⁶ Munt, p. 58.

Chapter Four: The Home

This chapter examines the space of the home in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction. Using feminist literary criticism as a framework, this chapter focuses on the home as a means to understand the relationship between societal homophobia, criminality, lesbianism, and the home as the space that should let the lesbian protagonist live according to her true self. Grounded in physical and metaphorical appropriations of space, this chapter emphasises how social and cultural processes of oppression influence the behaviour of the protagonists in their homes. As with other spaces described in this thesis, the home also shows how early authors maintained a stable union of the detective and romance genre, while subverting both.

One of the most respected works in popular literature studies, Janice Radway's *Reading the Romance* (1984) argues that despite a pre-marital phase of seeming independence and adventure, romance marks out femininity as domestic, dependent, and sexually passive, focuses on a common structure of experience which generally excludes women from the public sphere, and finally presents the domestic as the core of modern society.¹ The home becomes the defining site for female individuality in a reverse of the emergence of the New Woman in Victorian times who rejected domesticity for excitement and a career. Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction sits in-between these attitudes; due to the half-mystery, half-romance nature of the sub-genre, the riveting chase is often punctuated by amorous bickering, and the protagonist's characterisation is also often torn between public and private spaces, as in Amanda Valentine's case (elucidated further down below).

Popular culture scholar Jay Dixon's study on city and country romance novels has also remarked on the spatiality of gendered movements in the genre in relation to urbanised settings: while the wives remain at home in the country, surrounded by the stable virtues of nature and domesticity, their husbands' work in the city leave them vulnerable to all sorts of heady temptations. In these novels, it is the women who provide domestic solidity and security for the fallible men,² while in the researched material the figure of the heroine as a stable, solid and secure entity is turned into a maelstrom of troubles. The lesbian sleuth is frequently on the move and alone, she is often threatened and assaulted, and, as examined in this chapter, she brings the hauntings of her job home with her, which, coupled with her inherent queer trauma,

¹ Janice Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, [1984] 1991).

² Jay Dixon, *The Romance Fiction of Mills & Boon, 1909-1990s* (London: Routledge, [1999] 2016) p. 58.

creates a unique setting in the genre. This is not to say that the presence of domestic settings in the primary source texts is a unique trait, as even in heterosexual crime fiction with a less cosy flavour, the combination of romance and crime solving is a staple, perhaps no more evident than in J. D. Robb's futuristic *In Death* (1995-) series. This features a NYPD detective, Eve Dallas, and her relationship with thief-turned-businessman Rourke. The, to date, sixty-three novels of the series regularly feature domestic scenes, with home featuring as both a sanctuary and one of the key crime-solving command centres.

Emblematic American investigative genres such as the police procedural and hard-boiled fiction highlighted the criminality of the city landscape, but early and especially female-authored American detection novels also focused on domestic mysteries, depicting, as Suzanne Young comments, 'a forgotten tradition of American mystery writing that combined scrutiny of domestic family arrangements with the emotional registers of traditional Gothic fiction.'³ Although this thesis does not interrogate the relation between traditional Gothic fiction and Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, Young's point about the home as a magnifying lens for gender critique is especially relevant for this chapter, as she engages with Catherine R. Nickerson's research in *The Web of Iniquity: Early Detective Fiction by American Women* (1998). Precisely, Young comments on Nickerson's focus on domestic detection novels indicating a connection between the home as crime scene, the uncertain position of female characters in the house, and the emotional registers of early Gothic fiction. This already intriguing point of view, clarified here by Young, has become a fundamental premise of the literary analysis carried out in this chapter, as she states,

[in the joint discussion of crime fiction, domestic spaces, and the Gothic tradition] we see how the presence of the female detective recasts both the Gothic's potential for gender critique in its depiction of women trapped in domestic spaces and the domestic novel's assertion of the home as the center of value against the public market economy.⁴

This viewpoint can be related to the home of the lesbian detective as this space could be the main sanctuary of the protagonist; the aspirational, utopic idea of a person's home is a site of emotional fulfilment and independence. Not that this is the case for people in real life but it is the stereotype that modern society projects on its citizens. The self-fulfilling, cohesive

³ Suzanne Young, 'The Simple Art of Detection: The Female Detective in Victorian and Contemporary Mystery Novels', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 47.2 (2001), 448-457, (p. 449).

⁴ Young, pp. 449-450.

family home is a social construct that has been built by a number of modern civilisations. Chris Weedon ties domestic heteronormativity to a pre-construction that appears ubiquitous, that appears as if it is common sense.⁵ Gender conventions are intrinsic to a family's common vocabulary, Weedon asserts, '[t]he ways in which norms of gender difference determine conventions of dress, play and social behaviour for girls and boys are familiar, as is the concern shown by parents over too extreme forms of "deviance" among "tomboys" and "sissies."' ⁶ Further on, Weedon sheds light on a fundamental premise of the argument of this thesis, that the idealised heteronormative society is extremely detrimental for the lesbian sleuth's psyche because it has intertwined itself with generally perceived normalcy,

the overriding concern of most parents in bringing up their children is with "normality", the normality necessary for future success in the two privileged sites of adult life, the family and work. This concern with socially defined normality will lead most parents to accept dominant definitions of the necessity and meaning of gender difference.⁷

Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction shows how heteronormativity warped the home into a space where the lesbian detective is riddled with self-doubts, self-worth issues, commitment issues (in 1980s and 1990s, in the countries where the novels analysed here set, gay marriage was not legalised), and struggles to remain dedicated to a profession which has been accessory to the enforcement of these misconceptions. In the researched sub-genre this illusory ideal is particularly fraught with issues; more often than not it becomes a space where the protagonist's subconscious erupts as an extension of the closet, another space where homophobia constricts the lesbian detective. This juxtaposition has already appeared in the chapter about the clinic but it bears reiterating because of the centrality of the heterosexual union in the aspirational idea of home held by conformist society. In hetero-sexist societies, the home is in fact the favoured place of female activity, in contrast to a wider, public masculine area of activity, promoted to the public by such popular products as romance novels, whose significance for the home of the lesbian detective will be expanded upon shortly.

⁵ Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 75.

⁶ Weedon, p. 76.

⁷ Ibid.

4.1 The Lesbian Home

As Neil Smith points out, the home ‘represents a spatialization of different social experiences, activities and functions or combinations thereof,’⁸ and this chapter examines just how different this spatialisation of social experiences is for lesbian detectives. Firstly, and most notably, the home of the lesbian detective is different from the home envisioned by the heteronormative aspirations of the nuclear family because the couple at its centre is not composed of a male and female.

The history of same-sex female unions has been studied by major researchers such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Lillian Faderman. The latter’s ground-breaking *Surpassing the Love of Men* (1981) traces romantic friendship and love between women from the Renaissance to the time of publication and arguably galvanised the field of queer studies into researching the spectrum of female homosociality and homosexuality. This drew attention to pre-twentieth century households based on lesbian unions, however long or short these cohabitations or marriages were, as in the case of Ann Lister or the Ladies of Llangollen in Great Britain and the Pierce-Smith household in New England. Because of the old-fashioned concept of female sexual fulfilment as intrinsically tied to heterosexual intimacy, these unions often were the target of public scrutiny and scandalised reproaches and thus were hidden behind ambiguous descriptions. In fact, historian Lisa L. Moore points out such elements in her analysis of Sarah Pierce’s poems, for instance when Pierce paints a lyrical portrait of her friend’s future marital house the imagery is covertly celebratory of secluded spaces and double-entendre expressions associated with female sexual intimacy.⁹

In *The Lesbian History Sourcebook* (2001) Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull offer dozens of extracts from literary sources to delineate a lesbian history mostly covering the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They dedicate the first half of the book to romantic friendships but none of the thirty sources cover the second half of the twentieth century. As Oram and Turnbull assert, even the sources presented must be regarded critically, especially considering the smokescreen applied by self- or external censoring from biographers or editors.¹⁰ Romantic friendship is a core concept in the discussion of the lesbian home because

⁸ Neil Smith, ‘Homeless/Global: Scaling Places’, in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. by Jon Bird and others (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 87-120, (p. 104).

⁹ Lisa L. Moore, ‘The Swan of Litchfield: Sarah Pierce and the Lesbian Landscape Poem’, in *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*, ed. by Thomas A. Foster (New York: New York University Press, 2007) pp. 253-278, (p. 257).

¹⁰ Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull, *The Lesbian History Sourcebook: Love and Sex between women in Britain from 1780 to 1970* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 50.

it has been at the centre of the male view of female sexuality until the beginning of the past century. Dominant beliefs attributed to women, especially of the middle and upper classes, a natural frigidity which justified men as the sole carrier of the active role in sexual matters and romantic friendships were thus widely acceptable bonds for women because they did not involve men as potential romantic rivals. Thus, lesbian relationships often had to exist alongside marriage, as in the case of Ann Lister's partners for instance, without the possibility of establishing one's own household.¹¹

Before the relaxing of gender and sexual mores post-World War II, same-sex households were created usually when women cross-dressed as men and used typically masculine names to sign the marriage contract, which was and is illegal and this is why many of the sources Oram and Turnbull cite are police reports. Among the notable cases they list are those of Sarah Holtom, who sheltered her girlfriend from public contempt by passing as her husband and father to her children for twenty years,¹² or novelist Nancy Spain (1917-1974) living with *She* magazine founder Joan Werner Laurie and her children for life,¹³ or finally the poet and novelist Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978) who lived together with Valentine Ackland for thirty-nine years, whose ethereal words, '[i]t is so natural to be hunted and intuitive. Feeling safe and respectable is much more of a strain,'¹⁴ encompass the feelings of many Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction characters. Oram and Turnbull's research also demonstrates that this unmasking of lesbian unions had a significant place in popular culture of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, regularly appearing in broadsheet ballads that were very widely distributed.¹⁵ As Oram and Turnbull point out,

[b]allads were used to report gossip and opinion about news, current affairs, politics, royal scandals, crimes and murders as well as human-interest stories. From the late nineteenth century, different media, the working-class Sunday papers and the mass-market popular press, took over this role of reporting oddities such as female husbands, as newsworthy entertainment.¹⁶

¹¹ Oram and Turnbull, p. 51.

¹² Oram and Turnbull, pp. 43-44.

¹³ Oram and Turnbull, p. 84.

¹⁴ Oram and Turnbull, p. 81.

¹⁵ Oram and Turnbull, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The many instances discussed by Oram and Turnbull of past domestic lives of lesbian individuals compound the sense of a history of hidden normalcy vis-à-vis the catastrophic consequences of revelation, which mostly conceptualised lesbian unions as entertainment and/or downplayed them as mere friendships.¹⁷ In this regard, not just the lesbian detective but the home of the lesbian detective itself comes from a history of liminality, an insider in societal bliss under the ruse of the masculine/feminine appearances of the parties involved, but an outsider to societal matrimonial life once the unmasking occurs. Early lesbian fiction often reverses this ruse, the domestic sub-plots' real target seems to be the heterosexual household, which is represented as a failed ideal, with detrimental consequences for minorities, as in the cases of Nilsen's twin sister and her boyfriend from Barbara Wilson's Pam Nilsen series, the Quillin household and Kate's brother's household from Katherine V. Forrest's Kate Delafield series, or Aunt Greta and Uncle Claude's family from J. M. Redmann's Micky Knight series.

If the crime novel emerges in response to the obliteration of life from the social group, the investigative process addresses this fear of social and geographical collapse. Similarly, if the coming out story emerges in response to the Otherness of an identity, the investigative process of Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction can be said to address this fear of social and geographical Otherness,¹⁸ as described in more detail in the following section. A fundamental human fear is disorientation, geographical and social, therefore because of the home's statutory heteronormative history, the sense of Otherness experienced by the lesbian sleuth even in domestic settings assumes a particularly tragic tinge.

4.2 The Home in Crime Fiction

The home ought to be the safest place for its inhabitants, yet it has been featured as the site of innumerable crimes since early crime fiction, its sacred grounds portrayed as riddled with death and hostile to the uncovering of truth. The city house crime scene narrative was explored by pioneers of the genre such as Edgar Allan Poe and Doyle, while the country house murder mystery was perfected by Golden Age master Agatha Christie.¹⁹ In crime literature the home has been the site of both disorder and murder and of detection, as it has been the juncture of

¹⁷ Oram and Turnbull, p. 53.

¹⁸ Stewart King, 'Place', in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Janice Allan and others (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 211-218, (p. 217).

¹⁹ Louise Harrington, 'P. D. James (1920-)', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) pp. 495-502, (p. 496).

the mystery and the romance plots, which is what interests me most in this chapter. Where the home is a point of focus for the mystery plot, such as in Miss Marple's or Nero Wolfe's case, who spend a significant portion of their time untangling the clue puzzle in the privacy of their abodes, the juxtaposition of the home with the image of the police precinct is not inaccurate. The same comparison will be made later in this chapter. The home as a pivotal point for the romance plot is a sporadic and recent trend in the genre, featuring prominently in the stories of Mary Russell and Roderick Alleyn of cozy crime fiction, whereas the home as pivoting setting of the plot features prominently in the sub-genre called domestic noir.

Coined by crime novels author Julia Crouch,²⁰ the domestic noir has a tendency to foreground the home and/or workplace, these seemingly 'safe' spaces, to reflect women's experience; as Crouch describes,

Domestic Noir [sic] takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants.²¹

In the Foreword to Laura Joyce's and Henry Sutton's *Domestic Noir* (2018), she further postulates,

[d]omestic noir puts the female experience at the centre. The main themes are family, motherhood, children, marriage, love, sex and betrayal. Setting is important: the home a character inhabits, and the way they inhabit it, can tell us as much about them as what they say or do. At the centre of these stories is a subversion of the idea of home as sanctuary. Home can also be a cage, a place of torment, of psychological tyranny, of violence.²²

Fiona Peters connects this definition with Patricia Highsmith's portrayal of the American suburban homes as oppressive spaces: 'deathly environments that stifled individuality and

²⁰ Laura Joyce, 'Introduction to *Domestic Noir*', in *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction* ed. by Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1-8, (p. 4).

²¹ Julia Crouch, 'Genre Bender' (2013) <<http://juliacrouch.co.uk/blog/genre-bender>> [accessed 3 June 2023].

²² Julia Crouch, 'Foreword: Notes from a Genre Bender', in *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, ed. by Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. v-viii, (p. vii).

creativity',²³ pointing to Edith Howland's emblematic descend into madness in *Edith's Diary* (1977), a literary antecedent of domestic noir. Once settled in the city's suburbs, Edith's life gradually narrows, her new home becomes a shackle, a limitation, rather than a safe space.²⁴ Finally, as Emma V. Miller asserts, in centring the narrative on female experience, '[d]omestic noir acknowledges and then explores the reality of female experience, [...] the treatment of the female characters, their experiences and the way they are responded to, echoes the social truth.'²⁵

The sub-genre under examination also centres the female experience, but by telling a mystery story, embroiled in romance and drama, from the perspective of same-sex desire, it subverts the codes and conventions found in typical heterosexual relationships which mould female subjectivity as the passive, inert, dutiful housewife. The lesbian protagonist re-casts the submissive role of the traditional female love interest by exposing how the orthodox representation of women as preternaturally nurturing and submissive is unreconcilable with social truth.²⁶ Domesticity in crime fiction easily stands out due to the coded association of the home with the story's crime from early crime literature. Leonard Cassuto's extensive study, for instance, focuses on sentimentality in hard-boiled fiction and substantially informed the interpretive key I formulated for this chapter; the relation between the home as fulcrum of heteronormative society and the position of the lesbian detective as an Insider/Outsider due to her double identity of law enforcer and sexually pathological. The sentimental movement Cassuto traces in hard-boiled fiction is said to epitomise the concerns of crime fiction with the stereotypical American family in a society where the family became the focus of law and politics. In this view an outlier such as the homosexual woman is generally seen as a malevolent enemy of the ideal nuclear family, and the contest between these two entities highlights the domestic concerns in early novels.

Detective fiction generally sees urban space as chaotic and in need of order; in his research on radical geography and detective fiction David Schmid asserts that '[d]etectives have widely varying degrees of success in systematising the chaotic city, but in the process, detective fiction exposes its readers to a fund of images of violent and disordered urban

²³ Fiona Peters, 'The Literary Antecedents of Domestic Noir', in *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction* ed. by Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 11-26, (p. 21), capitalised in original.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Emma V. Miller, "'How Much Do You Want to Pay for This Beauty?': Domestic Noir and the Active Turn in Feminist Crime Fiction', in *Domestic Noir: The New Face of 21st Century Crime Fiction*, ed. by Laura Joyce and Henry Sutton (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 89-114, (p. 90).

²⁶ Joanne Bishton, 'Subverting the Romance: The Fiction of Sarah Waters', in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*, ed. by Christine Berberich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 227-40, (p. 229).

spaces.’²⁷ He goes on to claim that detective fiction is an excellent source of ‘imaginative methodological models of how the various spaces of a city are connected through acts of violence, and how these connections indicate the spatializations of power within the city.’²⁸ This interpretive lens can be smoothly transposed to the home in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction due to the peculiar position of the detective protagonist. In this sub-genre the detective exposes the spatialisations of power that affect not just other individuals, but herself too. A comparison can be drawn between the lesbian detective and the hard-boiled one, but while the hard-boiled detective shows how he is inevitably dragged into the ‘violent and disordered’ urban corruption, the lesbian detective portrays how she is always-already embroiled by it and how this position affects her movement in all spaces of the narrative, including the home. Not even the home is excluded from the ‘acts of violence’ of the spatialisation of society, but in her case the lesbian detective fights a tri-headed spatial disorder: one is gender and sexuality bias, the second is the blurry boundary between criminality and immorality, a distinction which is especially relevant for the queer community, and third is the spatial disorder that the lesbian detective harbours within herself as an Insider/Outsider of society.

This thesis is focused on the role of the lesbian detective’s sexuality in so far as it is an element which enhances the author’s critique of their heteronormative society. From this, this thesis indicated psychological issues or advantages presented by lesbian detectives within certain spaces and how these issues/advantages enmesh with the mystery plot. This individual focus has thus largely set aside the fact that the researched material is a hybrid romance/mystery genre. As Joanne Bishton comments in her essay ‘Subverting the Romance: The Fiction of Sarah Waters,’ as a literary genre, romance is littered with manifestations of hetero-sexist ideology which ‘have contributed towards the Othering of the female form and female sexuality over a consistent period of time.’²⁹ Bishton interrogates the possibility of the romance genre as an appropriate form for lesbian representation and concludes that lesbian romance effectively subverts staple elements of conventional romance including ‘true love,’ ‘love at first sight,’ gendered binaries related to masculinity and femininity, such as assertive/passive, combative/nurturing, and the assumption that happy endings rightfully belong to heterosexual relationships Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction appropriates several features of

²⁷ David Schmid, ‘Imagining Safe Urban Space: The Contribution of Detective Fiction to Radical Geography’, *Antipode*, 27.3 (1995), 242-269, (p. 243).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Joanne Bishton, ‘Subverting the Romance: The Fiction of Sarah Waters’, in *The Bloomsbury Introduction to Popular Fiction*, ed. by Christine Berberich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) pp. 227-240, (p. 227).

conventional romance to sustain the readers' attention, including miscommunication, misunderstandings, re-appearing ex-lovers, cheating and forgiveness. However, other fundamental elements of romance are scarcely or not at all utilised, such as the emphasis on youth and beauty, hetero-sexist behavioural binaries, and even happy endings.³⁰ The majority of the series read for this thesis do depict happy endings, but two notable instances stand out: as of the writing of this thesis, Forrest's Kate and Aimee are separated due to Kate's issues with being closeted, alcoholic, and open about her feelings; Redmann's Micky and Cordelia cheated on one another and separated. Moreover, lesbian detectives tend to be in their 40s, their appearance is not remarked upon by secondary characters, and the dynamics of their home lives cannot be categorised in gendered binaries.

The home of early lesbian detectives contains within traces of the history of homophobia that implanted queer trauma in the protagonists' psyche. As this chapter shows, it also contains the struggles of the lesbian detectives to overcome this psychological scar. From this perspective, early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction is the opposite of the traditional detective novel of the turn of the century where the protagonist embodies the success of the pre-established law and order. Doyle for instance suspends a critique of the capitalist city and of the ways in which it regulates various forms of crime, opting instead to portray crime as the action of rotten apples within an otherwise just and well-ordered society. Though Doyle and other authors of classical detective fiction have availed themselves of foreigners and representatives of minoritarian societal mores, comments on these characters' identity are more the result of the author's ideology rather than part of an attentive critique. As Schmid comments, twentieth century crime fiction developed a sustained discourse about identity and minority scapegoating in its second half, '[t]hrough the scapegoating of such groups as immigrants, welfare mothers and young people of color, politicians and police divert attention away from the systemic factors that produce violence, despair and poverty.'³¹

In feminist and lesbian activist history though, this dominant interpretation of social (dis)order is continuously denounced and challenged, its criticism continuing in literary production, including in this sub-genre. Similarly to Raymond Chandler's, Chester Himes', and Sara Paretsky's symptomatic view of crime, the criminal is just a part of the whole rotten society and represents larger structures of oppression in a capitalist, racist, patriarchal establishment. But since the person pursuing this evil is the lesbian detective, who is also at the

³⁰ Bishton, p. 228.

³¹ Schmid, p. 248.

mercy of the scapegoating propaganda, she is both enforcer and victim of the spatialisation of power that Schmid writes about. By reducing the scope from the city to the home, it is evident that early lesbian fiction authors have strived to denounce the imbalanced position which lesbian citizens are reduced to, and to make this peculiar position even clearer authors lingered on the space of the lesbian detective's home.

4.2.1 Perception and Deception in the Patriarchal Home

This section spurs the debate about how the home of the protagonist is located at the boundary between Us and Other due to her sexuality and to the same-sex relationship at the core of the lesbian home, despite the protagonist's role as a law enforcer. Moreover, the abusive home of the lesbian victim illustrates how the victim's displacement from her childhood home to the lesbian bar mirrors the protagonist's displacement from an isolated individual to the member of a community which resists narratives of social control, embodied by the criminal of the novel.³²

The home should be a space where a person is unencumbered by societal inhibitions, but for homosexual people who experience familial homophobia in their childhood and adolescence, the home is another space where social scrutiny judges them. For lesbian detectives whose sexual identity has been overtly or covertly oppressed in their youth, societal scrutiny is enhanced by their profession. Previous chapters have argued that Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction authors denounce homophobia by showing how lesbianism is incorporated into what conformist society considers criminal behaviour, and how this produces the protagonists' multi-faceted characterisation that emerges from the way they navigate certain spaces. This chapter argues that the home is the most complicated space to analyse because nowhere else is this conflict more apparent. This space of promised bliss hides numerous psychological shadows and the protagonists are constantly pulled between the desire to live freely and not conceal themselves behind the veil of normalcy, and the fear of being pulled apart by constantly going back and forth between their real selves in the home and society's image of the heterosexual female detective outside the home.

³² Dory Quillin's story as a victim of abuse who finds refuge in lesbian bars is mirrored in Knight's background story, but also in Stoner McTavish's move from her hetero-sexist parental home to her Aunt Hermione's house because the latter is a lesbian feminist.

In the novels analysed in this thesis the past experiences of familial neglect and homophobia lead the characters to be highly critical of their parents and their heteronormative principles, creating a They-Us discourse. Within this discourse the Us is the homosexual couple and their domestic domain and They/Other is the dangerous, toxic mentality of the parents and of society at large; this subverts the usual reading of the home because the Us is not the traditional heterosexual nuclear family anymore and the They/Other is not the psycho-sexually confused homosexual, as is usually portrayed in mainstream popular culture. From this perspective, Young's reading of Gothic domesticity as a manifestation of gender imprisonment due to excessive inequality between the genders' socio-economic statuses can be related to the home in the researched texts as a manifestation of sexuality imprisonment due to excessive inequality between heterosexual and homosexual identities.

As the pillar of the nuclear family, the home is a problematic space when analysing homosexual female characters. The home is a fundamental site of inter-gender relations negotiations; as Smith summarises, '[i]nternally, the home is a contested zone, especially in gender terms, with the wider, socially sanctioned authority of men pitted, in numerous cultures, against the authority of women rooted in the routine of the home.'³³ The home is the locus of the family, a social structure which has historically offered power to the male members of the household, while the wife/mother is relegated to supportive roles such as socialising the children and aiding the patriarch's accomplishments.³⁴ Moreover, the law has been biased towards the household's patriarch, bestowing him with a veritable monopoly of domestic privileges, thus turning the home into a bastion of sexism and heteronormativity, held together by the discourse of power between the sexes.³⁵

This section analyses how the lesbian detective navigates the space of the home in all novels from the Micky Knight series, focusing on the shift from the bayou to the city and how this displacement, combined with familial homophobia, develops into a general sense of displacement for the protagonist's lesbian identity. The solitude of Rose Beecham's Amanda Valentine's home will be analysed as an apt example of the consequence of the spatialisation of social control combined with the displacement of expatriates and emigrants (in Amanda Valentine's case she moves from the United States, her mother's home-country, to New Zealand, her father's home-country). The homes in Laurie R. King's Kate Martinelli series and

³³ Smith, p. 87.

³⁴ Weedon, p. 19.

³⁵ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, [1984] 1990)

in Sandra Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano series are similar because they juxtapose multiple spaces (workplace, closet, and clinic) which have already been described as problematising the lesbian identity, but they are all confined in the home.

4.3 The Numerous Homes of Micky Knight

The majority of early protagonists under examination are mature in age, their domestic lives are marred by self-doubts, fears about losing independence over a committed relationship, concerns about coming out, and anxieties about how to reconcile their yearning for domestic peace while also appeasing the worries of their partners about their dangerous line of work. This creates an uneasy balance between features of the romance genre and of detective fiction, with the figure of the lesbian detective situating itself at the end of an awkward history for female protagonist in both genres. As Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan write on mid-twentieth century heterosexual female detective protagonists, '[i]n England and America during the 1930s and 1940s women, especially if unmarried or widowed, seem to have aged even more quickly in detective stories than in romantic fiction —where a woman's usefulness to the plot generally tended to fizzle out well before she was thirty.'³⁶ This premature aging is most visible in the Micky Knight novels.

Micky's consistent characterisation as a hard-boiled lesbian detective derives mainly from the shift from the outskirts to the city, and from one house to another within the city. As Smith comments, '[t]he city, the contemporary metropolis, is for many the chosen metaphor for the experience of the modern world [...] the figure of the city, as both a real and an imaginary place, apparently provides a ready map for reading, interpretation and comprehension.'³⁷ The Micky Knight Mystery series' eponymous protagonist is characterised by the contrast between the excessive oppressiveness of the home she inhabits and the liberating nature of the metaphorical homelessness inherent to the hard-boiled detective. Smith comments on the gender bias in the home in terms of layers of geographical scales,

³⁶ Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1981), p. 84.

³⁷ Iain Chambers, 'Cities Without Maps', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. by Jon Bird and others (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 188-199, (p. 188).

[i]f the interest of men lies largely in containing women within the home, the interest of women lies more in extending the power and pride experienced in the home to higher geographical scales. [...] Although it was suggested that the scale of the body defines the site of personal identity, the scale of the home provides the most immediate context within which this takes place. Homelessness is a dramatic loss of power over the way in which one's identity is constructed, since the home no longer shields from the public gaze.³⁸

The movements of lesbian detectives in key spaces is entwined with 'higher geographical scales' of class, racial, gender, and sexuality relations, evidenced by how Micky's homes can easily be analysed under the perspective of a prison, more precisely as a means for *containing* lesbian sexuality. In the process of moving through numerous homes, Micky gradually strengthens her body and psyche to withstand the challenges of her personal and professional life. '[T]he scale of the body' defining 'the site of personal identity' is a particularly useful interpretive key for this series because as a hard-boiled protagonist Micky's body is coded as the repository of brutal restrictive measures by heterosexual male authority. After being moved from her childhood home, Micky's body becomes the only home she can trust, but after her body is violated by her cousin, even this home is no longer safe, which affects Micky's psyche deeply.

Written by American author J. M. Redmann (1955-), the Micky Knight Mystery series (1990-2019) is written in the hard-boiled style, set in New Orleans between 1969 and 2005, and composed of ten novels. Michele "Micky" Knight is the daughter of Helen Mikatos, a young Greek immigrant, and Cajun-Native American Claude Robedeaux, who raped Helen when she was sixteen. A married man, Claude chooses his family over Helen, who is disowned by her parents as a consequence. Alone and penniless, Helen decides to keep the baby thanks to the support of Claude's brother, who becomes Micky's adoptive father. Micky however knows nothing of this past until well into her adulthood, and this ignorance lays the foundation for Micky's childhood home as a place of comfort but also ultimately abandonment, somewhere she lives in an adrift state, searching for something unfindable.

Micky's childhood home, a shack in bayou St. Jack, is introduced in *Murder by the Riverside* when Micky's office, which occupies the day area of her apartment, is ransacked by members of an organised criminal organisation irked by Micky's investigation into their affairs.

³⁸ Smith, p. 87.

This is a common scenario within the hard-boiled genre, as John G. Cawelti comments, '[because] the hard-boiled detective embodies the threat of judgment and execution as well as exposure, the pressure against his investigation is invariably more violent than in the classical story.'³⁹ This violence includes burglary, drugging, assault, capture, attempted assassination, and in the case of female detectives, rape, portraying the hard-boiled detective as a "tough guy," accustomed to a world of bloodshed, corruption, and treachery.⁴⁰ In the classical hard-boiled trope, the detective is expected to numb their pain with alcohol and prowl the streets again on the morrow, but Micky leaves the 'dirty and cacophonous'⁴¹ city to recuperate in the family's bayou St. Jack shack at the edge of New Orleans. In *Murder by the Riverside* this childhood home is introduced at sundown, but contrarily to the menacing darkness of urban corners, the darkness here is comforting and familiar. Concrete and metal are replaced by boards and dirt, New Orleans' maze of buildings is replaced by 'the moon glistening on [the] waters, the marsh stretching off to the horizon,'⁴² and the car horns, sirens, and drunken nightly noises are replaced by the nostalgic sound of crickets, which evoke fatherly love as is shown in Micky's thoughts, 'my dad always used to tell me that those crickets and bullfrogs were singing a lullaby for me to sleep by.'⁴³

Micky's mother and adoptive father represent the lost loving family, lingering in the run-down yet comforting shack, which also stands in contrast to the chaotic, perilous city apartment, depicting Micky's uncertain and violent adult life. The shack lacks modern amenities like electricity and hot water, but is filled with the comforting atmosphere of a nostalgic childhood, while the city apartment is sparse like Micky's emotional adult life, 'I lived a spare existence here [in the city]. [The mob] hadn't done a lot of damage because there wasn't a lot to damage.'⁴⁴ Opposingly, the run-down bayou St. Jack shack is filled with precious emotions and memories, including the bittersweet feeling of loss of innocence, 'I couldn't let go of the shipyard because it had been such a battle with Aunt Greta to keep it. And because...I felt there was something still here, something unfinished. But I wasn't sure what. Somehow that made it all the harder for me to be here.'⁴⁵ The 'unfinished' business Micky refers to here is the truth behind her conception and her parents' relationship, which

³⁹ John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 143.

⁴⁰ Cawelti, p. 149.

⁴¹ J. M. Redmann, *Death by the Riverside* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1990] 2009), p. 125. Bold Strokes ebook.

⁴² Redmann, *Death by the Riverside*, p. 124.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Redmann, *Death by the Riverside*, p. 123.

⁴⁵ Redmann, *Death by the Riverside*, p. 124.

causes the shack to lose some its childhood-tinted lustre and for Micky to make her peace with that part of her family's history.

The contrast between the city and the countryside is a well-navigated trope in literature. In the Micky Knight series though, the contrast is not so much between New Orleans and the surrounding marshes, but between traumatic and safe homes. Micky's homes are emblematic of a type of characterisation (for the protagonist specifically) commonly found among early novels. Micky's movement from the childhood shack in the bayous outside New Orleans to the middle-class nuclear family household in the city does not equal a shift in attitude or worldview, as she retains a strong sense of periphery, both in terms of being proud of her origins and in terms of identifying as an outsider (homosexual) stepping into a different world (hetero-sexist society). This movement can be compared to the shift of the lesbian detective from being a lesbian, a member of an oppressed minority, to being a detective, dedicated to enforcing the law, but still retaining her status of outsider in the eyes of conformist society. This reading is inspired by a quote from Lorne Foster's work on Detroit-based crime novels, in which she states that the contrast of periphery/wilderness and city/civility is

a bit naïve. Mutually compensatory exchanges still exist; but to rely on one's mutuality with others in the great city can be deadly. The civilized man in the great city is a man ripe for the picking. Furthermore, there is a feeling that if you can live marginally, on the fringe of the city, you can go anywhere.⁴⁶

Foster argues that protagonists who flourish in the metropolitan environment equip themselves 'to bracket conventional rules of conduct when necessary in order to negotiate the vicissitudes of the urban terrain.'⁴⁷

By the time Micky is ten her mother has abandoned her and her adoptive father has died, so Micky is taken in by Uncle Claude (unknown to her, her biological father) and moves into the city centre. Uncle Claude is a meek, defeated man trapped in a loveless marriage, barely acknowledging Micky's existence, while Aunt Greta is a homophobe and a religious fanatic who suspects Micky's sexuality of being unnatural and constantly points at Micky when in need of a scapegoat. Claude and Greta have three children: Bayard is an arrogant sadist

⁴⁶ Lorne Foster, 'City Primeval: High Noon in Elmore Leonard's Detroit', in *Writing the City: Eden, Babylon and the New Jerusalem*, ed. by Peter Preston and Paul Simpson-Housley (London: Routledge, 1994) pp. 125-148, (p. 138).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

misogynist who physically, verbally, and sexually abuses Micky, and thanks to his status of firstborn male is never reprimanded for anything. Bayard's two younger sisters are polar opposites of what Greta wanted from her female offspring: the older is passive and subservient to males, but also embarrassingly weak-willed, while the youngest is as strong-willed as Greta, but embarrassingly promiscuous, becoming a single teenage mother. The author's criticism of post-War middle America is elaborated in full here, with Aunt Greta standing in for the average 1970s American middle-class citizen who felt that they had a special calling to represent the heterosexual nuclear family; even if she alienated both of her daughters and destroyed her acquired daughter's psyche in the process.

Aunt Greta puts Micky down at any available opportunity, for instance creating imaginary links between Micky's sexuality and negative social situations, 'I was too tall, too dark, [...] I had always been left on the sidelines at school dances. Aunt Greta thinks I became a lesbian because there was no one to dance with me in high school.'⁴⁸ In this quotation the feeling of social abandonment is arbitrarily compounded with Micky's homosexuality, forming the basis for future self-destructive self-effacement tendencies that Micky perpetrates during adulthood. In twentieth century American crime fiction, as the city population is progressively more diversified, such diversity leads to the Other, such as a minority, deemed outside the community, as Richard Lehan comments, 'in mythic-symbolic terms, an embodiment of the Other is the mysterious stranger—the Dionysus figure in the early city, the mysterious man from nowhere, who disrupts the city from within.'⁴⁹ Micky represents part of a diverse society that the conformist establishment, represented by Aunt Greta's household, turns into the Other through psychological and physical abuse. By tracing Micky's life through the homes she lives, she emerges as the epitome of the Othering process perpetrated by heteronormative society through domestic neglect and abuse.

At a simplistic level of interpretation, it can be said that Redmann's handling of Aunt Greta's household is a subversive turn for crime fiction, as such a family history as Micky's would be prime material for a lone wolf, revenge style plot. In police procedurals and more in hard-boiled fiction the dark history of the protagonist becomes a future case or a re-opened cold case to explore past trauma and find closure. In Jaye Maiman's Robin Miller series for instance, the plot of *Old Black Magic* (1997) pivots on the search for the serial killer who murders the wife of Robin's father figure, Detective Thomas Ryan. Detective Ryan has secretly

⁴⁸ Redmann, *Death by the Riverside*, p. 50.

⁴⁹ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 8.

continued to gather evidence for nine years and shows obsessive attention to any similarities to this personal case, and one would assume that Micky would do the same, but this is not the case. Her iron will at apprehending criminals seems to contradict her lack of retaliation towards the wrongs she suffered in the past, but is in fact consistent with the genre trend of protagonists with well-rounded if troubled psyches. As epitomised in Micky's characterisation, in front of abuse perpetrated by heteronormative, patriarchal power, the researched sub-genre performs a double operation, as aptly described by Sally R. Munt, 'a primary, political gesture of making visible abuse in a non-sensationalist way, and a secondary one of reassuring readers and victims of abuse that resolution and recovery is possible.'⁵⁰

This narrative style is embedded in the historical background of 1980s and 1990s United States, riding the wave of 1960s and 1970s feminist and queer activist projects such as humanistic therapies, an emergent encouragement for women to seek out psychotherapy as a way of making sense of and resolve the pain of heteronormative and patriarchal abuse. Indeed during these decades a culture of women's support and counselling blossomed to life, powering a plethora of helplines and support groups.⁵¹ Therefore, even in the story of Micky's bleak, stoic, hard-boiled protagonist where there is only one vague mention about Micky undergoing therapy, the whole process of her remembering and making sense of the cruelty she suffered as a child and teenager because of her sexual orientation can be considered therapeutic. Therapeutic not simply meaning healing here, but resembling the trudging steep slope that is real-life mental health treatment, which is riddled with self-doubts, contradictions, and setbacks. In this way the analysis of Micky's troubled relationship with the homes she navigates showcases how deep-seated queer trauma informs the characterisation of the lesbian detective.

Due to the abuse received in Aunt Greta's household, it would be safe to assume that Micky would turn her back on the abusive heteronormative household to find safety and comfort in the lesbian community, but the author complicates Micky's characterisation by introducing new psychological issues and rendering the relationship between the lesbian detective and the lesbian community ambiguous. For Micky, fear is the predominant state of being in Aunt Greta's household:

[f]ear of discovery was constant. [...] I was left with a secret I could share with no one during those long school days. But I had learned of the bars in the French Quarter, and

⁵⁰ Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 149.

⁵¹ Munt, p. 150.

I was tall enough to get in. [...] sex is what connected me to the women I met in those bars.⁵²

Fear isolates Micky in Aunt Greta's household but also among her peers; the fact that Micky has no one to dance with at school balls is not due to her abnormal sexuality, as Aunt Greta believes, but is one of the consequences of Micky's abnormal home setting. Moreover, the level of hostility in Micky's home drives her out to seek a home in other environments, and Micky finds one in the 'bars in the French Quarter,' the lesbian bars. There is no need to indulge in these spaces, since, contrary to the representation of lesbian bars in the Kate Delafield or the Amanda Valentine Mystery series, they do not provide the protagonist with a found home or found family. The relation between Micky and these spaces is utterly practical and based on the fulfilment of sexual desires and the basic need of human(e) contact. The line 'I was tall enough to get in' signifies that the shift of Micky's home space from Aunt Greta's household to the bars occurs during her early teens. Spending her teenage years without any psychological support, it is no wonder that Micky creates two pillars to sustain her home, the first being alcohol and the second being casual sex. This quote enhances one major aspect of the home in this series, the element of domestic fear, which recalls the domestic-focused Gothic genre mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

As Lyn Pykett points out, early Gothic novels are a form of sensational fiction featuring crimes, evidenced in examples such as *Dombey and Son* (1848), *Bleak House* (1852-3), *Jane Eyre* (1847), and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848). In sensation novels the scene of the crime is more likely to be the home rather than on a street corner or the drinking den, as these novels did not depict the criminal underworld but the 'dark underside of respectable society.'⁵³ In such plots the family is the locus of crime, family secrets are responsible for most of the plot points, and crime and punishment circulate all within the family.⁵⁴ The second element does not pertain to Micky's homes, but the first and third elements justify a thread connecting the subjugated female sexuality of Gothic fiction, the self-regulated criminal family of sensation fiction, and the home in the Micky Knight series. Moreover, while in much traditional crime fiction the detective is an outsider who witnesses the family's self-regulating system and walks away, back to his normal life, as in Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), the lesbian detective

⁵² J. M. Redmann, *The Intersection of Law and Desire* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1995] 2009), p. 192. Bold Strokes ebook.

⁵³ Lyn Pykett, 'The Newgate Novel and Sensation Fiction, 1830-1868', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp. 19-39, (p. 33).

⁵⁴ Pykett, pp. 33-34.

cannot detach herself from the aftermath of the homophobic family because she continues to carry with her the same crime that was perpetrated on somebody else. This is the case of Micky, who never receives justice for the treatment she suffered at the hands of Aunt Greta's household, as is the case for the Quillins' household in Forrest's *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987), as will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

The lesbian bars become fundamental in providing Micky with a sense of community, as shown in this passage where Micky struggles with suicidal thoughts vis-à-vis the encompassing love of the LGBT+ community:

[m]y high school years, I tried not to think of them. The [pride] parades saved me on occasion. I remember clearly, all too clearly, once thinking I could just step in front of that truck and it would all end. All the misery, the despair of knowing I was so far out of place—queer, taken in by family that didn't want me, olive skin and black curly hair, not a fair child of the suburbs, but a bastard bayou rat. It seemed there was no place in the world for me. Except at the parades, and later the gay end of the French Quarter.⁵⁵

As Smith argues about community spatiality, '[c]ommunities are socially defined and can take very different spatial forms. Working-class communities in contemporary, advanced, capitalist cities may be broadly homologous with the spatial confines of a neighbourhood.'⁵⁶ Neighbourhood implies an open, public space when individuals intermingle and may establish a web of bonds.

As will be expanded upon in the following chapter, in the historical context of early crime fiction LGBT+ individuals did not have the luxury of such freedom of movement, thus community life gravitated towards gay bars. These locales became the preferential site for social interaction and became so pervasive within queer social life that the identity and spatial boundaries of the community were most distinct here. However, Redmann avoids portraying any scene of solace for Micky in these bars; they are not a miracle cure for the protagonist's trauma. First, this development would have been detrimental for Redmann's hard-boiled atmosphere; second, it demonstrates Redmann's attentiveness to a realistic character portrayal: if the lesbian bars had become a safe haven where Micky could shed her jaded self and heal, this would have been an idealised conceptualisation of this space and it would not have fit into

⁵⁵ J. M. Redmann, *The Girl on the Edge of Summer*, (New York: Bold Strokes Books, 2017), p. 18. Google ebook.

⁵⁶ Smith, p. 106.

the rest of the series. The fact that a teenaged Micky becomes an avid bar-goer to seek out sexual intimacy in lieu of friendly human touch reinforces the argument that queer trauma lays the foundation for her character. The sexual abuse in the home environment coupled with this early entry into an adult setting further distorts Micky's relationship with sexuality, which is reflected in the last line of the quote. The emphasis on the carnal rather than emotional aspect of intimacy is representative of the troubled relationship Micky has with her own sexuality as consequence of the abuse she suffered.

The predominance of sex in Micky's time spent in lesbian bars symbolises a detachment between sexual desire and emotions, the tragic consequence of which is the collapse of Micky's relationship with Cordelia. Sex is too tightly intertwined in Micky's home space; at first it represents the horror of her institutional home (Aunt Greta's household), then it stands for the only comforting touch Micky obtains in her found family/found home (the lesbian bars), and later, in order to protect her psyche from potential future abuse, sex becomes the only deep connection Micky is willing to make with other human beings. This reading is sustained by tracing the timeline of the role of sex and sexuality in Micky's homes. It is absent in her childhood home, but as mentioned, during Micky's high school years there emerge the abuse from Cousin Bayard and the introduction of one-night stands through the lesbian bars. In the last year of high school Micky is taken in by an older lesbian woman, Emma Auerbach, who is a genuinely caring person, but Micky constantly expects to be asked to exchange sexual favours for lodging. In *Deaths of Jocasta* Micky recalls an encounter with Cousin Bayard during the time she was sheltered by Emma, and as Micky's move out of her home signified that Bayard lost the object of his one-sided sexual fulfilment, he reinforced Micky's fears by insinuating that Emma expected sexual favours in exchange for lodging.⁵⁷ Bayard's reinforcement of Micky's subconscious fear problematises even this safe haven for Micky:

[b]ut he had planted something corrupt and contaminated. It wasn't until after college, after the hold I thought Emma had on me was gone, only after it hadn't happened and hadn't happened over and over again, that I could believe it wouldn't happen. But before time had taught me trust, whenever she put her hand on my arm, as she had just now, I would wonder, is this it?

⁵⁷ J. M. Redmann, *Deaths of Jocasta* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1992] 2009), p. 24. Bold Strokes ebook.

If Emma had ever had any sexual thoughts about me, she never showed them. I doubted she did. Now. Now I trusted her. Now I knew better. By the time I finally knew she didn't want sex with me, I had pulled back and stiffened too many times whenever she touched me. At times I wanted so much to apologize for my suspicion, but that would mean admitting to it, framing the words to explain how evil I thought she might have been. To take in a scared high school kid with no other place to go only to...fuck, Bayard's tainted word.⁵⁸

The verb 'fuck' is introduced by Cousin Bayard's sexual abuse, which taints the act with the subjugation of male to female and of heterosexuality homosexuality. It is Bayard's animalistic sexual appetite that infects Micky's sense of intimacy and consequently her idea of home. After Emma, Micky moves in with her best friend Danny for college, the two start a physical relationship, but while Danny has fallen in love, Micky is too scared to commit and starts sleeping around even more than during her high school years, prompting a bitter break-up with Danny.

This obsession with sexual intimacy as the foundation of human contact continues until Micky falls in love with the main love interest of the series, Dr. Cordelia Holloway. In their new home all seems to be peaceful and Micky's psyche seems to be healing, until in *The Intersection of Law and Desire*, during a long, exhausting investigation, Cordelia proposes an intimate evening involving sex and Micky declines for the first time. Cordelia is dumbstruck by Micky's tearful apologies, telling Micky, 'you can always say no, at any time, for any reason,'⁵⁹ to which Micky simply replies, '[t]hat's a nice thought.'⁶⁰ The possibility of refusing sex does not register in Micky's mind; this defeatist response stems from her conviction that sexual intimacy is necessary to maintain long-lasting bonds between individuals, and especially between her and any other homosexual woman, to the point where Micky believes her worth lies in her sexual experience, which she unfortunately developed from a young age. And this entrenchment of the domestic space in sexual contact is foreshadowed by the above-mentioned quote containing the line, 'sex is what connected me to the women I met in [lesbian] bars.'⁶¹ The return to this line also serves to link the space of the home with that of the lesbian bar.

⁵⁸ Redmann, *Deaths of Jocasta*, pp. 24-25.

⁵⁹ Redmann, *The Intersection of Law and Desire*, p. 90.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Redmann, *The Intersection of Law and Desire*, p. 192, my emphasis.

What is Micky's real home in this series then? And how does she settle down by the end of the series? Addressing the latter point first, *Not Dead Enough* reprises the main romance of the series, the one between Micky and Cordelia, simply to highlight the irreconcilability of this relationship. Both parties have cheated on one another, have been verbally abusive towards one another, and it is implied that they have fallen out love with one another. But while Cordelia finds another partner, *Not Dead Enough* sees Micky wandering the streets of musical New Orleans in a solitary, alcohol-induced daze. Micky is left with a small home in the downtown part of the city, slightly annoyed by her neighbours' regular antics and making the rounds with her friends for catch-ups. One could argue that Micky's home is the community of neighbours and friends who remain around her throughout, but Micky's interactions with her neighbours are minimal and semi-hostile, while the interactions with her friends need to be scheduled so that she and Cordelia will not meet again, which means that the spontaneity of these bonds is gone.⁶² This is not to say that Micky detests her home, but the enamoured atmosphere of the beginning of the series is progressively destroyed by a sense of duty towards one own's loved ones and everything Micky put them through with her cases:

[a]t times I still wished to join her, soar over the clouds and land in a place I'd never been before, where I could start with nothing to hold me to everything I had become. She had nothing to go back to, no choice but to go forward. Life held me here: Torbin, my job, my friends, the streets I had trod on for my entire adult life, the sultry summers that gave way to the bright blue of fall days.⁶³

In this scene Micky receives news of the client she has just closed the cases of, a woman who is finally happy, at ease with herself, with the people around her, a woman who is travelling the world and fulfilling her dream life. Micky deeply yearns for the same things but life holds her where she is, ties her to her familiar bonds, and notably, she lets herself be tied to these bonds, with, I would argue, a defeated, melancholic mind-set. This is the atmosphere of the second half of the series, and compounded with Micky's unstable spatiality, caught in the contrast between the abuse of her previous homes and the liberating nature of the metaphorical homelessness inherent to the hard-boiled detective, the events of the second half of the series reinforce my interpretation of the lesbian sleuth as deeply scarred on a fundamental level by

⁶² J. M. Redmann, *Not Dead Enough* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, 2019), p. 232. Bold Strokes ebook.

⁶³ Redmann, *Not Dead Enough*, p. 233.

the history of oppression in respect to her identity. This section dedicated to Micky's homes showcased a detailed criticism of the supposedly normal hetero-sexist household. In the so-called normal home the individual has two choices, either conform to the ideal of the hetero-sexist illusory perfect citizen, or become the shunned outlier and the scapegoat. Micky Knight's story shows how the oppressive fanatical religious homophobic home threatens to disintegrate the protagonist's sense of a cohesive, self-affirmed Self and demonstrates how the protagonist's liberating profession and the surrounding LGBT+ community help her interact with the space of the home in a non-self-destructive way.

4.4 The Solitude of Amanda Valentine's Home

There is one home that stands out in the genre for its emptiness and its owner's solitude. The Amanda Valentine mystery series (1992-1995) written by Rose Beecham (1958-) is written in the police procedural style, set in New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s and counts three novels: *Introducing Amanda Valentine* (1992), *Second Guess* (1994), *Fair Play* (1995). In this series the home is a desolate place that should provide a refuge for the protagonist, but becomes the intersection of a double-bound displacement: first between romantic fulfilment and professional life, and second between the United States and New Zealand. The conflict between Amanda's private and public life comes from the two love interests of the series, Kate and Debby Daley. Kate is introduced in the first novel as a partner suffering from burn out; overwhelmed with stress from Amanda's erratic and dangerous profession, Kate issues an ultimatum: me or the job. Amanda's choice, favouring her work, causes tension in the way she navigates the spaces of the home and workplace throughout the trilogy, as is premised in Amanda's thoughts at the beginning of the first novel:

[i]t was no way to spend a night, Amanda reflected over her morning caffeine a few hours later. Kate was still sleeping, and, delaying the inevitable, Amanda had avoided waking her. [...] Her throat tightened and for a moment she hated herself. Why couldn't she be in love with Kate, change her job, get her kicks like other people? What had she become? Some kind of thrills junkie, a weapons nut?⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Rose Beecham, *Introducing Amanda Valentine* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1992), p. 10.

In this scene Amanda has just spent a night with her lover (soon ex-lover) Kate. Amanda's house already feels so empty and desolate that she hates herself and doubts her dedication to her job: she is not devoted to any of her spaces in New Zealand, the home, the police department, or any of her usual haunts because her heart is back in the United States, where she had a more successful (and more eventful) career and where her first love is buried. This background story is progressively revealed during the series, yet hints of Amanda's deep emotional turmoil are dramatised by the afore-mentioned quotes, very early in the first novel: Amanda comes back from a very late night working at a case but instead of sleeping through the morning with her lover, she sits in her kitchen alone, dwelling on self-hate. The house is quiet, and Kate's ultimatum lingers in the air, but only because Amanda lets it be so, and this hostile atmosphere mostly stems from herself.

From this perspective Amanda fits perfectly in the pattern of 1980s-1990s lesbian detectives who are essentially, deeply flawed, as a result of the flawed establishment that created the queer trauma which haunts them. These are detectives who break from the American crime fiction tradition of hero-like detectives; the comparison between lesbian detectives and hard-boiled ones has been drawn several times in this thesis, but the home is one space which subtly complicates this comparison. The home of the lesbian detective resembles the domestic environment of the hard-boiled detective in so far as they are both spaces where the detectives would feel at ease, but they become infected with the presence of criminality, as the home or apartment of the hard-boiled detective is sometimes stalked or raided by criminals, and the home of the closeted detective is never at peace due to the psychological pressure presented by the prospect of a forced coming out. The home as refuge is at its full potential only with the openly out detective, and even in this scenario the author may choose to complicate the domestic environment, as in the Kate series where the home and the workplace become juxtaposed.

The case of Amanda is a middle way between these two scenarios, she is closeted but she is not paranoid about it like Kate. As this section shows, there is fundamentally nothing wrong with Amanda's domestic environment per se: her parents care for her, her friends leave her messages on her answering machine, and some of her colleagues are amicable. The displacement Amanda suffers is created by herself. Beecham created this character as subconsciously restless, incapable of feeling like she belongs in the spaces she inhabit until the very end of the trilogy, where Amanda starts accepting the fact that she wants a career as a New Zealand officer and long-term relationship with Debby. From this perspective Amanda Valentine, Micky Knight, Kate Martinelli, and Lauren Laurano diverge from one of the most

influential American crime fiction genres for lesbian detective fiction, namely the hard-boiled. The traditional hard-boiled detective, penned by Chandler for instance, poises as a “complete” man, a cohesive, consistent, put-together character, who is waveringly confident in every space of the narrative. Naturally in reality Marlowe has a long series of issues of attitude and world-views which work against his own peace of mind, he is generally morose and pessimistic for instance, but his stumbling is generally caused by external forces rather than by the kind of existential dread of the lesbian detective. Because, and this is well-portrayed in domestic spaces, the lesbian detective is generally unmoored, lacking a foothold in society’s spaces because of her very identity, she feels desolate and Othered by mechanics of spatialisation of gender and sexuality which are engraved in the fabric of society.

Creating a fulfilling home for the lesbian detective is a process which undergoes several stages, all centring on Amanda’s conflicted attitude towards the matter. On the one hand she wants to leave the United States behind, regard New Zealand as her new home, and fill her house with the presence of a beloved person; on the other hand, Amanda fears that moving on implies an insult to the significance of her first love. She also fears starting anew in New Zealand because it would mean getting attached to a set of spaces which she is used to navigating as impersonally as possible. This reading is justified by one of the scenes after Amanda sleeps with Debby, a tabloid-like television show presenter:

Amanda made it home at ten. She’d been so preoccupied she’d forgotten to stop at McDonald’s. Strung out, she gazed into her fridge. It contained a large bowl of salad and something chocolatey on a plate. She did a double-take and turned automatically toward the coffee machine. A note was pinned to it. *Last night was great*. Amanda snatched it off and ran nervous fingers through her hair. A second missive decorated the microwave. *Turn Me On*, it begged. Inside the microwave was what looked like lasagna.

“Oh, no,” Amanda groaned out loud. She should never have told Debby where the spare key was. Her kitchen had been taken over by a Real Woman. If this was what happened after a one-night stand what would a relationship be like?⁶⁵

The sudden presence of food in Amanda’s kitchen denotes Debby’s overwhelming consideration and affection. Apart from material advantages such as the nourishment food

⁶⁵ Beecham, *Introducing Amanda Valentine*, pp. 180-181.

brings to the body, this scene depicts the potential fullness of a relationship where both parties harmoniously create a homely atmosphere to nest in. The ‘double-take,’ the running her fingers nervously through her hair, the groaning, and the petty complaint in her mind about a ‘Real Woman’ presence, these gestures in this scene all point out to the fact that she is not yet ready to let go and acknowledge this space as home. In fact, the first novel concludes with Amanda ending the (primarily physical) relationship with Debby and flying back to the United States, “‘Chief,” Amanda said huskily, “when I came out here to New Zealand, you could say I was running away from a lot of things. Time to think it over won’t make any difference [...]” “You’re going home, then?” “Yes, sir.””⁶⁶

Amanda’s experiences back in the United States are not dramatised as the second novel of the series, *Second Guess*, begins with her return to New Zealand, but the few recollections that are shared with the reader are significant for the overall understanding of the home space in this series:

[a] year ago [Amanda] had wanted quite desperately to go home, to see American flags and hear American voices, eat bagels and cheesecake, catch up with friends, revisit the world she had run from when Kelly had been killed. But there was no going back. Friends had moved on. Her mother no longer lived in Brooklyn. Was that why New York had seemed so lonely? Or was there an equally mundane explanation for that familiar empty ache – the lack of a steady girlfriend, maybe?⁶⁷

This quote circles back to the journey Amanda needs to make in order to arrive at a state where her psyche has left the past behind and is open to develop new relationships, new connections with people and spaces in New Zealand, as is indicated in the mention of a ‘steady girlfriend.’ However, Amanda is still anchored to a past that is not contributing anything fruitful to her life anymore, she is depriving herself of self-growth and wallowing in the desolation of past broken connections, such as the friends who ‘moved on’ (punctuating her inability to do so) and the loneliness at finding her childhood home empty and lonely (punctuating her equally empty and lonely house in New Zealand).

In analysing the home the social narrative of the heterosexual home has emerged time and again, as the paragon of public virtue and private deception in the Micky Knight and Kate

⁶⁶ Beecham, *Introducing Amanda Valentine*, p. 229.

⁶⁷ Rose Beecham, *Second Guess* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1994), p. 40.

Delafield series, and as the sole repository of the legitimate, sacred marriage contract in the Pam Nilsen series. But in the Amanda Valentine series the focus shifts from how the protagonist views and criticises these narratives that juxtapose with the home, to how the protagonist's psyche is impacted by the need and simultaneously the rejection of the concept of home itself, precisely because of the narratives. Explaining this is easily done through the characterisation of Amanda: first, she wants to return to an idealised sense of belonging dramatised in the family home and childhood neighbourhood in New York, and cannot make sense of its loss. She resents the emptiness and silence of her New Zealand house but keeps creating these empty spaces and silences by distancing herself from any lover she has before the main love interest of the series. In this character element, the narrative of the home as a place of belonging and family is already lost. Second, Amanda is a reserved police detective who resents any encroachment of colleagues, witnesses, suspects, and the media in her home territory, and she is closeted, so she needs to put a front of heterosexuality around her home as a smokescreen between her private and public life. The narrative which sees the home as a site of heterosexual family bliss, the centre of procreation and of life, a space where the private and public lives of its inhabitants can overlap briefly and peacefully, is also lost.

Heterosexual mainstream detectives can visit their work partners' houses and discuss their cases without disrupting the harmony of either the home or the workplace, but if Amanda invites any guests at home they will expose her homosexuality, they will not have only crossed the threshold from the workplace to the home, but they will have trespassed into the closet too. The lesbian home sits awkwardly in the social narratives of the 1980s and 1990s, and Amanda's desperate battle between her longing to belong to an acceptable narrative, to become normal, even banal in her domestic predictability is constantly at odds with her double-sided attitude towards her lesbianism: her misery at being excluded for something she is not in control of, and her steadfast will to reject conventions, to reject being constrained in the mould of the heterosexual nuclear family. Amanda's psychological struggle is quite similar to the emotional turmoil of Paretsky's V. I. Warshawski. Warshawski's trauma originates in a general, universal, injury that all women share, and manifests most evidently in Warshawski's personal, familial, and intimate relationships. Shifting this damage to lesbian women explains why some protagonists, and Amanda specifically, manifest queer trauma in their impossibility of settling down in heteronormative spaces, of which the home is the most emblematic.

Other quotes supporting this reading can be found in *Second Guess* and *Fair Play*, where Amanda feels melancholy whenever she thinks about the concept of home:

[a]t home, Amanda lay on her sofa unable to concentrate on anything except the silence of the house. She had always lived alone, and that was how she liked it. [...] Amanda tried to imagine her house filled with life. [...] Her eyes stung. She had never experienced anything like that, not even in childhood. Why should she miss it now?⁶⁸

Something about [Amanda's] bedroom jarred. Catching a whiff of jasmine, she started around, besieged suddenly with memories of last summer, the windows wide open, scents drifting in from her garden, Debby cradled against her.⁶⁹

The last quote marks a turning point: the jarring atmosphere of Amanda's empty bedroom makes her feel increasingly desolate and disoriented until the last chapter of the series, where Amanda realises that she has to disregard pre-established narratives about the home and has to move forward from the loss of the loved object, which in her case is an idealised idea of home. The state of failed mourning, of melancholia in which she lived during the series has by now become such a reliable state of mind for her (as previously seen in the quote about the presence of a 'Real Woman' in her kitchen), that it is a psychological crutch for Amanda's psyche. The casting off of this crutch is marked by a final shudder:

[a] shock of longing made her weak. Blood roared like an ocean in her ears. She could hardly breathe. Almost against her will, the nucleus of a decision seemed to be forming inside her. When finally it crystallized a long moment later, Amanda felt strangely disoriented.⁷⁰

This quote, from the ending of the Amanda Valentine series, involves the decision to ask Debby to become her home, to start a long-term committed relationship. This decision brings Amanda a sense of disorientation, which is fitting regarding how being displaced, destabilised, and disoriented have been fundamental parts of her characterisation consistently throughout the series. It also indicates that the establishment of a home is not something as easy as forming an idea in one's mind. If the ending were more resolute, more stable in its hopeful plans for the future, it would have resulted in a strident conclusion to a disproportionately rocky road, thus

⁶⁸ Beecham, *Second Guess*, p. 126.

⁶⁹ Rose Beecham, *Fair Play* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1995), p. 205.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

this type of open ending is the coherent and ideal solution to the mystery that the home has been for Amanda.

4.5 An Implosion of Space in the Home of Kate Martinelli and Lauren Laurano

King's Kate Martinelli and Scoppettone's Lauren Laurano Mystery series contain intriguing domestic settings. The first has been properly introduced in the third chapter, which analyses the clinic, but it is now the appropriate time to introduce the latter. Laurie R. King (1952), acclaimed author of Sherlock Holmes' partner Mary Russell with *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (1994), also wrote a police procedural lesbian series featuring San Francisco Police Department Inspector Katarina Cecilia Kate whose investigations span from the 1990s and early 2000s in five novels. The domestic scenes of the Kate Martinelli and Lauren Laurano series shed light on the way the protagonists of these series live their identities of lesbian detectives in a troubled, uneasy way. They navigate their homes, a space which is ideally the safest and most effective for nurturing identitarian traits such as sexual identity, in a hyper-aware manner, reminiscent of the queer trauma discussed throughout this thesis. Because lesbian detectives are hyper-conscious of their Othered identity, they implement the physical and psychological self-discipline shown in the home and other spaces in their crime solving.

The uniquely subverting elements described in this chapter and specifically in this section are set in extensive, frequent domestic scenes that belong more to the romance genre than crime fiction and they cannot be interpreted solely on the basis of the parameters of either genre. These settings are not filled with action-packed detective work, nor are they completely ignorant of the nature of the main investigative plot. Yet because of this liminality they aptly demonstrate how early authors of this sub-genre struggled against a genre whose female protagonists had long been either spinsters or unmarried youngsters untroubled by balancing professional and domestic lives as an oppressed sexual minority. As Michael Millner writes, 'their self-regulation suggests an attempt to achieve a kind of autonomy, which is perhaps most clearly suggested by their relationship to intimacy.'⁷¹ This would lead readers to picture the lesbian detective's home as a blissful utopia isolated from the outside world's harassment, but when comparing several novels of the genre it becomes clear that the autonomy Millner speaks of is closer to solitude or abandonment for lesbian detectives. They live in solitude even when they are partnered because the nature of their work isolates them from civilian life, and they live in a state of abandonment because they need to negotiate the violence of criminality with the violence that has been perpetrated against their community by the establishment. As Millner further argues, post-1980s identity-focused protagonists tend to 'have difficulty relinquishing

⁷¹ Michael Millner, 'Identity Politics in Crime Fiction', in *A History of American Crime Fiction*, ed. by Chris Raczkowski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) pp. 236-249, (p. 243).

independence in their romantic relationships, but it is a sense of independence that develops not from a need to individually master the world but from a need to protect oneself from that world and act autonomously.⁷²

In the previous sections the home has been analysed as mostly a standalone space, with sporadic references to spaces analysed elsewhere in this thesis, such as the clinic and the closet. In this section these three spaces, the home, the clinic, and the closet are tightly intertwined in the house shared by the main couples, Kate and Lee, and Lauren and Kip. It can be a double space, with the heterosexual private eyes sometimes carving out an office space out of their apartment, but even so there is a proximity between public and private life, with the latter falling within the parameter of what a so-called normal private life should look like. The home of the lesbian detective is fundamentally different.

Despite the stories leading Kate and her SFPD partner Al Hawkin at times into the bowels of the city and at times in its distant periphery, a good portion of the narrative involves Kate's home. King would go on to utilise the same characteristic of devoting a sizeable portion of the story to romantic scenes in her Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes series, where her protagonists get married at the end of the second novel. Another lesbian detective home where multiple spaces coalesce is featured in the Lauren Laurano Mystery series. Unlike other private eyes in the researched sub-genre, Lauren is over-qualified; having been beaten, gang-raped, and left for dead at eighteen, Lauren's active involvement in the capture of her rapists drew the attention of a federal agent, under whose suggestion Lauren undertook FBI training. During this significant, formative experience Lauren finds a partner in the bright FBI trainee Lois, who is tragically killed by one of Lauren's stray bullets in an early assignment. The series depicts Lauren's vicissitudes years after these events, after she has undergone therapy and is happily married to Christine "Kip" Adams, a psychotherapist who specialises in hypnosis-based treatment. From this premise alone it is evident that the home in the Kate Martinelli and Lauren Laurano series share a meaningful feature: they include several spaces at once.

In the Kate Martinelli series, the protagonist and the main love interest Leonora "Lee" Cooper are married and sharing a small house in downtown San Francisco.⁷³ This space is influenced by the closet as a consequence of Kate's queer trauma accumulated from the inherent contradiction in her being a lesbian police officer. This connection is premised by the omniscient narrator of *A Grave Talent*, who dramatises this juxtaposition of home and closet

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Not legally married, but it is to be considered equal to any other legally sanctioned union.

by avoiding the use of pronouns when referencing Lee: '[t]he sound of a door opening, feet on a wooden staircase, slight scuffs on the slab floor, the click and pull of the car door coming open, Lee's voice, dark and restful.'⁷⁴ By eliding Lee's agency in favour of objects or actions, '[a] light finger brushed the back of Marinelli's neck, and then the scuffs and steps retreated upstairs. [...] Lee laughed outright, and then the towel began to wipe the last of the oil from Kate's skin'⁷⁵ the gender identity of Kate's partner becomes purposefully ambiguous.

Apart from constituting a literary device to create suspense, this union of closet and home can be read as criticism of heteronormative social control: tragically, even the detective, the representative of social control, is sure of not being defended by the system after her sexual orientation is revealed. Such is the literary significance of the closet, that the author would rather shroud her protagonist's home in neutrality and avoid the use of pronouns as long as possible. This union of home and closet is ruptured by the gaze of social control, represented by Al Hawkin's question about Kate's sexuality, "Hawkin asked me tonight if I was a lesbian." The sweeping hands checked only slightly. [...] Odd, thought Kate muzzily, how hands can be amused when a voice isn't. "I told him to ask me again when we knew each other better."⁷⁶ Even though Kate intends to preserve her closeted domesticity, the narrator reveals Lee's gender in the same scene, 'Lee's soft curls formed a halo against the hall light, and she closed the door gently and went downstairs, an expression of fond exasperation on her face.'⁷⁷

This reveal combines two significant elements in the way King weaves domesticity, the closet, and professionalism in this series. First, the fact that Lee's gender reveal is foreshadowed by Al Hawkin and enacted by the omniscient narrator deprives Kate of agency in coming out of the closet and anticipates the implosion of the home, the closet, the workplace, and even the clinic. Second, Lee's 'fond exasperation' foreshadows the dynamic between her and Kate and the parallel of the closet and home. Lee, being a practicing psychoanalyst who specialises in treating gay artists, has no issues with coming out of the closet to friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and patients. Because Lee practices her profession in her and Kate's home, this space represents perpetual conflict between society and homosexuality, between the freedom of self with which home is associated and hiding aspects of oneself in the closet. Indeed, the home and the closet seem to have a mixed relationship in the genre: Claire McNab's Carol Ashton and Sybil Quade are forcibly outed, with Carol finding the experience a source of

⁷⁴ Laurie R. King, *A Grave Talent* (New York: Picador, [1993] 2014), p. 197. Macmillan ebook.

⁷⁵ King, *A Grave Talent*, pp. 197-198.

⁷⁶ King, *A Grave Talent*, p. 198.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

harassment from colleagues and civilians and trying to take refuge in peaceful domestic surroundings, while Sybil is fired from her position of high school teacher and finds refuge in feminist activist activities and women's studies classes outside the home. Thus Kate and Lee are not emblematic in the way they fold back into their home after Kate is forcibly outed, there are a number of vastly different reactions in the genre, but their home is emblematic in so far it constantly engages and draws attention to joint considerations of the spaces of the closet and the workplace. The home of heterosexual detectives does not put in the foreground their sexual identity as much as the home, from wider questions of criminalised and pathologised sexual behaviours to smaller questions of adjusting a committed relationship with a dangerous profession.

In the first novel of the series Kate's closeted identity is introduced as an early source of conflict in their relationship. After Lee gathered experienced as a therapist, she understood that Kate was using the closet as a form of psychological self-defence, to protect herself from potential harassment not only in a professional context, but anywhere: 'Kate would not come out. She told Lee the very first day, [...] and Lee, [...] believing that in this, too, Kate would change her mind, acquiesced. [...] What had begun as a mild irritation had grown to an open sore, threatening to infect the entire relationship.'⁷⁸ In this quote Lee simply believes that Kate would change her attitude towards being closeted; she does not try to empathise with Kate's situation. But in her defence, empathising with Kate would imply understanding and internalising an additional instance of queer trauma, and one which involves being part of the establishment, as Kate is a police officer. In this household the presence of the closet thus seems to be internal, as it seems to be part of Kate's infamously stubborn personality. However, it is actually a consequence of queer trauma developed from Kate's profession as a police officer:

[i]t is no easy job, being a police officer. For a woman it is an impossible job, fitting into the masculine world of the station while retaining her identity as a woman. [...] The men and women she worked with found her friendly and easygoing, to a point. [...] Yet not one of them had been inside her home, knew what she did in her off hours, knew how or with whom she lived. [...] she had found that the only way she could continue as a cop was to preserve a place totally apart where she could retreat. No work came home, no colleagues came inside.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ King, *A Grave Talent*, p. 247.

⁷⁹ King, *A Grave Talent*, p. 97.

In contrast, in Lauren and Kip's home, the presence of the closet comes from an external source: Kip's parents' homophobia. Despite having been married for a decade, Kip's mother adopts a series of subtle cues to indicate that Lauren is *persona non grata*, such as conveniently forgetting about Lauren's birthday, and encouraging Lauren to address her formally. She acts in the same way with Sam, the male partner of Kip's brother.⁸⁰ As Lauren mentions, '[s]upposedly [Kip's mother] accepts me as a family member, as do the rest of Kip's kin. Still, over the years there have been little things that have repudiated this. [...] Sam and I are never mentioned. These are little things, I know, but they rankle.'⁸¹

The Kate Martinelli and the Lauren Laurano series are similar in the association of the home with the inhabitants' professions. Neither Kate nor Lauren work from home officially, but they are similar in the way they involve their homes in their work. Kate is a police officer but she increasingly bounces ideas off of Lee (also to derail Lee's attention from her paralysis), while Lauren is almost never portrayed working in her office, instead the vast majority of her work progress is achieved in an alternative office space in the living room of her and Kip's apartment. Lauren and Kip share work details liberally, merging the spaces of the home and workplace.

If the first half of *A Grave Talent* intertwines the home and the closet, the second half includes the workplace too. The victim of *A Grave Talent* is Eva Vaughn, a schizophrenic young woman who is hailed by the media as a modern Rembrandt. Vaughn is the object of the obsession of the serial killer of the novel, so to protect her Al Hawkin proposes to temporarily hide her in Kate's home and have Lee moved into a hotel. But being a psychotherapist who specialises in treating artists, Lee has no intention of going to a hotel until the serial killer is captured, and the danger hanging over her angers Kate to the point that she contests Hawkin's decision by saying that the house is not hers so she cannot give consent to using it as prop in their investigation. But Hawkin has come prepared, and the delicate balance between Kate's closet, home, and workplace is ruptured by Hawkin's words,

[y]ou are right, the house does not belong to you. The house you live in is owned by one Leonora Cooper, Ph.D., a practicing psychotherapist who specializes in art and artists, particularly among members of the gay community. [...] That is all I need to

⁸⁰ Sandra Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine* (Boston: Little Brown, [1991] 2011), p. 111. Amazon ebook.

⁸¹ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, pp. 111-112.

know about your home life [...] unless and until your home life begins to interfere with your work.⁸²

Lee is eventually caught in the crossfire during the final fight against the serial killer, who managed to sneak into Kate's and Lee's home to murder Vaughn. Lee escapes with her life, but a stray bullet paralyzes her from the waist down. When news of this reaches the media, Kate's sexuality becomes a matter of national spectacle: 'the media had seized [Kate] with sheer delight, a genuine San Francisco lesbian, a policewoman, whose lover had been shot and left dramatically near death by a sociopath.'⁸³ This development shows how the agency of the lesbian detective has been taken away from her by heteronormative institutions. Al Hawkin represents the establishment which does not implement enough resources to defend the lesbian detective, who is left alone to face the criminal world alone. This causes the tragic consequence of the implosion of home and workplace. Similarly, the agency of the lesbian detective to come out of the closet is taken from her by the heteronormative society represented by the media, where the figure of the lesbian is a novelty and worth writing about not because of her personal achievements but because of her otherness.

Like Lee, Kip also monitors the state of Lauren's psyche regularly. For instance, she often asks Lauren what trauma triggers emerge during her investigations, as evidenced by the scene where Lauren talks about trying to convince a rape victim to sue by using her own reaction to being raped at eighteen as encouragement for the victim. 'When I finish my tale.[sic] Kip reaches across the table and puts her hand over mine. "God, honey, does it bring everything back?" "In Technicolor," I say. She understands how one memory can lead to another.'⁸⁴ Kip also keeps tracks of Lauren's attitude towards her cases, and is particularly concerned about instances where Lauren's dedication to her job becomes an obsession over finding the solution to the mystery, "I get wrapped up," I say. "Obsessed," she corrects. "Okay." "Look, if I haven't gotten used to your compulsive, obsessive, addictive behavior by now, then —."⁸⁵ Such continuous remarks about Lauren's mental health are strongly evocative of what was argued in the third chapter, on the clinic, that the nature of detective work brings together the spaces of the police precinct (or of the private eye office in this case) and of the doctor's office, which causes a type of queer trauma which is regularly portrayed by the primary source material.

⁸² King, *A Grave Talent*, p. 229.

⁸³ Laurie R. King, *To Play the Fool* (New York: Picador, [1995] 2014), p. 9. Macmillan ebook.

⁸⁴ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, p. 24.

⁸⁵ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, p. 134.

Mirroring the way Lee's concerns about Kate's mental health develop into paranoia about the dangers of Kate's job, Kip becomes paranoid about the risks of Lauren's job. Kip constantly reminds Lauren about her anxiety, '[w]hen you're on a case there's always this underlying nagging feeling. When the phone rings I'm frightened to pick it up, frightened not to. I'm afraid somebody will tell me you're in the hospital ... dead.'⁸⁶ This apprehension, coupled with the knowledge that Kip finds Lauren's professional attitude 'compulsive, obsessive, and addictive'⁸⁷ leads Lauren to lie about her job at an increasing rate, until by the middle of the series Lauren's home is filled with deception and bittersweet thoughts such as '[w]hen I leave the house we're speaking but there's distinct disharmony.'⁸⁸

It is important to remember that despite Lauren having an office elsewhere, she works from home for virtually the whole series so it is not unproductive to analyse the space of the home as a domestic/professional hybrid setting. From the first half of the first novel onwards almost all domestic scenes between Lauren and Kip devolve into an impromptu psychoanalysis session or into a dissection of Lauren's investigative skills, which is the crux of the problem in analysing Kate's and Kip's home as a standalone space. Despite the often tense discussions Kip and Lauren have about the latter's job, they represent one of the most comforting couples in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction; for example, they do not separate amidst bittersweet scenes like Kate and Aimee, they do not emotionally blackmail each other into remaining together like Robin and Kentucky, or into choosing an open relationship like Pam and Hadley. "Hold it." I sit up. "What?" "I'm not one of your patients," I say indignantly. "I'm sorry." "Okay. My work sometimes makes me ..." "I know." She stretches out both arms, and I come into them like a bird to her nest.'⁸⁹ This exchange between Lauren (the first-person narrator) and Kip aptly summarises not only the homely atmosphere of the household despite Kip's overbearing concern, but also the union between the spaces of the home, the workplace, and the clinic, that are peculiar to the Kate Martinelli and the Lauren Laurano series.

The presence of therapy is also a reminder of the negative psychological effects on those who excessively repress themselves in the closet and on those who come out to a highly hostile environment and cannot deal with the fallout. In a way, the element of Lee's therapeutic practice can be read as an outlet for Kate's contested identity as a closeted lesbian identity. Does Kate insist on not coming out despite Lee's offer of professional help because she feels

⁸⁶ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, p. 103.

⁸⁷ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, p. 134.

⁸⁸ Sandra Scoppettone, *I'll Be Leaving You Always* (Boston: Little Brown, [1993] 2011), p. 22. Amazon ebook.

⁸⁹ Scoppettone, *Everything You Have Is Mine*, p. 134.

like she is living vicariously through the patients' therapy? There is no textual evidence which directly sustains this reading, but it is productive to consider interpreting Kate's and Lee's home through the lens of Foster's work on deviance, disorder, order of society, and social control. As Foster states, 'the relationship between deviance and social control has to be motored by a legitimation process; it depends on the existence of a common version of authority upon which both deviance and social control converge.'⁹⁰ This legitimation process sustains the reading that it is because of her profession that Kate remains in the closet, despite witnessing openly out gay people weathering all sorts of harassment thanks to Lee's therapy.

Because Kate's character juxtaposes the role of social control and the element of depravity (homosexuality considered from a conservative perspective) that social control strives to repress, this conflict emerges in her home as the juxtaposition of contradicting spaces: the home, the closet, the clinic, and (Lee's) workplace. Following Foster's argument, the relationship between deviance and social control is the relationship between the lesbian sleuth's queerness (the Outsider spatiality) and the social control is the role of enforcer of law and order of her profession (the Insider spatiality). The 'common version of authority' upon which this relationship impinges can be read as the fragmented identity that is left in the lesbian sleuth's psyche by the Insider/Outsider dilemma. Analysing the spaces recurring in 1980s-1990s Anglo-American lesbian detective novels, it becomes evident that the protagonists embody one major wish of their authors, and one unexpected trait. On the one hand, the authors' wish for visibility, self-realisation, and pride is evident in their depiction of lesbian protagonists who defy all odds by being part of the system but remaining true to their sense of justice and community, on the other hand, the emotional and psychological conflicts created by the dual identity of lesbian and detective cause complexities and point to ongoing trauma. The juxtaposition of several spaces of self-realisation and social order in the Kate Martinelli and in the Lauren Laurano Mystery series is a prime example of the sophisticated nature of the recurring spaces in post-1980 novels.

As for the intertwining of the domestic and the working environments, during the events of the second novel Lee resumes her work and Kate goes back to the police precinct with reduced working time and load, while also providing basic care for Lee. This new dynamic deeply affects the way Kate navigates the home and the workplace from here onwards in the series. The answers lies in the destroyed balance between the workplace and the closet, '[Kate] had clawed herself into place behind a desk and endured five months of paper shuffling and

⁹⁰ Foster, p. 136.

that special hatred and harassment that a quasimilitary organization reserves for one of their own who has exposed the weakness of the whole.’⁹¹ This quote reveals that after having being publicly out-ed, Kate goes back to work, but the space she navigates is not the whole police department anymore, it is reduced to her desk. Without the psychological defence of the heteronormative anonymity provided by the closet, Kate subconsciously restricts the physical space that she can enjoy freely in the police department. Faced with a devastating sense of displacement at the precinct, Kate encloses her life within the domestic setting, with the rest of the series portraying more and more domestic scenes where Lee, not Al Hawkin, acts as the John Watson type of character, the sounding board against which the detective bounces ideas off in order to solve the case.

Society’s homophobic gaze constantly reminds Kate that she represents ‘the weakness of the whole,’ thus it stands to reason that Kate would find haven in her home, the only place where she can be herself. Instead, the afore-mentioned implosion of the home, the workplace, the closet, and the clinic renders this space one of the most troubled of the researched sub-genre. After this narrative implosion occurs the home becomes the site of one major development in Kate’s characterisation: self-neglect/self-effacement. This develops during Lee’s recuperation period and immediately following Kate’s forced public coming out; Kate is depressed but does not undergo therapy. She is unhappy in her workplace, where she is shunned and becomes a publicity stunt, and she is unhappy at home, where after her accident Lee becomes paranoid about the dangers of Kate’s profession, repeatedly begging her to remove herself from high-stakes cases.

The Kate Martinelli and Lauren Laurano series are instances of primary source material featuring ordinary spaces which heterosexual citizens can navigate with ease, but where the lesbian detective stands awkwardly and momentarily before her position is shaken by the scrutiny and prejudices of heteronormative society. Moreover, the Kate Delafield and Lauren Laurano series are prime examples of a more general trend in the sub-genre: the copious domesticity related to both the mystery and romantic plots. Domestic scenes are quite common in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction: the domestic squabbles between Kate and Aimee about Kate being closeted and her problem with alcohol, and the discussions between Stoner, Gwen, and Aunt Hermione about the suspicious characters Stoner meets on her cases, and the domestic scenes of several more couples in the sub-genre are not so dissimilar from the interactions highlighted in this chapter.

⁹¹ King, *To Play the Fool*, p. 10.

All the novels read for this thesis combine elements of detective and romantic fiction. The romantic sub-plot usually features the protagonist and the love interest slowly falling in love and having one or more sexual encounter during the course of the narrative. When the protagonist and the love interest enter a long-term relationship, drama is usually produced via misunderstandings between the main couple or via differing opinions that create increasing emotional or physical distance between the characters, and to solve this rift the protagonist may encounter a past flame or a new love interest, have an affair with this secondary character and eventually return to the main love interest and the home they built together. From this perspective, the researched novels break from the tradition of the twentieth century American detective novel which favours single detectives over partnered ones and professional settings over domestic ones, and which finds one of its emblematic depictions in the mid-century hard-boiled protagonist, exemplary depictions of this archetype have been penned by Chandler, Himes, Spillane, and Hammett. The detective as lone wolf did not originate from hard-boiled writing, as Holmes, Miss Marple, Poirot, and most of the Wimsey stories feature non-partnered protagonists, but when comparing Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction against arguably the most representative genre of American crime writing, the contrast is more apparent and more telling of lesbian authors' subversion of genre conventions. When considering some of the key figures in the history of detective fiction, including Holmes, Poirot, Spade, Marlowe, Miss Marple, Wimsey, Nancy Drew, and Millhone to name a few, the focus is mostly on the mystery, the puzzle, the investigative process and the skillset of the protagonist. This is showcased via the lone wolf characterisation which enables the detective to enjoy a wide mobility without having to return to their home base to nurture an on-going relationship.

Researched novels emphasise on this return to the homely couple is a symbol of social subversiveness and the Kate Martinelli and Lauren Laurano novels are invaluable representatives of this trend. With the exception of Miss Marple who often conducts her investigations from home, when the detectives listed above return to their home the action/mystery plot is halted in order to rest and recuperate, or to set up the scene for criminals, suspects, and witnesses to approach the detective and move the plot forward, usually drawing the detective out of their abodes into a new location. These detectives may be overtly or subtly rebutted by the establishment for certain aspects of their personality or for their methods, but they are not thrust under public scrutiny and discriminated for their identity like lesbian detectives are. Non-queer detectives have institutions to reliably fall back upon, in addition to the privacy of the home, whereas Kate and Lauren do not enjoy the reliability of institutional protection and the conformist institutions infect their home too. This causes the queer trauma

and social disorientation that leads to the spatial interactions described in this and other analysis chapters of this dissertation.

4.6 Closing the Home

The thread running across the fictions considered in this chapter is a shared faith in the power of the individual character as a subversive force, as the most efficacious form of opposition to heteronormative, homophobic institutions. The individual detective solves the cases, addresses society's flaws, but while heterosexual detectives' reformative power is through their actions, the lesbian detective provides some manner of reform to the institutions through her presence alone. And while it would be easy to assume that the home would be the one space where this subverting power couldn't be seen, where the authors portrayed blissful, peaceful relationships, the home actually joins the other spaces analysed in this thesis by showing how, however individualised, lesbian detectives do not live in a literary vacuum, they are still entrenched in the 1980s lesbian feminist activist context of making each and every lesbian protagonist a carrier of the queer trauma of their community.

Chapter Five: The Bar

5.1 Introducing a Home Away from Home: The Lesbian Bar

This chapter outlines the literary interpretation of a space that, although not as common as the closet, the clinic, or the home, nonetheless holds a substantial importance for the way the lesbian sleuth interacts with spaces in early novels. Drinking in gay bars became another means for lesbians to resist the geographical confinement of “unaccompanied” women, but these locales were far from safe.¹ This chapter will briefly describe the history of the importance of bars for the lesbian community, the literary representation of this space and the relevant case studies.

The process of knowing oneself, admitting one’s abnormality in front of society’s disapproval inevitably generates the desire to find similar individuals. Historically this has been difficult for homosexual women, whose spaces of congregation were both hidden and short-lived, and cultural references to lesbianism were sparse. The only literary source on lesbianism that was widely known during the emergence of lesbian bars was Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* (1929) and its tragic characterisation style; thus the search for other gay women required courage and persistence. Queer historians such as Lillian Faderman have written at length about lesbian bar culture because of its centrality in the creation of a relatively cohesive lesbian community, but also because it exemplifies the consequences of homophobic legislation, religious zeal and misinformation. The expanding American bar culture after World War II was in fact the only relatively safe place where women-loving women were permitted to see their feelings in a broader context. These women could now conceptualise the spectrum of lesbian experience more easily, not simply as a secret or forbidden desire, but as a way of living shared by many other women.²

For those who persisted in their search, from the 1930s onwards gay bars became the centre of their free time, and for decades they were the *only* places lesbians had to socialise, becoming central milestones of their history. Individuals who had been confused by their same-sex desire, who had felt isolated and excluded, now understood that this desire was shared by an unknown number of women and men countrywide. This notion of shared sexual identity encouraged many isolated individuals to exit domestic isolation and seek social life with other

¹ Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 164.

² Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 191.

homosexuals. As historians Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis summarise, ‘[b]y finding ways to socialise together, individuals ended the crushing isolation of lesbian oppression and created the possibility of group consciousness and activity. [...] forming community in a public setting outside of the protected and restricted boundaries of their own living rooms.’³ It is precisely because of this isolation that the time spent in bars was all the sweeter for queer folk, and it was in such spaces that the struggle for public recognition and acceptance began.

Kennedy and Davis’ findings reveal that the accelerated urbanisation at the beginning of the twentieth century and women’s gradual financial autonomy laid the ground for a liberated eroticised leisure culture for the queer community.⁴ Bars became the centre of this new lifestyle because for many, house parties were not a viable option, and for women specifically public spaces such as parks, beaches, and street corners were not safe. Although the bar had been a predominantly male domain, it was gradually welcoming of women. Its sheltered interior offered a less risky environment for lesbians than the open streets. Kennedy and Davis argue that bars were vital for lesbian life more so than for male gay life because of the environment: ‘[t]he concentration of lesbian social life in bars derives from the danger lesbians faced as women in a patriarchal culture based on the sexual availability of women for men.’⁵ The space of the bar also granted the possibility to cultivate a public identity, socialise, seek romance, while ostensibly shielding this romance from the public eye.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, queer individuals and especially lesbians began to take advantage of the unique qualities of such spaces, which became centres of queer life-style and hot spots for same-sex experimentation.⁶ Naturally, not all bars belonged to big urban conglomerates and not all lesbians frequented these bars: lesbians of colour generally preferred house parties, and middle-class lesbians convened in either private houses or in upscale private clubs, which provided an attractive alternative to the gay bar scene that for many was too dangerous, to their reputation and physically.⁷ On the other hand, working-class lesbians drew from a long tradition of working-class women’s independent pursuit of pleasures, which explains why from the 1950s until the end of the 1980s, the majority of the bar attendees were working-class lesbians.⁸ Moreover, the presence of working-class women in the bars was

³ Elizabeth L. Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, “‘I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar’: Lesbian Bar Culture in Buffalo in the 1930s and 1940s”, in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. by Brett Beemyn (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 27-72, (p. 27).

⁴ Kennedy and Davis, “‘I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar’”, p. 9.

⁵ Kennedy and Davis, “‘I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar’”, p. 31.

⁶ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 81-88.

⁷ Lillian Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015), ch. 6.

⁸ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 179-181.

solidified by inter-war and 1940s customs, where so many capable gay recruits entered the services that if officials were to discharge them all or ignore them, it would have damaged the war efforts. And what better place for throngs of queer and questioning soldiers to de-stress than to frequent bars. Overlooking displays of homosexuality during the recruits' downtime was ultimately for the good of the war efforts, and each military base found ways to manage homosexuality and to integrate gay recruits into military life: allowing them to nurture same-sex affections and passions in places like the bars was one such way.⁹

Twentieth century lesbian bars can be regarded as a significant starting place for intersectional discussion on lesbian spatial repression: research done by scholars such as Kennedy and Davis' 1993 ethnographic research on Buffalo lesbian bar history, as well as Lillian Faderman's and Kelly Hankin's, confirms that there were vast differences with respect to race and class. Hankin offers two main causes: 'because of racism and the need for discretion respectively, women of color and white middle-class women formed lesbian bar subcultures neither as soon nor as easily as white working-class women.'¹⁰ The 1940s started to show the coalescence of this separation. Black lesbians socialised mostly at house parties, often choosing discretion over popular Black-owned venues in Black neighbourhoods. Kennedy and Davis' work indicates that Black and the white upper- and middle-class communities were usually not large enough to provide anonymity for a discreet lesbian social life, which was vital to the safety of individuals living in homophobic families or neighbourhoods. Black, upper- and middle-class lesbians distrusted the wide-reaching merry-making of working-class lesbians, and working-class lesbians were content to steer clear of people who disdained them.¹¹ Therefore, analysing literary scenes featuring lesbian bars can be quite straight-forward; due to the relatively homogeneity of lesbian bars clientele (especially compared to the heterogenous gay male bars clientele of most of the twentieth century), any literary aspects which deviate from historical records represent thematical peculiarities, which is a major reason why the space of the lesbian bar receives particular attention in this thesis.¹²

The bar is a core space of twentieth century LGBT+ history, so much so that Riemer and Brown summarise its importance in the twentieth century as 'the central institution of queer life, serving as a social centre and "a crucible for politics,"' but, as described above, this is

⁹ Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, [1990] 2010), p. 34.

¹⁰ Kelly Hankin, *The Girls in the Back Room: Looking at the Lesbian Bar* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 8.

¹¹ Kennedy and Davis, "I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar", p. 42.

¹² Kennedy and Davis, "I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar", p. 43.

especially true for the lesbian community, which had historically suffered from tighter¹³ socio-geographical restrictions than the gay male community due to different behavioural expectations between the sexes. From Kennedy and Davis's research there also emerges the fact that the public opinion about twentieth century lesbian bars was an image of depressing and seedy places where lesbians gathered to drown their afflictions with alcohol and one-night stands. Lesbian pulp novels and journalistic fiction of the 1950s and 1960s perpetuated the depiction of bars as central but fundamentally limiting and depressing for lesbian life.¹⁴ This was the general understanding of lesbian public life before the Women's Liberation movement promulgated a better understanding of lesbianism.¹⁵

From the moment lesbians began congregating in bars, law enforcement made every effort to locate these locales and, backed by conservative-leaning politicians, persecuted the clientele with a violent cease-and-desist series of raids. Faderman asserts that institutional authorities funded years-long research to allegedly study and categorise homosexuality. In 1955 California bodies of legislature, informed by the principle that aberrant sexual behaviour was a sign of psychological pathology, created the Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, in which code it was stated that a liquor licence was to be revoked in those establishments where sexual perverts congregated. In major cities, police and media waged war on pornographic material, prostitution, and erotic deviancy of all sorts, including homosexuality. The police raided bars and patrolled the streets, driven by the intention to drive queers out of their city. Crackdowns against queer individuals became routine throughout the country.¹⁶ The 1950s is the decade during which most lesbian fiction authors read for this thesis were either born or in their youth, and Kate's formative years belong to this decade.

According to historian Jennifer Terry, the notion that homosexuals were easily discernible by their aberrant bodies or by simple cross-dressing had lost scientific and social hegemony by the 1930s. As a result, anxieties about potential dangers of concealed homosexuality arose. These dangers were explained in a range of consequences, including the ability to infect the healthy heterosexual body and mind, the seduction of innocent youths, and

¹³ Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2019), p. 58. Google ebook.

¹⁴ Kennedy and Davis, "I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar", p. 27.

¹⁵ Heather Love, 'Feminist Criticism and Queer Theory', in *A History of Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007), p. 306.

¹⁶ Gayle Rubin, 'Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality', in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 6.

during the Cold War, the ability to threaten national security.¹⁷ The increase in surveillance of homosexuality during the 1950s eventually devolved into regular bar raids. This method proved the most effective until pro-queer legislation was emanated and enforced. Those who were arrested had profiles in the vice squads' archives which were then made available to employers and the FBI with absolutely disregard to privacy.¹⁸ Gay bars did not fare better during the second half of the twentieth century; Gayle Rubin portrays a chilling picture of the persecution of gay bars and baths across the US, harassment which was especially vicious during the 1970s and 1980s. Large groups of men were hauled into padded wagons regardless of the injuries that they may have suffered during arrest, regardless of their state of undress, weather conditions and of the shock suffered during the sexual harassment perpetrated under the excuse of body-searching. In the early 1980s queer-bashing had become a common recreational activity for young urban males. They ventured into gay neighbourhoods armed with baseball bats or with metal poles – as happens in Katherine V. Forrest's *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (1987) – looking for trouble and knowing that, if they were caught in the act, they would get away very lightly.¹⁹

Rubin denotes some similarities between the policing of queer lifestyle in the 1950s and 1980s; she notes the 1980s as a decade of renewed violence, state persecution, and legal campaigns against non-traditional sexual practices, chiefly homosexuality. The collusion of mass media with homophobic legislature was especially effective: in the run up to elections or the discussion of queer-friendly amendments, the media would deliver reports of raids on cruising areas, prostitution rings crackdowns, and investigations into the manufacture and distribution of pornographic material, rallying public opinion against them.²⁰ Gay bars were busted regularly and police brutality was rife, with guests being dragged out of the establishments in any state of dishabille, hauled into wagons and driven to the police station, where they were fined, their finger prints taken for record, and their file updated. There was no privacy when it came to the criminal record of homosexuals. Their file was shared with the press, with any employer who investigated its employees, and most dangerously with agencies of intelligence. In conclusion, venturing into gay bars was extremely appealing but also

¹⁷ Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession Science, Medicine and the Place of Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), ch. 10-11.

¹⁸ Terry, p. 348.

¹⁹ Rubin, p. 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

dangerous for queer individuals. There was always the chance that the night could end in friendly or romantic endeavours, but also in imprisonment and forced public coming out.²¹

The policing of lesbian bars suggests that three possible solutions were available to the community at the time, either restrict membership, endure, or rebel. The latter two were carried out until the raids ended, while the first solution was not viable mainly due to financial difficulties. Very few bars had the luxury to be exclusively managed by lesbians and cater exclusively to lesbians, such as Forrest's Nightwood Bar; historically, queer managers of drinking joints had to rely on a mix of queer and heterosexual costumers to survive financially. As Faderman's research reports, by and large this heterosexual clientele was composed of voyeuristic tourists and in a smaller portion of local bohemians and adventurous or Questioning individuals. Some of these engaged in 'slumming' in gay bars to spice up their weekends, some of them tried to, supposedly, turn queer bar-goers back into heterosexuality with untoward, unwanted advances, and some of them simply gawked at the gallery of aberrant perverts that they had previously only read about or seen in sensational pulp fiction. This voyeuristic behaviour emerged from Salem drag balls and parties of the 1920s, but well into the 1990s testimonies report of heterosexuals displaying this behaviour in gay bars.²²

This voyeuristic behaviour demonstrates how the psychological shadow of queer trauma is omnipresent, even in a space where the lesbian sleuth should fit in perfectly, where she could feel at home, be content, perhaps even embark on a path of self-fulfilment and healing (as mentioned in the previous chapter within the Micky Knight's homes section). In the introduction this thesis connected spaces, community belonging and the ostracising of Outsiders, and the notions of surveillance and social control. Without knowing the history of this space, one would think that gays bars could be the one place where LGBT+ individuals could find solace and work towards emancipation, yet the bars were actually the fulcrum of social control. As Hankin notes in her research on the cinematic depiction of lesbian bars, 'the repetition [of representations] of lesbian bars and of their narrative and aesthetic conventions throughout the twentieth century is intimately tied to heterosexist ideologies of sexuality and space.'²³

The police novel is generally associated with notions of state bureaucracy and forms of collective social monitoring and enforcement, which are seen as increasingly necessary in uncovering criminality in the anonymous modern society. Analysing the space of the gay bar

²¹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, ch. 1, 11.

²² Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 67-68.

²³ Hankin, p. 4.

in Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, it is easy to see how the attitude of the police towards this space reflects an excessively invasive monitoring of any perceived threat to the established sexual order. As Peter Messent writes about this type of monitoring, '[t]he solution of the crime (an attempted release of a deadly infection on the American people), the role of the detective, and the power and best interests of the state, then, go absolutely hand in hand,' which is intriguing for two reasons: first, the detective is aligned with the power and best interests of the state, which is something that has been reiterated a few times in this thesis to indicate the conflicted, delicate position of lesbian detectives in the spaces they inhabit, and second, criminality is called a deadly infection, which is a parallel that this thesis has made with homosexuality standing in for criminality.

This comparison is well applied in the space of the gay bars, as the paranoia that the dangerous, abnormal carnal appetites of sexual deviants leads society to scope out and monitor their gathering places and any activity related to them. This led to two major solutions for gay bars owners and customers: one route was to locate gay gatherings in private houses disguised as house parties, with the negative consequences of becoming a highly racial and class segregationist move;²⁴ another route has been to locate gay bars in semi-hidden, seedy streets in the hopes that the reduced pedestrian traffic would bring customers more freedom of action. This decision also had several unfortunate consequences for the gay community: seedy locations meant that the local police could patrol the area and conduct so-called inspections in the locales, repeatedly, with the excuse of keeping the peace in the neighbourhood, this also meant that such locations did not attract delicate bourgeois clientele, but mostly working-class individuals who were already used to the tougher corners of the cities.²⁵ The hyper-monitoring coupled with systemic oppression meant that tensions constantly ran high among the gay bar customers, which often erupted in verbal and physical fights, which reinforced the idea it was necessary to routinely check and maintain control of such gathering places.

In exploring these issues a useful shift emerges from focusing on policing LGBT+ communities as an abstract concept, expressing the power and authority of the heteronormative state, to the impact on particular fictional law enforcers and oppressed groups. Detectives engaged with this kind of policing then can represent the state, like Detective Taylor in the Kate Delafield series, but they can also stand apart from it, motivated by the author's particular set of pro-LGBT+, feminist morals and values. The protagonists are aware of individual rights

²⁴ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, ch. 6.

²⁵ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 179-181.

and collective responsibilities that laws can compromise or overlook; with regard to bars, laws did protect the police in terms of performing routine checks about the orderliness of alcohol-serving locales and about the validity of alcohol-serving licences, but there was no law dictating that gay bars had to be monitored in such a disproportionate amount and brutal manner as they were until the Stonewall riots. Lesbian detectives are aware that law enforcement of their time neither compromised nor overlooked when it came to gathering places of the LGBT+ community and are thus more sensitive to the oppression that this group suffered. As Messent writes, '[detectives] are aware too that the system they represent can be flawed, with its own forms of corruption, moral fault-lines, and large-scale injustices - even if, sometimes, such injustices are themselves sanctioned by the law and/or the government.'²⁶ And yet, either because of the constraints of the closet or because they value an ideal concept of social justice more than the reality their community was living in, lesbian detectives never spoke up about such oppressive policing before they entered gay bars in person in their uniform; the conflict between their morals and their duties becomes evident in the following case study from the Kate Delafield Mystery series.

5.2 The Bar and the Community in the Kate Delafield series

This section argues that the lesbian bar most prominently depicted in the Kate Delafield series and in all the novels read for this thesis, the Nightwood Bar, is a utopic space that connects the protagonist's closeted identity to the openly out identity of the lesbian feminist activist community she comes in contact with. This section argues that this space awakens a consciousness of introspection and action in the protagonist, more deeply and effectively than any other space in the series. Finally, describing the Nightwood Bar as a utopic space I emphasise the term's potential role in social transformation, as Ruth Levitas states the term utopia can be broadly understood 'as the desire for a better way of living expressed in the description of a different kind of society that makes possible that alternative way of life [...] the political importance of utopia rests on the argument that a vision of a good society located in the future may act as an agent of change.'²⁷ The reason why the lesbian bar is particularly in need of a utopic characterisation has been delineated in the historical context above.

²⁶ Peter Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 46.

²⁷ Ruth Levitas, 'The Future of Thinking About the Future', in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. by Jon Bird and others (London: Routledge, 1993) pp. 256-265, (p. 256).

The Nightwood Bar (named after *Nightwood* (1936) by Djuna Barnes) is a lesbian locale which features prominently in the second novel of the Kate Delafield series, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*. The death of one of the visitors prompts the investigation which connects Kate to the lesbian community that gravitates towards the Nightwood Bar. Kate's ambivalent position exposes the LAPD's grosser prejudices. Detective Taylor embodies the typical redneck cop morality and Kate's long-suffering acceptance of his plain contempt highlights both her incongruity and the deep-seated bigotry of their workplace. However, in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* the structure of alienation is reversed. In this lesbian space Taylor's intimidatory tactics are derided, his masculinity prompts rejection and ridicule. This is Kate's territory.²⁸

The Nightwood Bar is presented in contrast to heteronormative spaces (among which the aforementioned workplace of the protagonist, where open contempt towards the LGBT+ minority is considered normal). First, the name sounds depressing to Taylor but is important and significant to Kate.²⁹ Second, the interior design of the locale brims with pride and activism about highly current sensitive issues:

[t]he bar counter was an elongated curve, [...]. At the end sat a coin-filled glass bowl with a neatly inked sign: AIDS PROJECT L.A. Behind the bar, next to a blank television screen high against the wall, a long banner read: ALIVE WITH PRIDE IN '85. A large kidney-shaped mirror was surrounded by lavender lights, The Nightwood Bar written across it.³⁰

This brief description conveys several important messages. The AIDS donation bowl is full, thus it can be assumed that most if not all of the clientele of the Nightwood Bar are knowledgeable about the epidemic and about the high costs of the drugs for the patients and are willing to part with their savings for a good cause. The year is 1985, the disease was discovered in June 1981 in Los Angeles hospitals among five young men, all sexually active homosexuals. Thus the coin-filled bowl indicates a community which had been legally discriminated against for decades witnessing an unstoppable plague-like disease spread among their midst and receiving little but condemnation. The bowl stands for a community that fights

²⁸ Sally R. Munt, *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 131.

²⁹ Katherine V. Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1987] 2011), p. 2. Bella Books ebook.

³⁰ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 14.

for its own life with everything it has because it knows it has been left to die by indifference and stigma. Next, the passage mentions a long banner with the declaration: ALIVE WITH PRIDE, which means being full of Pride, but ‘alive’ in particular evokes the refusal of death and the passage of the baton from the dead to the living in the struggle for inclusive AIDS-related health care. The banner also specifies ‘IN 85,’ implying that their activism is on-going. This is a banner commonly seen in Gay Parades and it is likely the fruit of communal efforts from the part of the Nightwood Bar’s clientele. Finally, the kidney-shaped notice could be related to both menstrual pain, sometimes situated in the area of the kidneys or to Urinary Tract Infections which can affect the kidneys and are statistically more common in women.³¹ The symbolisation of the interior design continues to the bar’s back room, which Kate takes in in increasing amazement. This room includes a well-stocked, large bookcase, tables set up for reading magazines, doing crossword puzzle books, playing at for checkers, chess, Scrabble, backgammon, cards and even Gay Trivia. Against the far wall of the dance floor there are video games, a jukebox and a cigarette machine, and the whole is decorated with ‘flourishing plants.’³²

This atmosphere stuns Kate on the spot; she had visited one lesbian bar in college, but the experience distanced her from gay bars altogether because she regarded the locale as a mere pickup joint. The text pits the Nightwood Bar in stark contrast with such crude establishments, “‘It’s the kind of place I’ve always wanted,” Maggie said. “It’s not a pickup joint—plenty of places in town for that.” She was addressing Kate, the angle of her body shutting out Taylor.’³³ In this scene, Maggie’s body language is an apt summary of the theme of this space. Maggie is endowed with very sharp observational skills of her own; she correctly interprets Kate’s amazement at the Nightwood Bar and explains its uniqueness is intended. Maggie combined several elements to make sure that her locale would not be just a drinking joint, but a place to spend the time enjoyably in a number of ways, including reading books and magazines, playing board games, playing pool, and singing. When Kate’s unit partner Detective Taylor calls the atmosphere of the bar ‘weird’ and that all these features are unnecessary for a drinking joint, Kate’s reaction is instinctively defensive, ‘he could never understand that to her this bar felt right and natural and good in every respect. He could never imagine the relief of escaping the claustrophobic heterosexual world into a secluded, private place where there were only other

³¹ National Kidney Foundation, ‘Women and Kidney Disease’, (New York: National Kidney Foundation, 2020) updated 2020 <<https://www.kidney.org/newsletter/women-kidney-disease>> [accessed 30 July 2020]

³² Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 14.

³³ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 15.

lesbians.’³⁴ In this passage Kate defends the Nightwood Bar as the symbolical safe place of the lesbian community. This is an effect of the historical context depicted above. The distaste for pick-up joint-like locales is another piece of evidence of the idyllic aspect of the Nightwood Bar.

In the 1970s and decreasingly in the 1980s, the gay press indefatigably recorded hundreds of arrests each year from bar raids only. Gay bars were swept with such regularity that most heterosexual managers put anti-gay signs on the door of their business or stopped catering to queer customers altogether, while some queer managers relocated frequently in a desperate attempt to dodge the authorities’ scrutiny. Regardless of the allegiances of the owner, the clientele constantly fluctuated. It was not easy to relax with the thought of police raids haunting your every move, especially if the police were already aware that the locale was compromised. Moreover, there were queer customers who could not cope with being stared at by daring heterosexuals who ventured into the bars to ogle at the homosexual couples as if they animals in a zoo.³⁵

Consequently, many sympathetic and queer entrepreneurs opted to acquire the bare necessities for their drinking establishments. They knew that as soon as they started catering to homosexuals the future of their profits was uncertain. With this context the utopic nature of Nightwood Bar is even clearer and supported further by the following lines from Maggie,

[a]ny woman who comes in here, she’s not locked into just drinking or dancing or playing pool. She can sit by herself and read a magazine or a book or play cards with somebody or whatever. [...] I’m just as happy to serve coffee or soft drinks as booze. [...] my crowd is mostly an older crowd and mostly regulars. They come in for one thing— [...] To relax and be themselves.³⁶

This peaceful environment remains untouched throughout the series; the Nightwood Bar is never raided, though there is one attempt at gay-bashing in the eponymous novel, where three intoxicated thugs try to get one of the regulars of the Nightwood Bar in their car for nefarious purposes, only to be stopped by more than a dozen women, the bulk of the Nightwood Bar clientele, and eventually by Kate. The scene plays out like a cowboy movie and is to be read through feminist-tinted glasses, but it is also historically accurate in two aspects. First, it recalls

³⁴ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 23.

³⁵ Rubin, pp. 3-44.

³⁶ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 15.

the homosexual/heterosexual segregationism which was a common self-regulatory measure in mid-twentieth century United States, where gay bars often offered separate spaces (sometimes literally separate by doors/double doors) for homosexual/bisexual and heterosexual clientele.³⁷ There is no such separation in the Nightwood Bar and I would argue that it is precisely because of the openness of this space that the author calls back to segregationism through the unprovoked arrival and aggression of the young homophobic thugs.

Second, from the mid- to late twentieth century, fighting was an integral part of bar life and of tough lesbian identity. As has been broached in the preceding paragraph, lesbian bar turf was constantly vulnerable to encroachment by heterosexuals. Curious heterosexual individuals sometimes entered the locales with excuses of drinking or playing but ended up harassing the lesbian customers and would be asked to leave, and physical violence was resorted to upon refusal. As Roey Thorpe's research demonstrates, this atmosphere created both negative and positive outcomes for community life and for how customers regarded the space of the bar:

[t]he existence of a separate space for lesbians gave them a clearer physical turf to defend. Although heterosexuals could enter the rear part of the bar, [...] the Palais employed big, tough lesbians as bartenders, waiters, and bouncers. These women were responsible for asking heterosexual men who stepped out of line to leave the bar, and resorting to physical violence if they refused. Not only did working for the bar give a few of the most hard-core butches a means of supporting themselves without compromising their butch personas, but patrons of all sexual orientations had the unique experience of seeing lesbians whose job was to maintain a safe lesbian space.³⁸

The context delineated by Thorpe's research can be transposed to Forrest's Nightwood Bar because it fits particularly well with the aspirational description of the bar and its role as ideal community place for Kate. It also fits within the context of the brawl scene, where Kate, a lesbian police officer (with all the Insider/Outsider connotations mentioned several times in this thesis), defends a space for the wrongfully criminalised oppressed from the unfair establishment.

³⁷ Roey Thorpe, 'The Changing Face of Lesbian Bars in Detroit, 1938-1965', in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. by Brett Beemyn (London: Routledge, 1997) pp. 165-182, (p. 168).

³⁸ Thorpe, p. 171.

The need for fighting back, the need for positive empowering representation is a major cause for Kate's uncompromising butch type characterisation. On the downside of the combative nature of lesbian bar-goers, this brought about a pervasive aggressiveness which was often detrimental to the growth of the LGBT+ community; as Thorpe asserts,

[the lesbian bar] was a place where fights, both with heterosexual men and between lesbians, were common. The fact that violence was woven so closely into the fabric of lesbian bars, right alongside the lasting friendships and the ongoing support offered there, is testimony to the difficulty of maintaining lesbian space and the pervasiveness of internalised homophobia.³⁹

Returning to the last quote from *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, another sign of the difficulty of maintaining a lesbian space is depicted in the fact that the text avoids mentioning how Maggie, as a disowned female teenager, could possibly finance the bar's current set-up. This omission is further evidence that this space is the manifestation of wishful thinking. Furthermore, as may be inferred from Maggie's body language and lines, her bar is exclusively for a lesbian clientele, which she conveys by physically and verbally isolating the only heterosexual man in the room, Detective Taylor. Kate, though, is more than welcome as a fellow member of a persecuted minority. In the last quoted scene the narrative takes the first step to introduce Kate to a potentially supportive community where the queer side of herself can be liberated. One could argue that this is finally the space where Kate finds solace and frees herself of the psychological shadow of queer trauma, but this solace is short-lived and its range is very limited: its healing effects are also unfortunately voided by Kate's mounting alcoholism, as described further down this chapter.

There are two significant aspects of the Nightwood Bar crowd: it is mostly working class and it is racially variegated. Maggie, Patton and Kendall are white, Tora and Ash are Hispanic, and Raney and Audie are black. Some of these names are diminutives, such as Maggie for Magda, while others are invented and serve as a barrier between the person and her painful past, which usually involves homophobic family members, as shown in dialogues between Maggie and Kate.⁴⁰ The Nightwood Bar crowd is a testimony to the resilience and independent spirit of lesbian runaways of the 1970s. Most of these women have been disowned

³⁹ Thorpe, pp. 172-173.

⁴⁰ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 21.

and had to network by themselves, improve their own finances by themselves, and generally survive in a society which despised them and in which authorities constantly harassed them. The use of invented names confirms the cross-boundary social position of queer runaways and shows how courageous they were. If family and society turned their back to them, they would learn how to fend for themselves with their newly-found family. This powerful message is shown in effect in the novels, since Maggie, for instance, is a castaway and she owns such a perfect lesbian bar.

The racial diversity of the group is coherent with Forrest's broader feminist principle of social diversity; it is also another reflection of the utopic nature of the Nightwood Bar. This level of racial diversity fosters a sense of cosmic communality under the banner lesbian, which is pleasantly romantic but glosses over the vastly different struggles that white lesbians and lesbians of colour or indeed women of colour were engaged in in the 1970s and 1980s. The tendency to label a particular cultural experience as paradigmatic was criticised by black, disabled, lesbian, and working-class women in the Women's Liberation Movement and the same is true among lesbian activist groups. Black lesbians disavowed separatism because of their allegiances with black men in the fight against racism. Black and white lesbians also experienced different forms of oppression and organised different forms of resistance, which is further proof of the idealised nature of the Nightwood Bar.⁴¹ It is so idealised that the none of the novels feature verbal sparring between the white and non-white members of the Nightwood Bar, which is puzzling considering that Patton is a staunch, brazen preacher of feminist-lesbian activism; as Maggie describes, Patton is outspoken even about the overwhelming levels of alcoholism plaguing the lesbian community at the time, '[Patton] thinks I'm corrupting the bodily temples of my sisters by serving them alcohol. She has lots of other free advice and opinions too—like I should share with my sisters any money I make beyond what it costs me to subsist.'⁴²

Kate's introduction to this small community is fraught with difficulties. As she stands before the group of regulars, Kate's identity and internal conflict are accurately pinned by every gaze in the bar,

⁴¹ Brett Beemyn, 'A Queer Capital: Race, Class, Gender, and the Changing Social Landscape of Washington's Gay Communities, 1940-1955', in *Creating a Place for Ourselves: Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Community Histories*, ed. by Brett Beemyn (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 183-210.

⁴² Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 20.

*[w]here does my integrity begin and end? What if someone asks pointblank if I'm a lesbian? They won't ask. She was looking into the faces of the women at the bar. They don't need to. She felt stripped of [...] her conservative cloak of invisibility in the conventional world. In here she was fully exposed against her natural background. She recognized aspects of herself in each of the women staring back at her. In the assertiveness of one woman's posture, in the stocky build of another, in the untouched gray of a short hairstyle, in the practical clothing and unmadeup faces and serviceably pared nails...*⁴³

Kate is divided between her allegiance to the only community she currently belongs to, her so-called police family, and the community she is too afraid to approach, the lesbian. This is partly due to fear of repercussions in her line of work and partly because of her internalised guilt at being abnormal, and the elements of her abnormality are scattered in the crowd standing opposite her: assertive posture, stocky build, undyed, short, self-made hairstyles, practical clothing and lack of makeup, clipped nails.⁴⁴ She is near-terrified of being asked about her sexual identity, because admitting it out loud would be a major turning-point in her life, as delineated at length in previous chapters, especially in the second one, which analysed the space of the closet.

Regardless of her conservative long hair and plain, slightly elegant but still practical clothes, Kate's appearance leaves her exposed, she is too butch-y to avoid the knowing gazes of fellow lesbians. They recognise her as part of their community, whether she likes it or not, although Kate soon admits that a lesbian-only environment is her 'natural background.' As Sally R. Munt contends, it is from this moment that, 'Kate begins to see her identity not in terms of being a single coherent individual but a "self in relation," in the reflection and diffraction of the other women's eyes.'⁴⁵ Kate's identity consists of a collection of inconsistent and even contradictory subject positions which compete for her allegiance. During the progression of the series, Kate's life increasingly intertwines with the life of the bar in a shift from isolation and self-doubt to inclusion and self-revelation, which testifies to the historical importance of the bar in lesbian history. Kate relinquishes the role of wishful outsider and attends the Los Angeles Gay Pride Parade. The scene where Kate looks upon the thousands of queer individuals and hundreds of allies (especially the couple flanking a young girl and

⁴³ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 11, italics in original.

⁴⁴ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵ Munt, p. 131.

holding the sign ‘WE LOVE OUR GAY DAUGHTER’⁴⁶) celebrates Kate’s entry in the community.

Returning to the scene of the first confrontation between Kate and the Nightwood Bar community, Kate’s thoughts reveal a struggle that seems to have weighed on her mind for a while. What does she know of the way the LAPD treats the queer community on the streets and in bars? What did she think of becoming one of the oppressors when she decided to side with law and order? The only mention of this internal struggle is put in general terms:

[m]ore than most she understood that instinctive recoil from the uniformed figure with a badge and a gun. It was not so much the sanctified authority to kill or maim but the power to subvert, to diminish and scar a life. [...] Small wonder that the cop was the personification of menace to many gay people already brutalized by contempt, whose lives testified to powerlessness without recourse.⁴⁷

Why does Kate understand more than most? Has she ever experienced a bar raid, from either side? Has she ever been manhandled, divided from her partner, thrust into a paddy-wagon and forced to spend in a prison cell for the sole reason that she wanted to go out and enjoy drinks in good company? Unfortunately, these questions are not answered by the novels, but it can be inferred that Kate feels trapped by her own profession.

The Nightwood Bar regulars refuse to speak to Taylor. Only the most politically aware and active, the most daring and reckless, Patton, lambasts him for bringing Kate with him and introduces a fascinating theme in the series, lesbian sisterhood, ‘[y]ou think bringing a *sister* in here makes some kind of difference to us?’⁴⁸ Here ‘sister’ is referred strictly to Kate’s sexual identity and it is immediately problematised by Kate’s role in society: she is a detective, she is supposed to represent law and order, but is instead faced with the other side of the medal when Patton becomes a mouthpiece for the lesbian community, ‘[s]he’s sold out to her own oppressors. Enjoy being one of the boys? Kicking your own sisters around?’⁴⁹ This quote together with Kate’s previous thoughts confirm that the fictional queer community of the Kate Delafield Mystery series is as oppressed as the real one at the time. The police is still a hostile force, queer business owners suffer financial instability, the community is constantly at the

⁴⁶ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 171.

⁴⁷ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 26.

⁴⁸ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 13, italics in original.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

mercy of petty harassers and gay-bashers, instances of both are present in the novel. And the police officers, the detectives, the federal agents and all lawful authorities are conniving agents in LGBT+ discrimination.

Patton's line is even more powerful with hindsight. At the end of the series, in fact, Kate has enjoyed thirty-five years of career at the LAPD: thirty-five years in the closet and at the service of a nation where homosexual activity was illegal (same-sex sexual activity in California became legal in 1976 but discrimination protections were adopted in 2003 and *High Desert* is set in 2002 so the statement stands).⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this oppressed-oppressor dichotomy is never commented upon in the twenty-three years of friendship between Kate and the Nightwood Bar group. It is barely brushed upon in *Apparition Alley* and it will be analysed shortly, but even this novel fails to delve into the depths of Kate's feelings for the role her 'police family' had in persecuting her sisters. The only explanation available is contained in the passage above, 'more than most she understood,' which does not engage with Kate's subjective experience. The social commentary of both *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* and *Apparition Alley* would have heightened considerably with more content about the oppressed-oppressor dilemma. This absence does not detract from the already daring subject matter of the two novels: inhumanly cruel gay-bashing.

Every regular customer is out of the closet, politically aware and involved in activism. When Kate announces that the LAPD will conduct an investigation into Dory's murder, the Nightwood Bar women are gobsmacked. They are unconvinced that Dory will receive dignity in death as she did not enjoy this luxury in life, courtesy of her sexual identity, "Dory's a dyke," Patton said bitterly. "Whoever killed her—he'll end up getting a nothing sentence in a cushy cell just like Dan White."⁵¹ This quote refers to the treatment of gay bashers in the 1960s and 1970s, well into the 1980s. One of the most famous gay bashers at the time of publication was Dan White, who in 1979 murdered Harvey Milk, a member of San Francisco's Board of Supervisors and the first openly gay official elected in the United States. White was sentenced with voluntary manslaughter and the riots set off by the San Francisco queer community received support across the country. The Dan White trial became one more piece of bitter proof that juries hated homosexuals and were lenient towards their murderers.⁵² Such was the historical context at the time of publication of *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, which more than explains the antagonistic attitude of the Nightwood Bar group in front of Kate.

⁵⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*.

⁵¹ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 13.

⁵² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*, ch. 22 sec. 2.

Despite Kate being a lesbian like them, she also represents an enforcing authority which historically had abused the LGBT+ community and which, according to the argument of this thesis, places her in a complicated Insider/Outsider spatial dilemma. The Nightwood Bar group expects the investigation into Dory's death to be dismissed because she is homosexual and Kate's sisterhood means nothing to them since she carries a badge. Consequently, Kate's solving of the case can be interpreted as both an arc of redemption for Kate and a sign of hope for the lesbian community: there is someone to fight for their rights, even in death. The bitter truth is that Dory is killed by her own mother who, blinded by religion, kills Dory to protect her husband's reputation as an upstanding, benevolent citizen. At the end of the novel Kate turns to the Nightwood Bar to report the investigation's findings to the group, but conceals the truth and says that Flora acted in madness instead of homophobic-driven premeditation. The way this scene is phrased, it reads as an act of kindness, but it is also an act of condescension, as if Kate thinks that these women cannot handle the truth when the text (and history) has already established that they live in a highly hostile society. This is another instance of the inevitable subconscious disorientation that the lesbian detective feels when confronted with her contrasting roles of LGBT+ revenger and state institutions' paladin, which is summarised in this thesis in the Insider/Outsider argument.

This reading is supported by delving deeper into Kate's role in the investigation of *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*. Kate is a lesbian detective solving the murder of an abused lesbian girl and Taylor is an old school homophobic detective who treats Dory with respect in so far as he sees her as a traditionally feminine young girl. The text hints at this from the beginning of the case: at the time of death Dory is found clothed in a pretty white dress which makes her look younger and more innocent, and when Maggie reveals that Dory was a runaway Taylor is befuddled, ' [w]ell, I know that goes on [...] we see all kinds of kids in the street—but God to look at her it's still hard to figure... I don't see how anybody could just—'⁵³ He cannot link the image of such a traditionally feminine girl with the stereotypical image of the lesbian, the masculine-looking butch; he understands why the first is thrown out on the streets, but not the latter. Dory's youth and appearance may also explain why Taylor performs as usual in this novel but refuses to cooperate well in the gay-bashing case of *Murder by Tradition*. In *Nightwood Bar* he investigates the death of a young girl who has been sexually abused since childhood and who looks nothing like his stereotype of a lesbian, while in *Murder by Tradition* the victim is a gay man who had made unwanted advances to his murderer. The interpretation

⁵³ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 18.

of segregationism is possible also because Kate carries out the bulk of the investigation of *Nightwood Bar* solo. The group of lesbians is utterly unwilling to answer Taylor's questions, even when he makes an effort to be polite. He is a man and therefore an intruder, which is exacerbated by the fact that he is a *policeman*; even Kate becomes conscious of this, in one of the few introspective moments in which she feels closer to the lesbian community rather than her so-called police family, 'Taylor's masculine presence in this bar, Kate thought, was a fact she resented as much as any woman here.'⁵⁴ Since the crime scene is the parking lot of the locale the technicians team are also out of the equation: Kate is the one who conducts the interviews and visits the locale multiple times to gather insights and review the crime scene. This central role in the investigation and in the communities related to the case exacerbates the lesbian sleuth's spatial liminality, causing further contrast and at the time blurring the boundaries between Self/Insider and Other(ed)/Outsider, as has been argued at the beginning of this thesis' introduction, and at length in the second and third chapters.

One way in which the author transmits the life-long bond between Kate and the Nightwood Bar community, and how this bond educates Kate on many newly accepted social mores of the lesbian community is Kate's negotiation of her own gender performance, aided by the bartender/owner Maggie. Because she is closeted, Kate lacks friends or allies who know about her homosexuality, but after the events of *Nightwood Bar* she realises that she can fall back on this group of individuals without fear of contempt. Thus, when Kate is stumped by her new young lover's 'aggressiveness,' as she calls it, in intimate matters, she seeks advice from Maggie, the owner and bartender of the Nightwood Bar, who quickly reaches the crux of the matter,

Maggie handed back the photo. "She doesn't look very butch." "No," Kate said uncomfortably, "she doesn't." [...] "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 prevent a grin. "Are you less butch on the job? Are you weeping over your corpses?" "Not yet," Kate said, chuckling with nervous embarrassment, but relieved that the conversation was now exactly where she needed it to be.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 25.

⁵⁵ Katherine V. Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1989] 2013), p. 138. Google ebook.

This scene depicts a closeted butch entrenched in a binary understanding of gender and sexuality behavioural patterns, and an openly out, more modern, more fluid type of butch who has liberated herself from the butch/femme binary. What does this have to do with the space of the lesbian bar? The butch/femme pattern emerged from lesbian bar life as the majority's need to identify Others fuelled recognition of a strict masculine/feminine binary and lesbian identity increasingly hinged on gender performance rather than simple sexual desire. Notably, a few protagonists identify themselves as butch, such as Kate Delafield, Stoner McTavish, Micky Knight, and others such as Kate Martinelli, Lauren Laurano, and Carol Ashton present strong butch elements in their characterisation; this may be a conscious choice to emphasise the visibility of the lesbian detective on the literary scene, as Kennedy and Davis comment, 'butches defied convention by usurping male privilege in appearance and sexuality, and with their [femmes], outraged society by creating a romantic and sexual unit within which women were not under male control.'⁵⁶ On the downside, the butch/femme distinction minimised the space for those beyond the butch/femme binary, with testimonies gathered by scholars such as Kennedy, Davis, Riemer, and Brown talking about lesbians who entered the bar scene from outside the binary being quickly educated by the other patrons and having no choice but to fall in line or be ostracised in the only space that would have allowed them to be themselves (ironically).

This circles back to the point I made in the second chapter, on the closet, about the relation between queer trauma, internalised homophobia, compulsory heteronormativity and the way the lesbian sleuth interacts with certain spaces. The space of the bar brings the butch/femme roles dynamics to the foreground: the butch/femme generally reigned over the lesbian bar scene until a new socio-erotic consciousness progressively hinged on desire rather than gender performance, leading the way to more fluid expressions of identity, narrativised by characters such as Kate's partner Aimee Grant. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, influences of butch development in the psychosexual field of childhood to adulthood is a complicated pathway which does not usually diminish or refocus in puberty, usually because of a lack of role models to assist in integrating gender and identity with sexual orientation into a coherent, self-aware organization of self.⁵⁷ This lack of or struggle with self-coherence

⁵⁶ Kennedy and Davis, *Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 7.

⁵⁷ Lee Zevy, 'Lesbian Tomboys and "Evolutionary Butch"', in *Lesbians, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis: The Second Wave*, ed. by Judith M. Glassgold and Suzanne Iasenza (London: Routledge, [2004] 2011), pp. 143-158, (p. 144).

reflects the way the lesbian sleuth interacts with and inhabits certain spaces, including if not especially the gay bar. Because of the ostracisation she suffers, the lesbian sleuth yearns to belong; however, as research on this topic indicates, the engagement of the lesbian detective with butch/femme dynamics impacts her characterisation and exacerbates her Insider/Outsider spatiality.

The yearning for belonging shaped Kate's motivations since her youth. In one instance, Forrest indicates that Kate's decision to enrol in the Marine Corps is driven by a need for financial and professional stability: '[i]n the absence of a definitive goal, military service would be a creditable haven until she found an answer—or perhaps so that she could continue to avoid one.'⁵⁸ However, it can be inferred that another underlying reason is an attempt to fit in. In fact, in Kate's recounting of her first venture in a lesbian bar and in comments about her mannish appearance, it is clear that Kate struggled to find a place or more precisely a community where she could feel like she belonged. For this reason, her decision to talk with the recruiter of the Marine Corps is partly due to defiance against a society whose social mores she could not relate to and adopt. She fled from a societal box she felt she was forced into: '[s]he understood only in retrospect that enlistment was her own protest—her first significant defiance of a peer group which had dictated too many aspects of her life.'⁵⁹ But even in the military Kate stood out in isolation from her peers, '[a]mong similarly uniformed women in the Marine Corps, she had been resented for her unusual physical strengths and command presence.'⁶⁰ The word 'resented' in this passage is fairly strong but there are no recollections of internal strife in Kate's unit. On the contrary, the squad's reunion in *Liberty Square* (1996) is the first time Kate is told that her unit mates considered her a member of the team in full. Kate's reaction makes it clear that she had never thought so before, 'Kate absorbed these statements with astonishment.'⁶¹

So why is Kate's sense of belonging with the Nightwood Bar group more meaningful than her belonging with her so-called police family? Because the first erupts in a particularly emotional manner that demonstrates the inner turmoil of the closeted lesbian detective vis-à-vis the unrestrained yet constricted life of gay bar goers, and this is evident in the recollection of her first experience of a lesbian bar atmosphere. Kate's first visit to a lesbian bar happens in her last year of college. She is accompanied by her on-and-off partner at the time to celebrate her twenty-first birthday. In this bar Kate is once again reminded that she has always been

⁵⁸ Katherine V. Forrest, *Liberty Square* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1996] 2013), p. 85. Bella Books ebook.

⁵⁹ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Katherine V. Forrest, *Amateur City* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1984] 2011), p. 29. Bella Books ebook.

⁶¹ Forrest, *Liberty Square*, p. 139.

hopelessly different from her peers. Even among many merry-making lesbians, Kate sits quietly, ‘wondering at her own passivity and emptiness, and why it seemed so suddenly obvious that her life had always been like a compass without direction.’⁶² This sense of disorientation derives both from Kate’s lack of sexual experience, but also and more importantly from a contrast between Kate’s physique and traditional standards of bodily femininity, ‘[g]rowing up, she had been taller and stronger, more aggressive than the other girls; in look and manner, hopelessly unfeminine by their standards.’⁶³ This ‘hopelessly unfeminine’ summarises Kate’s longing for belonging and the begrudging acceptance of her Otherness, even in the context of the community where she should have belonged by default.

Comparing Kate’s feelings with Kennedy and Davis’ research indicates a clear foreshadowing of the complexity of Kate’s closeted and internalised homophobia. As Kennedy and Davis assert, ‘[p]art of the exhilaration came from the dramatic contrast between the acceptance and warmth found in these gathering places and the isolation and hostility lesbians experienced in their daily lives. They met and socialized in relative safety in the bars and felt as if they belonged.’⁶⁴ Forrest does not specify what kind of isolation and hostility Kate experienced in her youth, but she is all the more complex and worthy of close analysis because of this. Kate’s expectations of lesbian bar culture were simple, she was elated at having discovered a world where her sexuality was normal. However, after she was flirted with by prostitutes and witnessed her girlfriend taking the flirting in stride and dancing with other women, Kate saw in lesbian bar culture a level of sexual licentiousness she was not comfortable with. Moreover, Kate was very uncomfortable with the presence of heterosexual couples morbidly staring at the intertwined bodies of the gay people in the dancing room, ‘Kate felt inchoate anger—and humiliation. Her curt rejection of Julie’s wish to dance was a refusal to be part of a freak show for these voyeurs. This place [...] was too much like the place which housed her grandmother—a ghetto of the exiled, of the classified hopeless.’⁶⁵ This quote explains the chilling realisation of the division between a heteronormative society and more importantly heteronormative legislature, and the queer community. The warm, welcoming, diverse community that Kate was hoping to find is actually a ‘freak show’ for the rest of society.

For state institutions, queer individuals are ‘the classified hopeless,’ a minority on the wrong side of the law. The voyeurism and the sexual licentiousness are the main reasons why

⁶² Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 27.

⁶³ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Kennedy and Davis, “‘I Could Hardly Wait to Get Back to that Bar’”, p. 46.

⁶⁵ Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, p. 27.

in *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* Kate feels disconnected from the openly gay community of Los Angeles. She feels like the bars are the fulcrum of the community and she is the outsider. Her position as a police detective of course exacerbates the feeling of exclusion. Because of its social criticism, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* is a highly significant novel within the researched novels, the level of social commentary, the denouncement of societal homophobia and oppression is unmatched among the texts analysed for this thesis. Kate's relation with the space of the bar is very similar to her relation with the closet; it is conflicted and contradictory and entrenches the protagonist in a defensive mindset. The most emblematic element in this case is described in the following section; it is Kate's alcoholism, which is closely related to the space of the bar because it includes the same basic activity that the bar encourages, which is alcohol consumption.

5.3 Alcohol as a Psychological Crutch in the Kate Delafield Mystery Series

It is deeply saddening that alcohol was pervasive enough in the lesbian communities of the 1970s that Adrienne Rich in 1980 paints this picture of lesbian identity: '[l]esbian existence comprises both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. [...] It has of course included role playing, self-hatred, breakdown, alcoholism, suicide, and intrawoman violence'⁶⁶ Sandra C. Anderson and Donna C. Henderson writing in 1985 assert from their knowledge of the literature at the time that number of alcoholics are estimated at 10% of adults who drink, and women are likely half of this figure. The difficulty in retrieving exact numbers stems from the scarce research within female communities and queer communities. Since lesbians belong to both, research about this group is deficient, and as Anderson and Henderson remind us, 'current figures regarding the number of lesbians in the general population can only be considered guesstimates, as they only account for those lesbians who have *acknowledged* their sexual preference.'⁶⁷

Why was this form of addiction so widespread? Faderman ascribes this malady to the bar culture which arose in the 1950s. As this chapter has shown bars were a safe haven for many butch working-class women because they were the only places they could dress and behave in a masculine way. But the most important aspect of the bars to young and working-

⁶⁶ Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, 5 (1980), p. 649.

⁶⁷ Sandra C. Anderson and Donna C. Henderson, 'Working with Lesbian Alcoholics', *Social Work*, 30 (1985), p. 518, my emphasis.

class lesbians was that they provided the possibility to connect with other lesbians, whether for friendship, romance, or even casual sexual encounters. With the persistence of homophobic legislation in place well into the 1980s, the continued importance of the bars in the queer community meant that they also posed several dangers, such as reinforcement of strict sexual roles, violence, and alcoholism.⁶⁸ The lesbian community did not live passively in front of this plaguing dependency. The campaigns ‘Just Say No’ and ‘Clean and Sober’ that were launched in the mainstream in the 1980s caught fire among lesbians, but as Faderman’s tense sequence and structure demonstrates, lesbians lagged slightly behind on the road to sobriety:

[t]he ‘80s saw a certain sobriety settle over the dominant lesbian community with regard to issues that had been treated more lightly in the ‘70s, such as non-monogamy [...] and drug and alcohol use. “Marriage” and “clean and sober” lifestyles became “in” among lesbians, just as they did among heterosexuals in the ‘80s.⁶⁹

Further on Faderman reinforces my interpretation of the severity of lesbian alcoholism, stating how Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12 Step Program, and the Living Sober groups quickly adapted their services to the needs of queer individuals, and ‘[t]he Living Sober contingents were the biggest in the Gay Pride parades *at the end of the decade*.’⁷⁰ In light of this history, Forrest opted for a pro-active approach towards this topic in her Kate Delafield Mystery series.

The topic of alcoholism is introduced slowly and subtly: in fact, in the first three novels of the series there are only off-hand mentions about Kate’s preference for hard liquor, such as a solitary dinner scene in the middle of *Amateur City*: ‘[Kate] opened her menu. Preferring a double scotch, she settled with little regret [sic] for half a carafe of wine.’⁷¹ The verbs in this quote, ‘preferring’ and ‘settle,’ set the scene for the upcoming downward spiral into alcoholism, and, more importantly for the argument of this thesis, they provide points of reference for Kate’s relationship with the bar as a space where she can find solace from her violent lifestyle. The second novel of the series, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, continues on this trend; exemplary is a scene where Detective Taylor goes home on time but Kate remains alone in the office poring over the case (which is a trend on its own between them, especially for cases involving LGBT+ victims), wondering about her next drink, ‘[Kate] would look forward to the

⁶⁸ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 162-163.

⁶⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, p. 281.

⁷⁰ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 282-283.

⁷¹ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 108.

drink she would soon have to end this long day. She pulled into the subterranean garage of her apartment on Montana Avenue wondering why it was that America couldn't produce a decent scotch of its own.⁷² The sequence of sentences even implies that drinking occupies Kate's thoughts during the entire drive home.

The quantity of the glasses is another element that the author makes use of brilliantly. At the beginning of the series alcohol is commonly mentioned in relation to one glass, which progressively becomes a couple and even four depending on how stressful an investigation turns out to be for Kate.⁷³ The third novel of the series, *The Beverly Malibu* (1989), contains the first sign of self-awareness, introduced as subtly as possible, as is consistent with Forrest's style, during a scene where Kate comes home from work:

[h]alf an hour later she again walked into her apartment and gazed at the books on the coffee table, companions patiently awaiting her attention. She poured herself some scotch over ice, hoping she was not too tired to sleep, and thinking about an article she had just read in which she fit the profile of the individual most prone to problems with alcohol: a person alone, without a primary emotional relationship, and in a high-tension job. She finished her scotch. She set her alarm and got into bed[.]⁷⁴

From this highly significant quote Kate's home mini-bar is a synecdochical representation of a bar, but without the key element described in the above section: the community navigating in and around this space. The fact that Forrest, throughout the series, continues to depict Kate as solitary, *without emotional relationship*, and in a constant state of tension *after* the events of *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, after Kate approaches and befriends the community of the Nightwood Bar, reinforces my argument that the psychological shadow cast by queer trauma does not permit Kate to navigate spaces healthily and peacefully. Even when there is a space with a welcoming, inclusive community like the Nightwood Bar, Kate traps herself into the home mini-bar, in a sort of self-harming cycle.

In the second-to-last novel, *Hancock Park* (2004) we find both direct and indirect references. Maggie Schaeffer tries to tell Kate openly that her relationship with Aimee is degenerating because of a number of issues, one of main factors being excessive drinking. Kate tries to deny this but when Maggie asks her if she ever took a 'Do you have a drinking problem?'

⁷² Forrest, *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*, pp. 44-45.

⁷³ Katherine V. Forrest, *Apparition Alley* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [1997] 2010), p. 175. Amazon ebook.

⁷⁴ Forrest, *The Beverly Malibu*, p. 111.

test (quizzes that can be found in magazines or online), Kate admits to herself that she always took them and she always failed. She also clings to the excuse that most likely all police officers failed such tests. The text does not offer a sample of the questions of such tests, but the significance of this reference is that it falls in line with the previous two. Articles, popular characters, quizzes, these self-monitoring methods belong to popular culture and can be easily found in the everyday routine of ordinary individuals. The Kate Delafield Mystery series simply adds to this line-up. The novels demand the audience to look inward. Do they recognise themselves in these characters who have a drinking problem? If the answer is positive but they have trouble admitting so to themselves, their journey of self-awareness may be similar to Kate's. In fact, Kate lives in denial until the very last novel of the series. In *Hancock Park* (2004) she tries to salvage the situation in her mind even by thinking that alcohol slows down the pace of sexual intercourse, thus it is necessary to maintain a healthy sex life with Aimee.⁷⁵

Unfortunately Aimee does not concur and in *High Desert* (2013) she and Kate have already separated, the chasm between them filled with misunderstandings and resentment. Even the loneliness that grips Kate every time she enters her and Aimee's now empty house is not enough to make her stop drinking⁷⁶ but it is enough to push her into seeking professional counselling. Kate feels defeated but also hopeful for a recovery. She no longer fights the diagnosis of alcoholism, not even that of depression, like she has done in the past. Forrest is no idealist and the road to recovery is not silk-smooth for Kate. She tries to sneak away from the alcohol ban, especially when Dr. Dearborn suggests she consider anti-depressants. Kate insists that alcohol is good enough medicine for her, that she knows exactly the 'dosage' to be able to relax, become tipsy, or pass out. What she seeks from a drink is the immediacy of its 'medicinal' properties, an ephemeral yet instant relief to her is better than progress that becomes evident only weeks, months, down the line.⁷⁷

Why does Kate fall into excessive drinking? The series does not offer definite answers but an interpretation can be dared. The exclusion from the queer community Kate felt in her youth, albeit traumatic, does not seem to be reason enough, also because there is not a single reference to alcohol consumption during such remote flashback scenes. However, the horrors of the Vietnam War have produced a number of traumatised soldiers whose psychological scars were so deep that the whole field of American psychoanalysis and psychiatry mobilised in order to treat them properly. Moreover, upon her return to the United States, Kate is stationed

⁷⁵ Katherine V. Forrest, *Hancock Park* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, [2004] 2013), p. 125. Google ebook.

⁷⁶ Katherine V. Forrest, *High Desert* (Midway FL: Spinsters Ink, 2013), p. 15. Google ebook.

⁷⁷ Forrest, *High Desert*, ch. 4.

in a juvenile detention centre, as working with women and children was the default position for female officers at the time. There was not much risk of over-populating juvenile and women's prisons with female officers, because in the early 1970s women comprised only 1% of federal agents and state/local police, most of these being ex-soldiers like Kate. In 1972 federal legislation prohibited discrimination at all levels of law-enforcement hiring. The percentage of women in police and government agencies thus gradually grew to 5% in 1980 and 9.1% in 1995.⁷⁸ It is explicitly said in the series that this legislation is why Kate's application as a police officer was accepted immediately and smoothly: 'the courts mandated numbers.'⁷⁹ There is a history of segregation and defensiveness of the macho police force behind this statement, but also there is the bitterness Kate felt when she was hired as a token female detective, as part of the LAPD's good PR theatricals. This is part of the reason why Kate prioritises her work over private matters, even above her personal happiness. She was considered a token woman so she felt like she had to dedicate herself to her work much more than her colleagues in order to be granted the dignity that they have, that is to be recognised from her performance alone. This continued psychological and physical burden sounds a good enough reason for Kate to keep using alcohol as an emotional crutch.

5.3.1 Exorcising Trauma with Alcohol in the Micky Knight Mystery Series

In a perfect fit with the hard-boiled genre, J. M. Redmann's Private Investigator Micky Knight relies on alcohol for comfort. She is not as picky as Carol Ashton or Kate Delafield, because as long as it contains a high enough concentration of alcohol, Micky stores it in her apartment which doubles as office. Micky's relationship with the bottle is almost a mirror to Kate's. Alcoholism is a major issue at the beginning of the series; chapter six of *Death by the Riverside* (1990) opens with Micky waking up hungover (as usual), with three empty bottles at hand, blurred memories of sex with a stranger, walking along the levee, watching the sun rise, crying, and nothing more.⁸⁰ The main issue with Micky's dependency is that, from her point of view, the very act of drinking alcohol was empowering: '[s]ometimes the hardest thing about changing is the people who still expect you to be as you always were. [...] I was a heavy drinker

⁷⁸ Linda Mizejewski, *Hardboiled and High Heeled: The Woman Detective in Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 16.

⁷⁹ Forrest, *Amateur City*, p. 169.

⁸⁰ J. M. Redmann, *Death by the Riverside* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1990] 2009), p. 34. Bold Strokes ebook.

then and proud of it. I thought it proved something. I drank because I knew Aunt Greta wouldn't approve. I fancied each drink a victory over her.'⁸¹ Because Micky dedicated her high school and college years to as licentious and wild a lifestyle as she could, as a consequence of her queer trauma, and because a couple of her close friends know about how proud Micky used to be about her hard-won lifestyle, Micky's environment is not conducive to her sobriety. She is at a disadvantage before she even starts quitting drinking.

The other significant obstacle for Micky is also psychological, and it is something she shares with Kate's case. For both women alcohol is a source of comfort. For Micky, it is tied directly to her queer trauma. She started drinking in order to forget her the violence done to her, and when she became a private investigator, she drank in order to escape from nightmares about violence done to others.⁸² Kate drinks right after coming home from her shift. She drinks excessively well into the night, but her routine is very strict. No alcohol in the line of work, only from the moment she arrives home. Micky is thus faced with another disadvantage, she lacks the certainty of a pre-established shift. This gives her the freedom she has always longed for since she moved in with her abusive Aunt Greta, but she also has the freedom to down shots any chance she gets. Excuses vary from feeling guilty and not answering or calling back her friends, being rude to them or being scolded by them, being anxious or frustrated at her investigations, and of course recalling pieces of her tragic family history.⁸³

Alcoholism is not a problem in the beginning of the Kate Delafield Mystery series, while it is the opposite for Micky. In subsequent novels alcoholism becomes a phantom menace. Micky's road to recovery is fraught with obstacles, many of them laid out by the trauma and self-esteem issues she carries from her troubled past. In *Deaths of Jocasta* the text reveals that Micky decided to abandon alcohol on her own. Complete psychological isolation is already a perilous foundation for sobriety, but this is aggravated by the fact that Micky shares her plan only under duress. This is related to Micky's self-effacing tendencies because she thinks she is not worthy of her friends' support in undertaking sobriety. She is convinced that they have no faith in her success, and for good reason, and would rather face any ups and downs by herself rather than be confronted with their inevitable disappointment.

Why are Kate and Carol easy victims of alcoholism, and why is alcoholism such an important element in their characterisation? Alcohol is an emotional crutch for these characters,

⁸¹ J. M. Redmann, *Deaths of Jocasta* (Valley Falls NY: Bold Strokes Books, [1992] 2009), p. 22. Bold Strokes ebook.

⁸² Redmann, *Deaths of Jocasta*, p. 77.

⁸³ Redmann, *Death by the Riverside*, p. 36.

but this chapter emphasises that they need an emotional crutch to pass as insiders in a profession that requires them to be so while they are in fact suppressed as outsiders and the psychological shadow lingering from this liminality tears their sense of Self apart to the point of desperately needing support. Why can these characters just not be satisfied with the emotional support they receive from other characters? Apart from the way alcoholism is used as social commentary of the rampant alcoholism among lesbians in the 1980s and 1990s,⁸⁴ it represents another reason why the figure of the lesbian sleuth is intrinsically tragic and perpetually lost within the spaces of society. For instance, Micky is out to most of her circle of friends, but she hides a traumatic past precisely because she is a homosexual woman. The fear of rejection from her biological family members, the abuse she suffered because she was not “normal,” the licentiousness she used to disconnect herself from reality, these are all pieces of Micky’s queer trauma. Instead of having their characters cope with their pain with something not quite relatable, such as violent acts on the job, or insubordination, the authors chose alcohol which, as discussed at the beginning of this section, was a common trap homosexual women fell into at the time of publication. Alcoholism not only well conveys the catastrophic consequences of queer trauma, but it was also immediately relatable for the original audience of these crime series.

⁸⁴ Hankin. See also Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, pp. 163, 281-283, and implicitly also Becki L. Ross, 'Independent Lesbian-Feminist Organizing', in *The House That Jill Built: A Lesbian Nation in Formation*, ed. by Becki L. Ross (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 41-56, (p. 45).

5.4 The Lesbian Bar as Crime Scene in the Amanda Valentine Series

The Kate Delafield Mystery series frames the space of the lesbian bar as a gateway between the solitary figure of the detective and the lesbian community, a place of refuge and of momentary escape from the closet. The Amanda Valentine Mystery series engages with the same elements, with the closet and the community, but in different ways. In the Kate Delafield Mystery series, the Nightwood Bar is regarded as part of the crime scene by secondary characters only, such as Detective Taylor and crime scene forensic officers, while Kate's perception of the bar is immediately positive. In contrast, the second novel of the Amanda Valentine series, *Second Guess*, dramatises a more tense relationship between the protagonist and the bar, which foreshadows an equally tense relationship between Amanda, Kate, and public LGBT+ relations. This section will argue that Amanda's tense relationship with the space of the lesbian bar is based on a yearning to belong in contrast with fear of rejection.

In *Second Guess* the victim is a psychologically unstable gay woman from a wealthy and influential family. The victim is found dead in a local S&M lesbian club called Lynx, her body covered in rope and whip marks. The space is introduced in the narrative under a negative light:

[t]he Lynx nightclub occupied a prime harbor position [...] in the same block as Police Headquarters. [...] Amanda could recall a brief period of public hysteria when the place opened, its proximity to the children's science museum inflaming a few righteous citizens. But after the initial flurry, the media had lost interest, apparently unable to support the titillating speculation with suitably salacious photographs.⁸⁵

There are already two worthwhile elements to point out in this quote regarding the reputation of lesbian bars. First, the Lynx causing clamour because of its vicinity to a children's science museum is a reminder of the history of strife between the LGBT+ community and the public: thus queerness in crime fiction has long been associated with extremes, usually of sexual violence (as the S&M focus of the Lynx) and with society-wide condemned sexual perversions, such as paedophilia.⁸⁶ This explains why there is heated debate over the closeness of the club to a place frequented by minors, the realms of sexual "perversion" and of innocence become too close for the public's comfort. The arbitrariness of the public's bias against places of

⁸⁵ Rose Beecham, *Second Guess* (Tallahassee FL: Naiad Press, 1994), p. 14.

⁸⁶ Heather Worthington, *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 50.

congregation for LGBT+ folk is evident in the way the author places the Lynx in-between the children's science museum, a place that society is afraid will be tainted by it, and the Police Headquarters, a place that society trusts with the supervision of law and order. Physically and narratively the author exposes society's hypocrisy and bias against the lesbian club: if the real concern is the negative influence of the club on the minds of the innocent then its proximity to the centre of operations of the "eyes of the state" should be reassuring. However, as the narrator notes in the quoted passage, the titillated public loses interest due to the lack of scandals, which dramatises how queer desire, when practiced with consensus of all parties involved like in the Lynx, is not any more outlandish than what the conformist heterosexual public does behind closed doors.

As mentioned, unlike Kate's immediate affinity with the Nightwood Bar, Amanda is resistive at first, but both characters' paths lead to a stronger connection with the lesbian community. Like the customers of the Nightwood Bar initially test Kate's loyalty, the owner of the Lynx, Casey, a key witness and friend of the victim, is initially intent on probing Amanda's loyalty:

"[c]ould we talk somewhere?" Amanda adopted her most no-nonsense manner.

"Sure. We have a discreet little parlor especially for wilting violets who can't be seen at queer venues."

Refusing to respond to this obvious baiting, Amanda said coolly, "I'm here on duty, Casey. It doesn't matter where I'm seen."

"If you say so, Inspector."⁸⁷

The tone of antagonism in this quote underlies the initial frosty atmosphere between the lesbian bar and the detective, which is a common recurrence in Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction novels featuring this setting. Like the Nightwood Bar regulars, the owner of the Lynx is constantly on the lookout for the authorities, as shown in this quote, 'I run a lesbian club. The police haven't done much to earn our confidence. [...] I could hand you a list of patrons and be out of business tomorrow.'⁸⁸ This reflects a historical tactic that was used by law enforcement against places of congregation of LGBT+ folks called entrapment, a US-born

⁸⁷ Beecham, p. 74.

⁸⁸ Beecham, p. 80.

initiative first implemented during the Korean War designed to train and send plain-clothes officers into lesbian bars to serve as decoys and gather evidence.⁸⁹

Conscious of this history, Amanda tries to keep her presence in the Lynx as impersonal as possible because this place is at a dangerous junction between the closet and the workplace. As this quote shows, these spaces are not in harmony at this point in the story: Amanda is like a ‘wilting violet’ who eschews laying her roots in queer ground, just like she prefers the idealised home of the United States to New Zealand. This may also be a hidden reminder of how all Amanda’s queer connections are in New Zealand – Amanda’s asexual colleague, her lesbian subordinate, her trans friend and her queer-friendly best friend – while no such connections are mentioned in the United States. Thus, Amanda’s strong will to sink her roots back in the United States can be seen as another attempt to detach herself from her lesbianism, which is the core of Amanda’s melancholia, as has been analysed in the section about Amanda’s home. In the quote above, Casey realises that Amanda plans to seek refuge in the impersonal role of the detective, even lures Amanda into thinking that she succeeded by referring to her rank. Although this is a façade, Casey’s goal is to avoid her customers being identified and interrogated by the police, and to this goal she tries to seduce Amanda with the goal of protecting the Lynx from the intrusion of the police. Unexpectedly, Amanda seems to be receptive to this methodology at first, ‘Amanda was sharply conscious of the heat, the pull of the music, the sexual energy of the crowd. Casey smiled and took a few paces back. Then they were dancing,’⁹⁰ but she snaps out of this reverie and reconsiders the space she is in with this poised reflection:

[a]lthough the police were not armed in New Zealand, Amanda had never quite adjusted to the idea of being on duty without her gun. [...] Tonight, however, she had felt unexpectedly ambivalent about taking a weapon into Casey Randall’s club. [...] To Amanda’s surprise and no little dismay, she was conscious of an odd yearning to fit in. Ironic, really. As if a cop would ever find easy acceptance in the lesbian community. It was almost as likely as the police force welcoming lesbians to the ranks. She should have worn her damned gun, Amanda thought. She couldn’t feel any more displaced, could she?⁹¹

⁸⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* p. 152.

⁹⁰ Beecham, p. 75.

⁹¹ Beecham, pp. 75-76.

In this scene the author juxtaposes the symbol of physical fight (the gun), with the psychological fight that Amanda goes through during the series against several spaces in New Zealand, such as the workplace, the home, and in this particular case the lesbian club. The Lynx represents not only the closet or a crime scene, but an opening to an unbridled part of Amanda's personality, one that would accept her Wellington house as a new home, that would let herself become friendly with her colleagues, that would grant her role of Inspector in New Zealand the same weight and dignity she afforded her role of NYPD officer, and finally one that would liberate her lesbianism. Considering how staunchly Amanda refuses to take roots in any of the New Zealand spaces, considering how resistive she is towards the home, the workplace, and the closet, it is no wonder that she wishes she had an actual weapon to fight her 'yearning to fit in' these spaces. In a way, this passage mirrors Amanda's journey into accepting her home; she is the agent of her own sense of displacement, until she makes a decision which destabilises her previous position and opens her future up to endless possibilities in the new space in question, which is reflected in the scene by the last line.

Like in the Kate Delafield Mystery series, the lesbian bar of this series also exists at the intersection with other spaces, such as the closet and the workplace, but unlike the Kate Delafield series where these spaces seem to overlap initially but lead to separate narratives, the lesbian club, the workplace and the closet are intertwined throughout *Second Guess*. Time and again Amanda needs to balance these spaces for the sake of the victim, a closeted lesbian whose death demands justice, and for her own sake, a closeted lesbian who is going through a life crisis as a grieving displaced immigrant but who also needs to solve the crime; the following quote is representative of the balance Amanda implements during the novel:

Amanda said mildly. "It's an investigation."

Casey drained her glass. "I don't know how you can compromise yourself like this."

Amanda felt stung. "I believe in what I'm doing, same as you. Someone killed your best friend – right here in your club, where women should be safe. It's my job to find that person."

"And you think it's a lesbian?"

"I can't rule that out without more information." Amanda said.⁹²

⁹² Beecham, p. 178.

Logically this interaction should appear at the beginning of a murder mystery, with the detective demanding a complete list of all people involved with the crime scene, yet Amanda shows a high level of consideration for the Lynx and its clientele and makes her demands only at this point, close to the end of the novel. This tentative methodology dramatises the complicated act of balance enacted by the protagonist among the spaces of the series. In a related scene this balancing act involves the closet, too. Like in the *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* where Dory Quillin is out of the closet in the lesbian bars but remains closeted in most public spaces, so is the victim of this novel, and additionally Amanda's workplace policy puts pressure on her to follow the victim's family's wishes to hide her homosexuality, as is instanced in this press conference Amanda holds during the investigation:

“[t]he Lynx is a known lesbian club,” Suzette Lord was determined to pursue her angle. “Is it possible that there is a lesbian killer at large?” The room fell silent. Television cameras closed in like circling sharks.

“A killer who targets lesbians?” Amanda willfully misunderstood the question. “That's possible. Hate crimes against gay people are rare in New Zealand, but not unheard of.” [...] What about herself? Several[sic] opportunists demanded. Her name had been linked with several well known gay and lesbian charities.

“That's probably because I support them, as does the Mayor and many other intelligent public figures.”⁹³

Although Amanda does not want to believe that the killer is a lesbian and worse still is murdering other lesbians, she is impelled by her ethics to carry out justice impartially. In this way Amanda is metaphorically struggling with the space of the lesbian club: to recognise that a space that was born as a safe outlet for the desires of homosexual women could be harbouring evil is not easy to accept, since she inherently belongs to a minority which has suffered a long history of prejudice. For example, in *Murder at Nightwood Bar*, the culprit is not amongst the clientele but is the victim's mother standing in for familial and societal homophobia; similarly, in *Second Guess* the culprit is a past scorned male lover of the victim who takes revenge on her for having aborted their baby, and the way the crime scene is arranged, with the rope and whip marks on the body, is clearly meant to frame lesbian desire as criminal.

⁹³ Beecham, pp. 104-105.

This ties the crime with the predatory image of the media circling around the closet like sharks, eager for a taste of scandalous perversity, which circles back to the beginning of the novel, where the opening of the Lynx sparked a sort of morbid curiosity towards what kind of monstrous appetites would be unveiled from the club. The titillation that the public is so eager to feel at the expense of the lesbian community is humiliating, similarly to the forced coming out that haunts the Lynx clientele during the novel's investigation. Therefore, Amanda's wilful misunderstanding of the media's questions is not only a personal defence mechanism, but it can also be interpreted as her own way to protect the privacy and dignity of the local lesbian community.

5.5 Closing the Bar

While it is an exaggeration to say that most of the lesbian community, or even the LGBT+ community, centred its social life around the gay bar, it is undeniable that this space played a central role in its history. The acquaintances made in the bars formed an invaluable web of contacts for the emancipation movement, as evidenced by historical reports, such as the *Furies*'. This collective of lesbian feminist activists and theorists organised seminars and workshops for the political and practical education of local women, recruiting participants from neighbourhoods, pre-existing activist organisations, but also from the clientele of gay bars.⁹⁴ This is a testament to how significant these spaces were for community life, but should not detract from the fact that gay bars also became an infamous element of LGBT+ history, helping the lives of their clientele as well as ruining them. The gay bar in fact was at the centre of a state-driven surveillance system that worked towards suppressing same-sex interactions for the most part of the twentieth century. The introduction of this thesis called this negative side of the bar a systemic mechanism of control and surveillance. The police routinely performed violent raids of gay bars with the excuse of checking the owner's or manager's license to distribute alcohol, reporting and detaining any perceived perverts, resulting in the forced public coming out of a sizeable portion of the LGBT+ community. This system was applied so widely and systematically that recent research found substantial usefulness in the reports of gay bar

⁹⁴ Anne M. Valk, 'Living a Feminist Lifestyle: The Intersection of Theory and Action in a Lesbian Feminist Collective', *Feminist Studies*, 28.2 (2002), 303-332, (p. 315).

raids, as evidenced in Allen Bérubé's⁹⁵ or Faderman's⁹⁶ work for instance. The troubled relationship between the space of the bar and the lesbian sleuth highlights the complexities of this space as both sanctuary but also site of suspicion, with the lesbian detective navigating the bar as private refuge and the bar as a space where her profession creates hostility and unease.

⁹⁵ Bérubé, p. 19.

⁹⁶ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution*.

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on Anglo-American lesbian detective fiction, a popular genre that has received limited critical attention. I have contributed to and advanced discussions of this dynamic and frequently overlooked genre by reading this literature through the intersection of related fields: literature, psychology, geography, queer, and crime fiction studies. My key interpretive lens is the tension between the private and professional lives of the lesbian detective and the complexity of the spaces she has to navigate. The fictional lesbian sleuth as a perpetual Other/Outsider sits uneasily with the law enforcer as a inescapable Insider, and this results in a fundamentally liminal entity.

By exploring the spatiality of the lesbian sleuth I have built a multi-layered interpretation drawing on recent and contemporary feminist research. Feminist research is also what first drew me to this protagonist, because the lesbian sleuth, as Sarah Gamble asserts, ‘seeks to endow a sense of empowerment upon its readers.’¹ This is why this thesis eschews attributing the lesbian detective’s spatial disorientation to one ultimate cause, such as the patriarchy, as this would be not only simplistic but would also lock this character into a victimised role. Empowerment is clearly one of the key concepts of the lesbian sleuth’s characterisation and despite the emphasis of this thesis on the spatial disorientation of this figure, I have preserved the lesbian sleuth’s aura of empowerment. Every protagonist who loses herself in heteronormative spaces is eased into this state of disorientation by medical, psychological, religious, and cultural pressure, but also chooses this state by her own volition.

It is this thesis’ contention that the cause of disorientation in the way the protagonist navigates certain spaces can be read as a residue of external oppression which has been internalised. For example, in the second and third chapters, this external oppression has been individuated as the history of the Othered and pathologised lesbian, while the internalised cause has here been called queer trauma. This premise is close to Gill Plain’s reading of female accidental detectives, including Barbara Wilson’s Pam Nilsen, and their ‘disturbingly little agency.’² Plain utilises intriguingly liminal terms to describe this type of sleuth, highlighting their marginal positions and how they ‘cross boundaries dividing detective and victim.’³ Plain

¹ Sarah Gamble, ‘Postfeminism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. by Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, [2001] 2006), pp. 36-45, (p. 44). Google ebook.

² Gill Plain, ‘Gender and Sexuality’, in *The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Janice Allan and others (London: Routledge, 2020) pp. 102-110, (p. 105).

³ Ibid.

also utilises the term outsider in relation to the archetypal perspective of the detective with quite a broad, encompassing meaning. In contrast, this thesis has focused specifically on the early lesbian detective to highlight her crossing not only between the boundaries of guardian and victim in relation to criminal acts, like Pam Nilsen in *Sisters of the Road*, but between boundaries of accepted/rejected members of society. This thesis has argued that this boundary crossing develops into the subtle ways lesbian sleuths linger between oppressive and liberating spaces, whether physical or metaphorical, whether the subject meant to fill these spaces is the sleuth's sense of self or her inter-personal relationships.

Early Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction is spearheaded by an intriguing figure, the typical mid-century butch lesbian investigator who reconciles with her tragic past and tender side thanks to romantic love. This figure is part of a century of lesbian representation entrenched in butch/femme dynamics, debates over the representation of pornographic material, and struggles over the mass-printing and distribution of stories featuring self-fulfilling, healthy, happy homosexual characters. While novels did not achieve mass-distribution, arguably remaining a niche market, their copious representations of queer life and highly sensitive issues for the lesbian community of the time gained the attention of scholars such as Michael Bronski, Hugh Stevens, Kaye Mitchell, Judith Markowitz, and Phyllis M. Betz. Scholarship on the figure of the lesbian sleuth generally highlights how the lesbian romance challenges the usual power politics between romantic partners, which, as Makinen for instance argues, become more varied and nuanced.⁴ According to her,

[b]y placing women in both roles, of protagonist and hero, the chased and the chaser, [lesbian romance] is able to question the way gender roles have been portrayed as 'natural', in relation to sexual difference. Lesbian romance has the potential to transform the conventions of the genre – the ability of a woman's love to transform the powerful other – without reinforcing the phallogocentric idealisation of masculinity, since the powerful 'other' is also a woman.⁵

This thesis is informed by such readings, but it also sets them aside to focus on the core notion of the relationship between society, law and order, and the Other. By placing the lesbian sleuth as the pivotal point of this relationship, I shift the focus from such empowering, optimistic

⁴ Merja Makinen, *Feminist Popular Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), p. 42.

⁵ Makinen, p. 43.

readings to the inescapable liminality of the Other. The lesbian sleuth is, from my perspective, too queer to be at peace with the spaces created by heteronormative society.

The spaces analysed in this thesis pivot on two core notions: Self and inter-personal relationships. Chapter Two, focusing on the space of the closet, examined the subconsciously internalised homophobia of the lesbian sleuth, the concept of the closet as a confining yet relatively safe, stable place, and the consequences of coming out or remaining closeted in the family, in one's own circles of friends, and in the workplace. It concluded that the early lesbian sleuth's subconscious is pulled apart by, on the one hand, the animated discussions on mass, public coming out following 1960s activism, and, on the other hand, the relative safety of a closeted life. Chapter Three, focusing on the space of the clinic, examined how the history of the pathologisation of same-sex desire cast a psychological shadow on the homosexual woman and created a lingering distrust between the LGBT+ community and the medical establishment. This chapter highlighted that the lesbian sleuth's investigations often lead her to re-hash this troubled history and re-live this distrust. This chapter contended that lesbian sleuths are inevitably prey to their own fears and insecurities towards the delicate stability of their romance, even sabotaging their own relationships irremediably. Chapter Four, focusing on the space of the home, examined how an idealised heterosexual family home weighs on the thoughts and actions of the lesbian detective and how her work and romantic relationships are impacted from the substantial difference between the heterosexual and the same-sex household. This chapter examined how the history of the idealised heterosexual family home impacts the solitary home life of the single lesbian sleuth and her domestic inter-personal relations, such as with partners, neighbours, and family members. The evidence suggests that the lesbian sleuth is so scarred by the queer trauma associated with this space that she self-sabotages her own intimate relationships. Finally, Chapter Five, focusing on the space of the gay bar, explored the history of the lesbian sleuth with this space, both in terms of the physical space of the pub and in terms of the symbolic head-space of inebriation, as well as the inter-personal bonds and sense of community created from interactions within this space. This chapter concluded that the troubled decades of (self-)segregation and persecution of gay bars created an irreconcilable source of guardian/jailer conflict in the figure of the lesbian investigator, which is often reflected in the gay bar as a crime scene or in its absence, in the portrayal of the lesbian sleuth's solitary experience of alcoholism.

Of the more than a hundred lesbian detective narratives that I read in the first year of this research, I have drawn on a few key series as both representative samples of the genre and unique works in their own right. There are a myriad of ways of approaching these texts. What

the focus on space contributes to the ongoing discussion of the genre is to emphasise the complexity of the genre and the way in which it connects to so many physical and conceptual spaces, all of which underscore the fraught, fractured journey of the protagonist navigating these spaces. This research project also originates from the will to render the characters of this genre, indeed of popular genres, more visible in academic scholarship. As Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown assert, '[u]ltimately, we think queer history is about the fight to be, and the celebration of being, seen. We don't choose to be queer, but we do choose to be visible in whatever way possible.'⁶ I chose to render lesbian identity more visible by showing the uncertainty of her spatiality as it is represented in the primary source material.

The interplay between identity and spaces also prompted an intersectional research drive into gender and sexuality studies and sociological, anthropological, and literary studies of urban spaces. This collaboration reminded me how fundamental intersectionality is for women's studies and in bridging the gaps between different disciplinary discourses. Women's and gender studies also benefit from more visibility in academia; Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson point out the various challenges this kind of research confronts, which is routinely denigrated as a waste of funds, or too ideological, or not scientific enough.⁷ I agree with Richardson and Robinson as they point out that these challenges are included within broader mobilisations against gender equality and LGBT+ friendly policies, which stifle campaigns for LGBT+ rights, including civil partnership and same-sex marriage legislation, reproductive rights (especially in relation to abortion), progressive sex education in schools, and post-structuralist definitions of sex and gender identities.⁸

This broader perspective enabled my literary interpretation to specifically consider the ways in which the lesbian sleuth's gender and sexuality are socially and spatially suppressed, for instance the awkward cases of Carol Ashton and Kate Martinelli, who regarded the closet as a psychological safe space but were thrust onto the public stage when third parties outed them. Or for example the even more uncertain positions of Kate Delafield and Amanda Valentine, who are subconsciously pulled apart by the sense of self-accomplishment and self-reliance that comes with being endowed with a masculine role in the workplace (they both attain a position of certain power and responsibility), while simultaneously craving the sense

⁶ Matthew Riemer and Leighton Brown, *We Are Everywhere: Protest, Power, and Pride in the History of Queer Liberation* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 2019), p. 17. Google ebook.

⁷ Victoria Robinson and Diane Richardson, 'Introduction', in *Introducing Gender and Women's Studies: Fifth Edition*, ed. by Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (London: Macmillan International, 2020) pp. 1-7, (p. 5).

⁸ Robinson and Richardson, p. 6.

of safety and stability that comes with introjecting a more submissive (therefore traditionally feminine) role at home. To make sense of and explore these nuances, I am indebted to the rich history of feminist theories of gender and sexuality which, as Richardson declares, serves ‘to develop understandings of how gender is connected to social, economic and cultural status and power in society. In this sense, *gender is theorised, not merely as difference, but as a social division.*’⁹

This painful social division has been implied in this thesis through the interplay of spatiality, gender performativity, and intimate desires, described through the sense of disorientation and lingering trauma deep-seated within the lesbian sleuth’s characterisation. This interplay of approaches and disciplines elucidates how much effort and attention has gone not only into this thesis, but also into the way Anglo-American lesbian crime fiction has been re-conceptualised, not just in terms of what can be gleaned from this genre, but for its academic potential too. The new approaches to knowledge intersectionality has brought to my studies aided my understanding of the significant impact works such as this thesis can have in and out of academia because they fissure and blur established boundaries of social processes that produce gender and sexuality discrimination. This thesis represents my contribution ‘to critically navigate the ever-shifting and fluid terrain of gender and women’s studies.’¹⁰

⁹ Diane Richardson, ‘Conceptualising Gender’, in *Introducing Gender and Women’s Studies: Fifth Edition*, ed. by Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (London: Macmillan International, 2020) pp. 8-23, (p. 15), emphasis in original.

¹⁰ Robinson and Richardson, p. 7.

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Appendix of Primary Novels

This appendix is separated between primary and secondary novels: primary novels are those published in the 1980s and 1990s and are analysed in this thesis, while secondary novels are published in the 2000s and onwards and/or have been read in preparation for this thesis but were not selected for direct literary analysis. The series which publication started in the 1980s and 1990s but were finished or continue to be published in the twenty-first century belong to the primary novels category. The series are in alphabetical order, based on the title of the series, and listed with the information reported in the edition utilised for this thesis. All summaries are penned by me.

The Amanda Valentine Mystery Series

Title: *Introducing Amanda Valentine* (Amanda Valentine 1)

Author: Rose Beecham

Year of publication: 1992

Place of publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Detective Inspector Amanda Valentine is the head of the Homicide squad of the Wellington Police Department. She worked for a number of years for the New York Police Department and her sense of belonging is torn between New Zealand and the United States. Amanda's private and professional lives are both in chaos. She has just broken up with a lover, her cases are sabotaged by another detective who wants her position, and her trans friend is murdered to keep a women trafficking ring hidden. Moreover, the presenter of a tabloid tv program accidentally outs Amanda on television, then falls in lover with her. *Introducing Amanda Valentine* is a novel about fraud, corruption, workplace strife, and the loss of all that appeared familiar and safe.

Title: *Second Guess* (Amanda Valentine 2)

Author: Rose Beecham

Year of publication: 1994

Place of publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

After a period of soul-searching in New York City, Amanda Valentine is back at the Wellington Police Department to investigate the death of the lesbian daughter of a wealthy family. The victim had an affair with a man, resulting in pregnancy and abortion shortly before death. Because the relationship between the victim and her family, her wife, and her ex-lovers is complicated, this novel raises issues about familial and internalised homophobia and the sexual identity crisis that these can lead to.

Title: *Fair Play* (Amanda Valentine 3)

Author: Rose Beecham

Year of Publication: 1995

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

This novel's pivots on two parallel yet unrelated cases. The first is a murder case, the shooting of the secret boyfriend of an All Blacks star player. The second case is the raping of a young girl at the hands of two lesbians. Secret passions degenerate into guilty consciences. The victim's father cheats on his wife with male one-night stands. The victim's lover cannot mourn his boyfriend openly. The raped girl is left traumatised. One of the rapists swears that the BDSM scene was consensual and not coerced until the end. And most ironically and tragically of all, the second rapist turns out to be a long-time worker at a rape crisis call centre. In this novel rife with homophobia, misogyny, rape culture, and unsolved justice, the silver lining comes from the love life of Amanda Valentine, who finally overcomes her fear of commitment and starts living with the love interest of the series.

The Carol Ashton Mystery series

Title: *Lessons in Murder* (Carol Ashton 1)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1988] 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

On a hot summer day in Sydney Australia, high school teacher Bill Pagett is found dead in his classroom. The reliable Detective Inspector Carol Ashton sets about to uncover the tangled mess that is the relationships among the school teachers, encountering threats by letter and

phone, and another corpse in the process. If this was not complicated enough, Carol ends up falling in love with prime suspect Sybil Quade.

Title: *Fatal Reunion* (Carol Ashton 2)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1989] 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Though she is in the closet to protect her career, Carol enjoys a peaceful domestic life with Sybil – until she receives a call from Christine Tait, the woman who left her three years ago by returning to her husband. But now Christine’s husband is dead and she is desperate for Carol’s help to clear her own name. Carol is drawn back to the society’s elite, a world of high spending and low moral standards, where every family seems perfect but turns out to be a den of deception and greed.

Title: *Death Down Under* (Carol Ashton 3)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1990] 2012

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Four women are dead, each strangled with an orange cord, their bodies ritually arranged. Carol and Detective Sergeant Mark Bourke tackle this case under the watchful eye of the Australian public, enticed by the sensationalist press. Not even Carol is free from the grasp of the media sharks, as Madeline Shipley, newscaster of *The Shipley Report*, claims that she has been contacted by the “Orange Strangler.” Sybil, sacked by her school after her involvement in the case of *Lessons in Murder* works as the private tutor of two teenager actors on a movie set in the desert, ignorant of the fact that she is closer to the serial killer than Carol ever imagined.

Title: *Cop Out* (Carol Ashton 4)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1991] 2003

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Bryce Darcy, the successful manager of his family business, has been murdered. His sister Charlotte Darcy has confessed, but when D.I. Carol Ashton comes to the knowledge that Charlotte is not only the family business' lead designer, but also psychologically unstable, Carol is determined to root out the true evil from this family. Amidst psychologically disturbed relatives, crashing side-businesses, jealousy, envy, and greed, Carol also discovers that Bryce was a member of a support group for married gay men, which opens the door for a whole new perspective into the internal feuds of the Darcys.

Title: *Dead Certain* (Carol Ashton 5)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1992] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Young Australian opera star Collis Raeburn is found dead in his locked hotel room, overdosed. But when the Raeburn family urges Carol to write this case off as suicide, she opens up an investigation. As Carol wades through the vast sea of acquaintances, friends, admirers, and past lovers in Collis' history, she stumbles upon the deadly trail of HIV/AIDS, shedding a new light on the case.

Title: *Body Guard* (Carol Ashton 6)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1994] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

As she recovers from a gunshot wound Carol is put on light duty: becoming the main bodyguard (or babysitter as Carol sees it) of internationally famous feminist philosopher Marla Strickland on her Australian tour. The concerns of Carol's superiors about Marla's safety are proved valid as Marla and her crew experience death threats, a bomb-rigged vehicle, and even come under sniper fire before Marla's televised a debate against one of the top preachers of the religious fanatic, woman-hating political scene. Reeling from Sybil's departure to the UK for a year-long women's studies course, Carol's emotions are put to the test by the charismatic Marla, ASIO Agent Denise Cleever, and the seductive Madeleine Shipley.

Title: *Double Bluff* (Carol Ashton 7)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1995] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Carol is working on the apparent suicide of media mogul Tala Orlando. As Carol investigates she finds that tranquilisers and alcohol in Tala's blood, not just the noxious fumes of her car, and the Orlando family, circling around Tala's wealth like starving sharks, is open to Carol's relentless investigation. As if Carol's nerves weren't frayed enough, the tempting news anchor Madeline Shipley pleads Carol to look into a crazed fan turned stalker. It started with love letters, then threats, then letters to others threatening action, then the active attacks, not only to Madeline herself but also her closest associates, going as far as threatening Carol's own son David. Carol must find out who the stalker is and she is becoming more and more convinced that the stalker and the murderer are one in the same, actually they may be the same individual.

Title: *Inner Circle* (Carol Ashton 8)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1996] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

At first, D.I. Carol Ashton thinks that the execution-style murders and the bombing of a small-town police station personnel is simply bizarre given the seemingly blissful local community, but she soon discovers that the innocuous town of Katamulla has been governed by a mysterious underground groups of extremist fighters for quite some time now, and they are planning to declare war on anyone who does not share their world views.

Title: *Chain Letter* (Carol Ashton 9)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1997] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

While investigating the murder of a fellow police officer, D. I. Carol Ashton believes she has discovered a bizarre link between this case and a series of unsolved homicides where each victim received a chain letter promising death if the instructions are not followed.

Title: *Past Due* (Carol Ashton 10)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1998] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Assisted procreation specialist Dr. Brin Halstead appears to be a charismatic, visionary pioneer, a world-class fertility expert. But a financial scandal reveals the truth of a dangerous fanatic playing with the laws of nature: cloning human beings. When Halstead's body is discovered, Detective Inspector Carol Ashton leads the investigation down a slippery slope of greed, corruption, and murder.

Title: *Set Up* (Carol Ashton 11)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [1999] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Carol Ashton's latest murder case turns out to be bigger than she initially thought and she is set up against an international serial killer on the loose in Australia. Her private life continues to complicate matters with her son being possibly framed for selling drugs at school, her distant and traumatised lover, and with an American reporter following her around in preparation for a piece about women in law enforcement.

Title: *Under Suspicion* (Carol Ashton 12)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [2000] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Carol Ashton attends a rigorous FBI training course in the United States and becomes a suspect in the suspicious death of a law enforcement officer after a bitter argument with her instructor. Framed, far from home, friends, or allies, Carol makes the acquaintance of sultry FBI Agent Leota Woolfe who has a not-so-hidden agenda of her own.

Title: *Death Club* (Carol Ashton 13)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [2001] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Fashion magnate and not-so-closeted lesbian Gussie Whitlew sponsors and houses an exclusive golf tournament in her private clubhouse, but the party is crashed by the discovery of the lifeless body of Fiona Hawk, one of the top international players. As the realisation that a relationship with FBI Agent Leota Woolfe is not viable anymore, Carol dives into the intricate web of relations of this elitist group of queer suspects, learning that the tournament participants' love stories are much more important than she had initially thought and that someone has set out to even a decade-old score.

Title: *Accidental Murder* (Carol Ashton 14)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [2002] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

D. I. Carol Ashton receives a call from a private investigator who works for a number of insurance companies: recently, the pay out policy of several large life insurance plans seems highly questionable, but there is no proof. This call leads Carol to make a connection in a series of seemingly unrelated deaths: people with no obvious connections to each other died in what appear to be legitimate accidents – a fall down the stairs, a single-vehicle car crash, a drowning in a hot tub – but are they truly?

Title: *Blood Link* (Carol Ashton 15)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [2003] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Carol Ashton connects the death of reclusive billionaire Thurmond Rule with a series of seemingly random deaths. With no valid will and no close relatives, many distant relatives reunite to vie for the money. Carol would stand by the side-lines and let them tear each other apart, if not for the fact that several of these relatives have recently died under suspicious circumstances. As the authorities contemplate protecting anyone with a blood link to Thurmond Rule, Carol fears she may be unwittingly shielding a cold-blooded serial killer.

Title: *Fall Guy* (Carol Ashton 16)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: [2004] 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Now in his mid-forties, Milton Ryce has never outgrown the clown personality of his adolescence,

embarrassing others has been Milton's favourite past time, and he delights in coming up with elaborate schemes for setting up his 'friends' as fall guys, making him *persona non grata* by his many acquaintances. When he plunges to his death while sky diving, no one seems particularly surprised to find that he was murdered. D.I. Carol Ashton navigates a long list of possible murderers, where everybody is positively jostling for the position of prime suspect.

Title: *Lethal Care* (Carol Ashton 17)

Author: Claire McNab

Year of Publication: 2017

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Newly promoted Chief Inspector Carol Ashton is assigned the case of media star and wealthy philanthropist Greta Denby, who had been undergoing a controversial experimental treatment for her cancer. Carol inherits this case from the bafflingly shoddy work done by her colleague Inspector Ian Rooke, who has recently died under mysterious circumstances. This delicate case is rendered all the more complicated when the Church of Cherished Life tries to undermine Carol's work by sending forth one of their most devoted followers, the nurse who used to take care of Carol's mother before the latter's death. Suddenly, Carol is pulled into a whirlwind of painful memories and hidden trauma, trying to keep her professional and private life from falling apart.

The Cassandra Reilly Mystery series

Title: *Gaudí Afternoon* (Cassandra Reilly 1)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1990] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

Professional translator Cassandra Reilly lives in London in happy solitude when she receives an unexpected phone call from San Francisco. Frankie Stevens' husband, Ben, has gone missing in Barcelona and Frankie enlists Cassandra's help as an interpreter. The seemingly straight-forward, well-paying gig soon turns out to be a comical farce. While she rekindled former flames Ana and Carmen, Cassandra becomes tangled with a couple quarrelling over the custody of a small child and with too many controversial questions of gender and sexuality.

Title: *Trouble in Transylvania* (Cassandra Reilly 2)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1993] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

Itinerant translator and part-time sleuth Cassandra Reilly is on the road again. Her latest trip brings her to Eastern Europe, where, upon receiving a call about a murder in a run-down Transylvanian health spa, she suddenly finds herself embroiled in a case of international intrigue and murder as two factions struggle over the property rights of the crumbling resort. As the mystery unfolds, Cassandra and her clique are steeped in the history of Romania, from the devastating stories of Ceausescu's tyrannical reign to the vampire folklore.

Title: *The Death of a Much-Travelled Woman* (Cassandra Reilly 3)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1997] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

This book gathers in one volume nine exploits and mishaps of globe-trotting translator-sleuth Cassandra Reilly, who journeys to such varied locations as Helsinki, Hawaii, Vladivostock, Reykjavik, and the English countryside. The thefts, murders, and other crimes Cassandra is called on to help solve are also engaging because they include clever satire aimed at publishers, editors, writers, and, of course, translators.

Title: *The Case of the Orphaned Bassoonists* (Cassandra Reilly 4)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [2000] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

Cassandra Reilly flies to Venice to help her housemate and best friend Nicky Gibbons, bassoonist extraordinaire, who has been accused of stealing a priceless antique bassoon during the rehearsals for the recreation of an historical orchestra set-up. With an international cast of characters, Cassandra's cosmopolitan attitude shines the best as she slowly exposes the shocking secret identities of the other orchestra members.

The Kate Delafield Mystery Series

Title: *Amateur City* (Kate Delafield 1)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1984] 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Detective Kate Delafield of the Los Angeles Police Department leads an investigation into the murder of a domineering office department chief. The events of the novel take place shortly after the tragic death of Kate's long-time lover, and the coping and overcoming of this trauma is one of the moments of great pathos in the novel. Due to the infamous reputation of the victim Kate's squad has to navigate a series of shifty-eyed witnesses before the final showdown against the criminal. This first instalment of the Kate Delafield Mystery Series deals with racism, misogyny, abuse and homophobia in the workplace.

Title: *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* (Kate Delafield 2)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1987] 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Detective Kate Delafield leads the investigation into the murder of a young lesbian whose body is found in the parking lot of an exclusive lesbian bar. Suspicions and prejudices swirl around this small defenceless community, urging Kate to probe deeper into the victim's backstory until she discovers a horrific history of child abuse. The final scene featuring the confession of one of the criminals is, in my opinion, the most hypnotising piece of writing among the novels of

this Appendix. This novel deals with familial and workplace homophobia, sexual abuse, misogyny, and it provides a comprehensive portrayal of 1980s lesbian bar culture.

Title: *The Beverly Malibu* (Kate Delafield 3)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1989] 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

The third instalment of the Kate Delafield Mystery series sees Kate and her team investigating brutal murder of a resident of the Beverly Malibu, a small apartment complex which residents include an AIDS-infected couple, a couple of lesbians, and several people from the entertainment business who barely survived the McCarthyism sweep of informers of the 1950s. The motive of the murder is precisely related to this. Although the motive devolves from a personal vendetta to a Presidential threat by the end of the novel, the unearthing of personal traumas and conspiracies is a riveting part of the narrative. In this novel Kate makes the acquaintance of the main love interest of the series, Aimee Grant, a spirited younger woman who soon falls in love with Kate. The novel deals with homophobia, conspiracy theories, the Red Scare and femme/butch themes.

Title: *Murder by Tradition* (Kate Delafield 4)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1991] 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Kate and Taylor investigate the death of a Teddie Crawford, a young openly out gay man, stabbed to death in the kitchen of his own restaurant by a closeted homophobic gay basher. Kate is increasingly isolated, her colleagues are loathe to pursue a case involving a dead gay man, and she must find hard evidence for the prosecuting attorney, a woman working at her very first homicide case. Bringing the killer to trial endangers Kate's professional standing and her belief in the justice system that she staunchly enforces.

Title: *Liberty Square* (Kate Delafield 5)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1996] 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Kate's partner Aimee maneuvers for the two of them to attend a reunion of the soldiers with whom Kate served in the Vietnam War. When one of the attendees is murdered and Kate is implicated, she finds herself embroiled in an investigation in a city where she has no jurisdiction, all while attempting not to be overwhelmed by the atrocities that are unearthed during the veteran's reunion.

Title: *Apparition Alley* (Kate Delafield 6)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1997] 2010

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Following an arrest gone terribly wrong, Kate is wounded by friendly fire and Internal Affairs challenge her professional conduct. To make matters worse, a cowboy cop who looks guilty beyond doubt ropes Kate into investigating his charges, and when this case uncovers a secret plot to forcibly out all the LGBT+ officers at LAPD, the stakes of Kate's decision soar.

Title: *Sleeping Bones* (Kate Delafield 7)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [1999] 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Naiad Press

Kate Delafield investigates the murder of a reclusive old man at the La Brea Tar Pits. This unusual case slowly uncovers a secret in humanity's ancient past, and at the same exposes the corruption and insatiable greed of the present, to the point that everyone, including an alluring archaeologist and a CIA agent with his own agenda, become suspects.

Title: *Hancock Park* (Kate Delafield 8)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: [2004] 2013

Place of Publication: Midway FL

Publisher: Spinsters Ink

Kate Delafield and newbie homicide detective Joe Cameron investigate a murder in the secluded, old-money neighbourhood of Hancock Park, where a cultured, refined mother of three has been shot, execution style. Everything seems to point at the victim's ex-husband, but as the truth is discovered, everyone in this dysfunctional, abusive family is partially guilty.

Title: *High Desert* (Kate Delafield 9)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: 2013

Place of Publication: Midway FL

Publisher: Spinsters Ink

Five months into mandated retirement from the LAPD, separated by her partner, and confronting the imminent death of her best friend, Kate Delafield is at an all-time low point in her life. The last person she expects a visit from is from her ex-captain, with a request to locate Kate's former police partner, Joe Cameron, who has disappeared. After discovering a murder which may or may not implicate Cameron himself, Kate follows the trail of evidence deep into the history of Cameron's troubled family. In what has been believed to be the last instalment of the series until *Kate* (2022) Kate needs to confront her loyalty towards the most loyal colleague/friend in the police, the death of her best friend, her addiction, and a potential new future with Aimee.

Title: *Delafield* (Kate Delafield 10)

Author: Katherine V. Forrest

Year of Publication: 2022

Place of Publication: Midway FL

Publisher: Spinsters Ink

A past mishandled case comes back to haunt Kate Delafield's peaceful retirement. Twenty years ago, a homophobia-based murder almost caused Kate to suffer a breakdown. To avoid this, she allowed a rookie officer to lead the investigation and a consequence the victim's mother spent two decades in death row until forensic advancements proved her innocence. The woman has vowed to take revenge on Kate and Kate's loved ones for the wrongful imprisonment. The narrative presents heavy emphasis on soul-searching and self-awareness due to the shame and fear weighting down Kate's heart. This poignant, prolonged look into Kate's deepest thoughts demonstrate how she is worthy of being considered one of the most (if

not the most) sophisticated protagonist out of all the characters of the novels listed in the Appendix of this thesis.

The Kate Martinelli Mystery series

Title: *A Grave Talent* (Kate Martinelli 1)

Author: Laurie R. King

Year of Publication: [1993] 2014

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Picador

The first case of Homicide Inspector Katarina “Kate” Martinelli at the San Francisco Police Department is extremely unsavoury, a serial killer who targets young girls. The case leads to a secluded community of eccentric characters where an incredibly talented artist, a female Rembrandt, seems to be the culprit, but is actually the original victim. Protecting her will come at a great cost for Kate: her privacy, the safety of her home, and the health of her partner.

Title: *To Play the Fool* (Kate Martinelli 2)

Author: Laurie R. King

Year of Publication: [1995] 2014

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Picador

The body of a homeless is discovered in a park of San Francisco, and the finger of guilt points at Brother Erasmus, a follower of the Holy Fool movement who speaks exclusively in Biblical quotes. Kate navigates this seemingly dead-end case while dealing with her new role of token lesbian police officer and taking care of her paraplegic partner.

Title: *With Child* (Kate Martinelli 3)

Author: Laurie R. King

Year of Publication: [1996] 2014

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Picador

Kate is in New York for the marriage of her police partner and decides to take in his teenaged daughter-in-law Jules while the newlyweds are on their honeymoon. Jules ropes Kate into investigating the disappearance of her best friend, a homeless Hispanic boy victim of a pimping

smuggling ring, and ends up going missing herself. Isolated and without the safety of jurisdiction, Kate fights against time to bring both children home safe.

Title: *Night Work* (Kate Martinelli 4)

Author: Laurie R. King

Year of Publication: [2000] 2009

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Bantam

Roz and Maj are a couple at the heart of a LGBT+ group of parishioners, the ideal liaison between the lesbian community and San Francisco's political scene. When they adopt Maj's baby and call upon Kate's partner to be her godmother, naturally the two couples become fast friends. As Kate investigates a series of murders of men electrocuted to death and tattooed with their misdeeds against their girlfriends or wives, it seems impossible that this couple of saintly lesbians would be involved. But men's abuse against women continues, and someone has already donned the role of vigilante in the name of a twisted definition of feminism, it is up to Kate to stop them.

Title: *The Art of Detection* (Kate Martinelli 5)

Author: Laurie R. King

Year of Publication: 2006

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Bantam

Philip Gilbert not only structured his house to match the famous 221B Baker Street, he not only collects and deals in Sherlock Holmes paraphernalia, and he not only thinks himself as a Victorian gentleman, he was also murdered Sherlock Holmes-style. As Kate navigates an intricate case of family feud and greed, the treasure trove that is Philip Gilbert's house reveals what appears to be a *bona-fide* account of Sherlock Holmes falling in love with a transgender American singer, dated 1920s. In this moving story Kate pits all her wits to distinguish what is fictional, what is real, and what is delusion in a meta narrative that perfectly espouses King's Kate Martinelli series and her long-time passion for the Great Detective.

The Lauren Laurano Mystery series

Title: *Everything You Have Is Mine* (Lauren Laurano 1)

Author: Sandra Scoppettone

Year of Publication: [1991] 2011

Place of Publication: Boston

Publisher: Little Brown

The smart, self-determined New York P.I. Lauren Laurano lives with her longtime partner Kip in a Greenwich Village brownstone. They lead a relaxing life apart from the cases Lauren becomes obsessed with, such as the rape and murder of Lake Huron. Lauren has to wade through a series of red herrings in online dating bulleting boards to realise that the true den of iniquity is Huron's own convoluted family history.

Title: *I'll Be Leaving You Always* (Lauren Laurano 2)

Author: Sandra Scoppettone

Year of Publication: [1993] 2011

Place of Publication: Boston

Publisher: Little Brown

Megan is Lauren's childhood best friend and secret first love, so naturally she is determined to find those responsible for Megan's murder when she is held up and shot in her jewellery store. But the deeper Laure digs, the more she realises how little she about the person Megan had become. Not the loving friend and mother she thought, not the considerate partner she thought, and also not the upstanding citizen she thought. When a money laundering plot is slowly exposed and Lauren is faced with the dilemma of forever tarnishing the reputation of her lost best friend to bring the criminals to justice.

Title: *My Sweet Untraceable You* (Lauren Laurano 3)

Author: Sandra Scoppettone

Year of Publication: [1994] 2011

Place of Publication: Boston

Publisher: Little Brown

When the eccentric Boston Blackie, convinced that his father murdered his mother, hires Lauren to find evidence, the finger of point seems to point at no one. Lauren would have written this off as a freak accident, or as a suicide, but someone seems to secretly pull the strings on her every move and ignites Lauren's fighting spirit. Lauren needs to juggle having a movie made about her character, the most complicated family tree she has ever investigated, and a plot to kill off all potential beneficiaries of a hidden will.

Title: *Let's Face the Music and Die* (Lauren Laurano 4)

Author: Sandra Scoppettone

Year of Publication: [1996] 2011

Place of Publication: Boston

Publisher: Little Brown

Lauren and her life-style partner Kip are drifting apart, with Kip increasingly trying to make Lauren see that she is addicted to her work and that they need to focus on building a family before they grow too old. Yet when Lauren's friend Elissa is accused to murdering her wealthy aunt for the inheritance, Lauren cannot help but setting out to prove Elissa's innocence. With Kip gone off state to hold a series of lectures and Lauren's only ally in the police force out of commission, Lauren finds an unusual alliance in Alex, an old flame rekindled by the sense of impending doom.

Title: *Gonna Take a Homicidal Journey* (Lauren Laurano 5)

Author: Sandra Scoppettone

Year of Publication: [1998] 2011

Place of Publication: Boston

Publisher: Little Brown

Lauren and Kip leave Manhattan for a vacation on Long Island. Ostensibly, they are helping friends renovate a new house, but actually they are aiming to reconstruct their relationship, which is in shambles after Lauren's affair with Alex. Coincidentally, a brutal crime has just occurred in the supposedly idyllic village of Seaview, the body of Bill Moffat, a local who was leading the petition to keep fast-food chains out of town, is found hanging from a tree. Bill's cousin hires Lauren to identify the culprit, and possibly his own stalker too. All too happy to put some distance between her and an increasingly paranoid Kip, Lauren partners up with NYPD Detective Cecchi to uncover a series of dubious fatal accidents and lure out the killer.

The Lindsay Gordon Mystery series

Title: *Report for Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 1)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [1987] 2010

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Harper Collins

To make ends meet Scottish socialist journalist Lindsay Gordon must spend a weekend at a high-society girls' boarding school to write a scintillating article about the school's fund-raising event. Tensions are running high over the school's financial issues, and the fact that alumna and famous cello player Lorna Smith-Couper will be the star of the show only serves to exacerbate old feuds and cause new bitter resentments. When Lorna's body is found strangled with her own cello string right before her performance, Lindsay and local novelist Cordelia set out to prove the innocence of a friend and develop an intimate relationship in the process.

Title: *Common Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 2)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [1989] 2008

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Harper Collins

An episode of unrest at a women's peace camp explodes into murder, and when Lindsay's former flame Deborah Patterson is accused, she decides to bring all her expertise as an investigative reporter into play. Moreover, as an investigator with insider knowledge and connections, Lindsay is asked by Superintendent Jack Rigano to unearth a conspiracy which is preventing him from doing his job.

Title: *Final Edition / Deadline for Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 3)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [1991] 2012

Place of Publication: Ann Arbor MI

Publisher: Bywater Books

Due to having published the conspiracy behind the events of *Common Murder*, Lindsay is enjoying an incognito lifestyle in Italy. But when Alison Maxwell, one of Lindsay's former flames is found dead and the police is running circles like a headless chicken, Lindsay knows that her investigative skills are the only thing that will guarantee Alison's memory the justice she deserves. However, much to her shock and dismay Lindsay returns to find that Cordelia has not been waiting for her at all, and is happily living with someone else. Lindsay vows to remain on amicable terms, but what about the secret past relationship between the victim and Cordelia?

Title: *Union Jack / Conferences are Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 4)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [1993] 2008

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Harper Collins

Lindsay Gordon is writing a thesis on women's experiences in the union movement and a conference of journalists is the perfect opportunity to gather more material, even if it means diving into memories of old friends and rivalries she thought she had put behind. When Tom Jack, national executive chief for the country's newspapers union, is pushed out of a 10th-story window at the run-up for the election of the new union president, Lindsay is called to unearth her own ex-colleagues' morbid secrets.

Title: *Booked for Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 5)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [1996] 2008

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Harper Collins

This story opens in San Francisco, where Lindsay has obtained her PhD and is working as a journalism professor, while her partner Sophie has a successful obstetrics and gynaecology practice. But once again the death of an old friend beckons her back to the United Kingdom. The violent death of socialist author Penny Varnavides has been pinned on Penny's former lover, Meredith Robin. Penny has been murdered in an identical manner to the victim of her next, yet unpublished novel, and it is up to Lindsay's investigative skills to retrace Penny's last days of life.

Title: *Hostage to Murder* (Lindsay Gordon 6)

Author: Val McDermid

Year of Publication: [2003] 2008

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Harper Collins

A small accident brings together Lindsay Gordon, jobless in Glasgow, and young freelance journalist Rory McLaren. Rory's invitation to work alongside her in the retrieval of Jack Gurlay, a six years old kidnapped by an attaché of the Italian Foreign Office, comes at exactly the right

time. Lindsay is in fact distancing herself from Sophie and her one-sided decision to get pregnant, and Rory's beauty and wits are not doing Lindsay any favours.

The Micky Knight Mystery series

Title: *Death by the Riverside* (Micky Knight 1)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: [1990] 2009

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes books

New Orleans Private Detective Micky Knight takes on the seemingly simple job of photographing the runaway brother of a client, but the case soon turns bigger and more dangerous than Micky expected. The trail leads to the old-money grand villa Hundred Oaks Plantation, a beautiful doctor named Cordelia who turns out to be the real heiress of Hundred Oaks, an underground criminal organisation with connections in very high places, and finally to Micky's traumatic past.

Title: *Deaths of Jocasta* (Micky Knight 2)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: [1992] 2009

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

P.I. Micky Knight works as a security detail for the organiser of an annual LGBT+ party, when a dead body is found in the shrubbery near the venue. When more dead women are found, the police target Dr. Cordelia James as the killer – the very woman who owns Micky's heart. Working to clear Cordelia's name, Micky discovers an anti-abortionist plot to bomb the local women's clinic.

Title: *The Intersection of Law and Desire* (Micky Knight 3)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: [1995] 2009

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

Cissy Selby, the daughter of one of Micky's friends, has a devastatingly haunted look in her eyes, and she is determined to root out the cause of the young girl's terror. On the side, Micky's wealthy ex-lover Karen Holloway is being extorted out of her fortune and pleads for Micky's help. These two seemingly separate cases converge into a dingy hole of a saloon where every body is for sale, no matter their gender, sexuality, consent, or age.

Title: *Lost Daughters* (Micky Knight 4)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: [1998] 2009

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

Micky Knight takes on the cases of a widowed mother looking for her missing daughter and a gay boy wanting to reunite with his biological mother. These cases stir in Micky a desire to search for her own mother who abandoned her when she was a young girl. When a young woman patient is murdered at Cordelia's clinic, it seems a separate heap of troubles, but then another patient is found dead and Micky starts to connect the thread to all of her cases: there is a serial killer on the loose, targeting lesbians who are isolated from their families.

Title: *Death of a Dying Man* (Micky Knight 5)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2009

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

Micky's preconception that the skills of a reporter are of no use to a PI is proved wrong in this story. Micky is stuck with a gorgeous reporter as assistant and the case of a dying gay man looking for the child he might have fathered does not help Micky in keeping her emotions in check. These chains of events, combined with the arrival of Hurricane Katrina tear down Micky's emotional defences completely.

Title: *Water Mark* (Micky Knight 6)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2010

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

After Micky cheated on Cordelia, she is willing to take on any case to take her mind off of the emptiness of her home, including investigating the circumstances behind a dead body found in one of the many houses destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Micky's quixotic search leads to a tangle of family greed and deceit that stretches back generations: someone is using the destruction wrought by the flooding to settle old family matters and a Midwestern lesbian teenager whose only crime was to be in the wrong destroyed house at the wrong time is in mortal danger.

Title: *Ill Will* (Micky Knight 7)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2012

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

Micky is confronted with the harsh truth that even health care providers, sworn never to harm fellow humans, can be ruthless criminals. In post-Katrina New Orleans Charles Williams hires Micky to investigate the death of his nephew, a victim of the seemingly miraculous cure called Nature's Beautiful Gift, the new front of a drug dealing ring. Meanwhile, nature bestows on Cordelia a cruel and terrible gift, an early stage lymphoma that will require bone marrow transplant to give Cordelia some semblance of hope.

Title: *The Shoal of Time* (Micky Knight 8)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2013

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

With Cordelia gone to a high-profile clinic in Houston to seek proper medical treatment, New Orleans P.I. Micky Knight is more than happy to let herself be roped into the role of local guide by an out-of-town team of investigators who are working on a human trafficking case. With both Mardi Gras and Super Bowl imminent, the risk of people disappearing never to be found again is at an all-time high and the arrival of the beautiful Emily Harris, a sketchy FBI agent who is investigating a prostitution ring gang war, certainly does not help. In the crowded streets of downtown New Orleans everything is blurred, who is the prey and who is the predator, who are the good and the bad guys, Micky learns it all at her own expenses.

Title: *The Girl on the Edge of Summer* (Micky Knight 9)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2017

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

The haughty Douglas Townson hires Micky to solve a 1906 case, his great-grandfather was murdered after infecting his numerous lovers with syphilis and wants Micky to wash the family of this slanderous stain. On the other hand, the humble Susie Stevens hires Micky to identify the online hater who drove her daughter Tiffany to take her own life. After one of Tiffany's Facebook friends (and abuser) turns out dead after a loud confrontation with Micky, the criminals try to wind up a web of false evidence and lies in order to take her out once and for all.

Title: *Not Dead Enough* (Micky Knight 10)

Author: J. M. Redmann

Year of Publication: 2019

Place of Publication: Valley Falls NY

Publisher: Bold Strokes Books

Atlanta born-and-bred Aimee Smyth hires Micky for a seemingly easy task, finding her missing sister Sally Brande. But when a body who looks exactly like the pictures Aimee showed Micky turns up at the morgue, Micky's real investigation starts. The Brande family is an organised crime powerhouse, being torn apart by internal feuds, and there are way too many women who look exactly the same turning up in different places for Micky to resist going on a trip to Atlanta.

The Pam Nilsen Mystery series

Title: *Murder in the Collective* (Pam Nilsen 1)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1984] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

This story narrates the first case of amateur detective Pam Nilsen, of Boston. Pam and her twin sister Penny own the Best Printing collective, a print-shop hovering on the brink of a merger with the lesbian-owned B. Violet Typesetting. When one of Best Printing employees is found

murdered in the shop, and the B. Violet is completely thrashed on the very same night, Pam and B. Violet's Hadley set out to defend the members of their respective collectives, encountering ever-bigger problems such as their colleagues' internalised homophobia, Third World feminism dilemmas, the Filipino resistance to the Marcos dictatorship, and possibly an intelligence agency agent turned psychopath.

Title: *Sisters of the Road* (Pam Nilsen 2)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1986] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

Pam Nilsen stumbles upon teenage prostitute Trish Margolin and the murder of Trish's best friend. Without nowhere else to go, Pam takes in Trish momentarily. As the two familiarise with each other, Pam is progressively concerned about the girl's family situation, even confronts Trish's half-brother, her pimp, directly, not knowing she stirred up a hornet's nest. The carefree, naïve amateur detective will understand how cruel the street world is at her own expenses.

Title: *The Dog Collar Murders* (Pam Nilsen 3)

Author: Barbara Wilson

Year of Publication: [1989] 2013

Place of Publication: New York

Publisher: Open Road Media

Pam attends the Seattle Conference on Sexuality, a hubbub of controversial topics ranging from pornography to violence against women based on real-life conferences about sex and anti-porn views such as the 1982 Barnard Sex Conference where Gayle Rubin held her workshop "Thinking Sex." Loie Marsh is an outspoken critic of porn and a speaker at the conference, but is found dead before her panel, strangled with a dog collar. Suspects include a member of Christians Against Pornography, an S/M advocate who owned the dog collar used to commit the murder, a producer of erotic lesbian videos, and Loie's ex-lovers.

The Robin Miller Mystery series

Title: *I Left My Heart* (Robin Miller 1)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1991] 2010

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Travel guides and romance writer Robin Miller receives the news of the death of her past first love Mary. Unable to reconcile the police's sentence of accidental death Robin flies to San Francisco and stumbles into an investigation that will reveal not only her ex-lover's secrets, but also those of Mary's whole new circle of friends: the fighting lesbian couple, Mary's best friend who was sleeping with her behind her own husband's back, Mary's homophobic neighbours. As much as Robin would like to pin all the blame on one person, Mary's death turns out to have been a tragic concerted effort.

Title: *Crazy for Loving* (Robin Miller 2)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1992] 2010

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

After being forced out of the closet by an ex-suspect, Robin is back in New York City, being trained to take over a small private detective agency. On one side, she investigates the death of David Ross, a middle school teacher found dead in his classroom and a child is possibly implicated. On the other side, Christine O'Donnell presents Robin with a no less complicated assignment: find the man who slept with her in an hotel in Atlantic City and infected her with HIV/AIDS.

Title: *Under My Skin* (Robin Miller 3)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1993] 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

While vacationing in the Poconos, private investigator Robin Miller is hired by her old friend Noreen Finnegan, who is found dead the following day, suspiciously after quarrelling with her ex-lover. In this small community of LGBT+ people, one with a more troubled past than the other, Robin delves into tragic histories of human pain and indelible sins.

Title: *Someone To Watch* (Robin Miller 4)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1995] 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Robin's latest client sends her hot on the trail of a singer who supposedly doubles as a con artist. However, she is side-tracked by a plea from her lover, K.T. Bellflower, to help K.T.'s friend, the prime suspect in the murder of her boyfriend. Tracing this man's past connections, disturbing secrets are revealed, even the startling relationship between a right-wing politician and a gay activist.

Title: *Baby It's Cold* (Robin Miller 5)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1996] 2016

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

As a bitter winter blankets New York, Robin is confronted with a bone-chilling case, there is a child kidnapper on the loose in the poorer corners of the city, and one child is presumed dead. Robin teams up with an ex-lover to stop this monstrous threat, and her actions bring her too close to the truth the final confrontation sends her to the hospital in a near comatose hypothermic state.

Title: *Old Black Magic* (Robin Miller 6)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1997] 2018

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Having just recovered, Robin is faced with an ultimatum by her lover K.T. Bellflower: to accept K.T.'s pregnancy or go their separate ways forever. Not being a family-oriented person, Robin is more than happy to open her mentor's cold case, fly to New Orleans to follow a trail of serial murders, and even team up with her mentor's old, sleazy friend Theobald Sweeney. The trail leads Robin through New Orleans' voodoo practices and a deep grudge against female adulterers, making her too a target of the serial killer.

Title: *Every Time We Say Goodbye* (Robin Miller 7)

Author: Jaye Maiman

Year of Publication: [1999] 2019

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

The entire family of Robin's partner descends on them for celebrations. Amidst the rabid-like crowd of relatives, Robin's only ally and friend is the fifteen years old Sydney Rayball, one of K.T.'s nieces, so it was only a matter of time until this relationship was soured by Sydney's mother, who hires Robin to investigate the cause of Sydney's distant, rebellious behaviour. On the other side, one of Robin's ex-lovers pleads to uncover a greedy CEO's insurance scam and prove the innocence of an orphan boy. In this last instalment of the series Robin juggles with two cases where all the odds are stacked against her but with the innocence of two children on the line and her own baby on the way, Robin puts her own life at risk to do her job.

The Stoner McTavish Mystery Series

Title: *Stoner McTavish* (Stoner McTavish 1)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1985] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner McTavish works at a travel agency and lives with her clairvoyant Aunt Hermione. She is tasked to save Gwen Owens, a young gullible woman whose husband plans to kill for the inheritances. Stoner stalks the young couple during their honeymoon trip at a resort in the middle of Wyoming mountains, befriending the locals and falling in love with the naïve young bride. The Wyoming landscape inspires scene of sublime fascination and ecological rage towards reckless urban development and endangered natural habitats. The queer-friendliness of some of the locals inspires filial attachment from Stoner, but the domestic scenes are constantly haunted by the horrific potential for murder. The final confrontation against the villain is perfectly cathartic.

Title: *Something Shady* (Stoner McTavish 2)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1986] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner and Gwen set out to seek a nurse from a private mental hospital who is gone missing. Stoner goes undercover in Shady Acres as a patient, a nefarious place where the ex-owner is faking to be drugged out of her mind to protect herself, people are hospitalised for trivial reasons, and electroshock and behaviour modifying drugs are used liberally. Eventually Stoner discovers that Shady Acres is a front for a smuggling ring sending criminal out of the country. The Gothic settings are aptly crowned with a finale where Stoner is drugged and almost electrocuted to death, fighting off horrific hallucinations until help from outside enables her escape.

Title: *Gray Magic* (Stoner McTavish 3)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1987] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner and Gwen set off to investigate a strange sickness which affects everyone within and related to a Hopi reservation in Phoenix, Arizona. A shape-shifting coyote-man searches for the magical YaYa bundle that supposedly contains all the secrets of life and death, and is up to Stoner and her company to stop him. To do this, a centuries-old Hopi shaman educates Stoner about the secrets of the reservation, helping Stoner develop self-confidence in the process.

Title: *A Captive in Time* (Stoner McTavish 4)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1990] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner's travel agency sends her to Denver to settle a client's issue, but her car dies abruptly in the middle of nowhere, and Stoner walks into the town of Tabor, Colorado, cursed to be stuck in 1871. Here Stoner befriends Billy, a girl who shot her abusive father and is on the run, disguising herself as a boy to avoid forced hospitalisation due to her sexuality. The town of Tabor is the chosen playground of a religious fanatic who plans to sacrifice the citizens to a false God, and is up to Stoner and her new friends to stop this.

Title: *Otherworld* (Stoner McTavish 5)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1993] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner, Gwen and their families spend a weekend at Disney World. Stoner receives multiple mysterious phone calls where a voice begs her for help. When Stoner's best friend is abducted, the group starts investigating the entertaining park and its workers in earnest. An old villain makes a comeback, Stoner discovers a door to another dimension in one of park's buildings, and the whole group will have to travel there to save the life of one of their own.

Title: *Bad Company* (Stoner McTavish 6)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1995] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

Stoner receives a letter from the owner of an historical inn in Sebago Lake, Maine, asking her for help investigating the sabotage of a feminist play. Gwen falls under the hypnosis of the theatre group manager, becoming obsessed with her and leaving Stoner investigating alone with an older lesbian couple visiting the inn. An old feud resurfaces among the theatre group members, the secret bursting into the open when the group performs a Wiccan ritual to exorcise the evil haunting the play. The final scene illustrating the fight in the pond between Stoner and the manager recalls the ending of *Stoner McTavish* and *Something Shady* in its potent catharsis.

Title: *Shaman's Moon* (Stoner McTavish 7)

Author: Sarah Dreher

Year of Publication: [1998] 2015

Place of Publication: Hereford AZ

Publisher: New Victoria Publishers

The last instalment of the series starts with Aunt Hermione's illness, showing signs of dementia. Several suspects are investigated then discarded, for the truth resides in Aunt Hermione's very own subconscious. When Stoner and her friends perform a group ritual, she dives within Aunt Hermione's mind to battle against demons of the past and finally liberate what turns out to be a piece of Stoner's own soul, unconsciously severed in childhood and left with Aunt Hermione

for safekeeping. The novel deals with the eradication of memories and the split of Self after a particularly traumatic experience. In this case, Stoner's coerced hospitalisation in a mental clinic, an attempt her parents made to "cure" her of her sexuality. The final reconciliation of Stoner's two selves makes peace and forgive the past to introduce self-acceptance and self-confidence.

Appendix of Secondary novels

As a reminder, here are listed the lesbian detective novels which have been analysed in the early stages of research but are not included in the literary analysis of this thesis. They nonetheless constitute contextual backdrop for the “primary” novels, but reside outside of the historical scope of this dissertation.

The Gun Mystery series

Title: *Gun Shy* (Gun 1)

Author: Lori L. Lake

Year of Publication: [2001] 2019

Place of Publication: Saint Paul MN

Publisher: Launch Points Press

While on patrol, Saint Paul police officer Desiree “Dez” Reilly saves two women from a serial sexual predator. One of them, Jaylynn Savage, is left awestruck by the professional way in which the taciturn policewoman handled herself and the criminals, so much so that she joins the St. Paul Police Academy. Fate guides the two women back together when Dez is assigned as Jaylynn’s Field Training Officer three years later. Having suffered the loss of her unit partner in the past, Dez has sworn off becoming friends, let alone dating cops ever again, a steadfast rule she has abided by for nine years, and one that Jay is determined to break.

Title: *Under the Gun* (Gun 2)

Author: Lori L. Lake

Year of Publication: 2002

Place of Publication: Saint Paul MN

Publisher: Launch Point Press

Dez and Jay are slowly adjusting to their relationship, but things start to go downhill when they are dispatched to a double homicide, which becomes Jay’s first murder scene: Steven D. Tivoli, the manager of a stand at a music festival is found with two shots in the head, execution style. Dez is openly protective towards Jay, which arouses the suspicion of their colleagues, and their commanding officer restricts them from riding together on patrol. This sets off a chain of events

that results in Jay being involved in a not-so-accidental accident during a chase driving test, and Dez being temporarily suspended.

Title: *Have Gun We'll Travel* (Gun 3)

Author: Lori L. Lake

Year of Publication: 2005

Place of Publication: Saint Paul MN

Publisher: Launch Point Press

Saint Paul Police Department officers Dez Reilly and Jay Savage set off on a camping trip with good friends Crystal and Shayna, expecting nothing more than long hikes in the vibrant forests and romantic wood fires. Instead, they find themselves caught in the escape plan of two convicts from the nearby Kendall Correctional Facility, desperate and determined to reunite with the rest of their Russian *mafiosi* family members.

Title: *Jump the Gun* (Gun 4)

Author: Lori L. Lake

Year of Publication: 2013

Place of Publication: Saint Paul MN

Publisher: Launch Point Press

In this last episode of the Gun series Jay and Dez are living a peaceful relationship together, but a terrible news strikes the Saint Paul Police Department: Lynette Mielo, an esteemed senior officer and one of Dez's long-time friends is killed in a turbulent shootout. When Dez's nemesis, detective Rosa Moran, is assigned to the case, Dez fears that Moran's petty feuds and paranoid suspicions will be at the detriment of finding the real culprit and starts her own discreet investigation. Amidst witnesses who are killed off, and armed men who break in her and Jay's at night only to vanish immediately after, Dez also needs to juggle a career-changing decision: accepting the promotion to Homicide or going to SWAT?

The Hunter Mystery series

Title: *Hunter's Way* (Hunter 1)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2005

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Dallas City's Senior Homicide detective Tori Hunter is the only woman in her squad, and the best officer. Pity that all her past partners have been misogynist *saboteurs* who could not keep up with her. As a consequence, Tori is used to working alone and doing things her reckless way, so when she is suddenly partnered with the hot-tempered newcomer Samantha Kennedy, tensions run high. During an intricate serial killer investigation, the two grow closer, with Sam drifting apart from her boyfriend and Tori, never having before let anyone get emotionally close, finally letting down her defences.

Title: *In the Name of the Father* (Hunter 2)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2007

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

After Sam is pulled from Homicide team because of her relationship with Tori, transfer from Special Victims Unit Casey O'Connor becomes the other half of Tori's unit. Together, they are handed a very delicate involving both religion and politics: Father Michael is found in his church's rectory, raped and strangled. As the only brother of the Mayor, Tori's boss Lieutenant Malone is eager to close the case as neatly as possible. But does the sodomy hint at an alternate lifestyle of Father Michael? And what the mysterious death in the Mayor's past? Tori and Casey discover a series of tangled passions at the highest level of society.

Title: *Partners* (Hunter 3)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2008

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Casey, now fully integrated in Tori's squad, is partnered with a new addition from Assault, Detective Leslie Tucker, closeted lesbian. Together they investigate the death of a homeless man, his throat viciously cut much too like several other homeless individuals whose cases were never closed.

The Johnston & Riley Mystery series

Title: *Keepers of the Cave* (Johnston & Riley 1)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2012

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

After a senator's daughter is the umpteenth victim of a chain of disappearance college girls, the FBI sends Agents "CJ" Johnston and Paige Riley to investigate the isolated, mysterious community of Hoganville. CJ and Paige fear the drunken night they spent together six months prior will turn their relationship sour, but it does quite the opposite. With this newly-found private and professional harmony they integrate themselves into the lives of the teachers and staff of Hoganville, and slowly uncover the existence of a matriarchal cult worshipping a monster in a cave.

Title: *Weeping Walls* (Johnston & Riley 2)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2013

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

An abandoned old house in a small town near Houston has become the site of a second murder, suspiciously similar to a fourteen years old cold case. FBI Agents "CJ" Johnston and Paige Riley are dispatched to find the link between the two homicides. The community of the small town has long declared the house haunted, but the children use it as a playground for courage tests. CJ and Paige need to decipher the children's gibberish and extract the truth, but maybe the visions that haunt the children's nightmares are not entirely made up.

The Ross & Sullivan Mystery series

Title: *Devil's Rock* (Ross & Sullivan 1)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2010

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Deputy Andrea Sullivan transfers from Los Angeles to Sedona, Arizona, hoping to find a peaceful, quiet lifestyle without the endless streak of murders of the metropolis. Then she stumbles into a series of murders of college students with no evident connection from one another. The complexities of this case stretch local resources to the limit, to the point that the FBI steps onto the field, with Agent Cameron Ross in the lead.

Title: *Hell's Highway* (Ross & Sullivan 2)

Author: Gerri Hill

Year of Publication: 2011

Place of Publication: Tallahassee FL

Publisher: Bella Books

Someone is using the bleak highways of California's Mojave Desert to dump women's bodies, and FBI Agents Cameron Ross and Andrea Sullivan set out to find the trail of hints in the rust-red dust.

The Saz Martin Mystery series

Title: *Calendar Girl* (Saz Martin 1)

Author: Stella Duffy

Year of Publication: [1994] 2012

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Serpent's Tail

London-based private detective Sarah "Saz" Martin is hired by John Clark to identify the woman whom he lent a significant amount of money to and has disappeared. The woman, known only as September is forced to work as a mule for a drug smuggling, gambling, high-class prostitution ring leader and Saz needs to infiltrate the exclusive Calendar Girl New York hotel as one of the Girls in order to save September and possibly retrieve enough evidence to take down the whole operation.

Title: *Wavewalker* (Saz Martin 2)

Author: Stella Duffy

Year of Publication: [1996] 2012

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Serpent's Tail

Saz Martin, is hired by a mystery employer known only as Wavewalker to investigate the activities of internationally acclaimed therapist, healer, and guru Doctor Maxwell North. Now it appears to be a simply effective psychoanalyst technique, but the more Saz dig into Maxwell's part, the more she uncovers the origin of this technique: a witchery mind technique that turns people into slaves.

Title: *Beneath the Blonde* (Saz Martin 3)

Author: Stella Duffy

Year of Publication: [1997] 2012

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Serpent's Tail

Siobhan Forrester, lead singer of Beneath the Blonde, hires Saz to follow the band on tour and identify her creepy stalker. When anonymous flowers and letters turn into the murder of one of her bandmates, Saz realises that the key is in Siobhan's past, but the woman is the most reluctant to talk about the childhood she spent in New Zealand. She left someone there whom she wants to do with again. That someone though has a decade-old score to settle and will kill every person Siobhan loves in order to reunite again.

Title: *Fresh Flesh* (Saz Martin 4)

Author: Stella Duffy

Year of Publication: [1999] 2001

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Serpent's Tail

Life is being kind to Saz and her partner Molly. They are expecting a baby and becoming friends with other gay couples who have submitted papers for adoption. To assuage their friends' worries Saz connects them with a friend of her who was also adopted, but the history of the adoption system reads more like a nightmare than a dream come true, which sets off Saz' instinct to get to the bottom of the problem.

Title: *Mouths of Babes* (Saz Martin 5)

Author: Stella Duffy

Year of Publication: 2005

Place of Publication: London

Publisher: Serpent's Tail

Saz Martin and her partner are trying to settle into new motherhood, especially Saz, who decides to rely on Molly's pay-check as a doctor and become a full-time care-giver to their daughter Matilda. But a sin from Saz's past is coming back to haunt her: TV star Will Gallagher is an old schoolmate of Saz who reaches out to her because Janine Marsden is blackmailing him. This would be a normal black-and-white case, if Saz were a good person in her teens. But what she and her old school clique buried in the past cannot be called good by any stretch of the imagination.