Ratbags on the fringe: Exploring feminism through crime

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"Ratbags On The Fringe": Exploring Feminism Through Crime Fiction

by

Danielle Brown

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of

Bachelor of Arts (English Studies) - Honours

Date of Submission: 1st of November, 1993
ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers how feminist crime fiction can transform a traditionally male-dominated genre. Contemporary feminist crime writers reject the codified masculine crime genre to create ever-expanding spaces for literary representation. I concentrate on three texts which are ordered as a progression. Firstly, I explore the conservative "male" writing of Jennifer Rowe in The Makeover Murders. I then go on to The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender by Marele Day which privileges a concern with the socio-political position of women and their access to socio-political power. The last text, Finola Moorhead's Still Murder, is a radical work of feminist literature, as it critically engages with areas of French feminist theory, particularly that of Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. These different strands of feminist thought signify a range of positions within the feminist movement. In my texts, however, I will argue that they become a mutually exclusive division.

Different "feminisms" create certain limitations for women, and although I suggest how these limitations are reproduced in the texts, I argue nevertheless that The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender and Still Murder in particular offer positive representations of contemporary women. In doing so, they signal a feminist use of genre which is non-structured and flexible, creating a range of possibilities for social and theoretical empowerment, for feminist writers and readers alike.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Danielle Brown

Date: 30th of October, 1993
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr Jill Durey, and especially my supervisor, Dr Susan Ash, for her support and encouragement.

Special thanks go to my mother, Judi Bracks, who didn’t complain.

Thanks also go to Bay Lynx Computing for the donation of their typesetting services, the Library staff for their endless assistance during my research; and Harry Freemantle, who listened to me.
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PREFACE

Two years ago, I was flicking through television channels when an interview with several women crime writers caught my attention. Referring to recent women's crime fiction, the interviewer called it "the great new feminist genre". Although I did not watch the whole interview, that particular phrase has remained in my mind. Such a sweeping statement demands questioning: why is it "great"? Is it a new genre, or is it a re-writing of a masculine genre, and therefore still guided by traditional generic conventions? And is all contemporary crime fiction written by women necessarily feminist? What qualities differentiate a "feminist" text from "male" writing? These are some of the questions I address here. I do not seek definitive "yes-no" answers. Rather, I explore the possibilities the genre of crime fiction offers feminist writers. After extensive reading of feminist crime fiction, I chose three texts which, while not representative of static (op)positions, do demonstrate the subversive potential of feminist crime fiction.
INTRODUCTION:
Propositions & Directions

The contemporary form of crime fiction developed as a sub-genre of detective fiction. Possibly due to its increasing popularity with writers and readers, it has come to represent a separate genre, guided by different generic conventions. Detective fiction is traditionally the more conservative of the two. It concentrates on a detection/solution pattern, may point to but does not always discuss ideological conflicts, and usually ends on a firm note of closure which re-establishes the initial status quo. In contrast, crime fiction tends to be concerned with the social and ideological implications of crime, exploring the psychological effects of crime on the individual; and potentially offers a critique of the society in which the crime occurred.

Detective fiction has been seen as a development of Gothic fiction. Popular towards the end of the eighteenth century, Gothic fiction posited a world which was subject to the influence of the spiritual or the mysterious, a world where the enigmatic remains unrevealed and unresolved, and therefore disturbing. Anne Cranny-Francis argues that Gothic fiction often “operates to speak and resolve the contradictions inherent in a society undergoing enormous change” (1990, 146). Gothic was present as a genre at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and the formation of the liberal/humanist movement, a period which saw the “transformation of the society’s economic base” and the “renegotiation of its dominant ideological formation” (Cranny-Francis, 1990, 146). By the early 1840’s in Britain, liberal humanism had promoted a growing awareness of the social realities and inequalities of the Industrial Revolution. The mid-1800’s saw an increasingly emphatic reiteration of the inherently stable, unified nature of the human subject, although that human was invariably masculine.

Edgar Allen Poe’s Auguste Dupin, widely accepted by critics as the first recognisably modern detective figure, operated as a fictional example of humanism’s masculine subject. Poe’s Dupin trilogy—"The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), “The Mystery of Marie Roget” (1842-3) and “The Purloined Letter” (1844)—established the generic conventions of detective fiction, and, perhaps more importantly, helped create the detective figure as “mythical embodiment of a certain conception of the ‘full’, integrated, conflict-free subject” (Rollason, 1988, 4). This

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1 Cranny-Francis, 1990; Reddy, 1988; Mann, 1981. Interestingly, male critics do not recognize Gothic fiction, possibly because a male literary tradition continues to see it as “women’s” literature, and therefore devalued.

2 Christopher Rollason quotes Jerry Palmer, Julian Symons, and Howard Haycraft (1988, 4). Stephen Knight argues “Poe was the first to create the intelligent, infallible, isolated hero so important to crime fiction” (1980, 39).
archetypal detective figure, epitomised by Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, functioned as a means of preserving the stability of bourgeois society, where the criminal was constructed as a single aberrant individual outside society who threatened the social order.

The 1920’s was the so-called “Golden Age” of detective fiction, dominated by the British school of detective writers, of whom the most popular are women such as Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham and Dorothy L. Sayers. These writers created the figure of the female detective. While these female detectives often explored issues concerning the socio-political position of women, patriarchal stereotypes of femininity were perpetuated in the process. Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple, in defense of women crime writers, claim “women seem to have been at the forefront of pulling detective fiction away from the predictable and towards a more psychological and social exploration of crime” (1989, 54). While it can be argued women writers in the genre have always been more “progressive” than their male counterparts, as Coward and Semple claim, they usually ignore the patriarchal structures which created and perpetuate the material conditions of women.

By the mid-twentieth century, following the advent of the modernist movement, two American writers, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, had greatly influenced the structure of detective fiction by creating “hard-boiled” detective heroes who were (occasionally) aware of their fallibility and limitations. In Chandler’s and Hammett’s work, society is represented as fragmented and chaotic, establishing one of the conventions of crime fiction. Chandler attacked the conservatism of British detective fiction when he wrote it was peopled by “‘puppets, and cardboard lovers and papier-mache villains and detectives of exquisite and impossible gentility’” (Glover, 1989, 67). However, both Chandler and Hammett continued the tradition of the autonomous detective. Within the chaotic world of hard-boiled fiction, the individual is the one remaining site of stability and offers the only hope of redemption, reinforcing the realist, humanist construction of the unified subject.

Despite the representation of twentieth-century society as chaotic, Hammett and Chandler’s hard-boiled fiction works to conceal the construction of the individual subject by a process of naturalisation. Anne Cranny-Francis claims that the narrative of “individual autonomy and integrity” conceals the “connection with ideology and the formulation of the individual” (1990, 154). Similarly, the narrative of realism papers over the cracks in patriarchal, capitalist ideological structures, in an attempt to reassure the reader that we live in a world which can be understood and controlled.
Feminist crime fiction seems to be a reaction to both the implicit misogyny of Hammett and Chandler's works, where women are either victims (who are rescued), or criminals (who are punished); and the conservatism of Christie or Sayers, whose female characters, including their female detectives, comply with patriarchal representations of women. Feminist re-writings of crime/detective fiction usually focus on crime fiction, as it offers a greater potential for a critique of patriarchal society. Paulina Palmer defines lesbian/feminist crime fiction as "re-creating and revising" the masculine crime genre in a manner which "aims to interrogate and subvert patriarchal, heterosexual codes of conduct" (1991, 9). Using this broad definition of feminist crime fiction, I make a further distinction here between texts which privilege a detection/solution narrative pattern, and those which privilege an exploration of contemporary feminist issues.

At this point, articulating the different feminisms is vital. I explore the division in the contemporary feminist movement between a transformation of the concrete, material conditions of women's experience of patriarchy, and a call for a more abstract philosophical transformation of the existing phallocentric order. Helene Cixous's and Luce Irigaray's demand for an *écriture féminine*, or a symbolic order centring around the female body, can be contrasted to what Toril Moi defines as "Anglo-American" feminism, namely a critical concern with social and political change. This continuing argument is implicit and explicit within much feminist crime fiction. Those "feminist" texts that privilege the detection/solution narrative also appear to privilege a concern with the material conditions of women. The more radical texts which privilege an exploration of feminist issues frequently discuss the problem of a philosophical transformation.

My texts demonstrate the range of positions open to women writers within the genre of crime fiction and within the wider scope of feminist thought. I use Jennifer Rowe's *The Makeover Murders* to establish a basis for comparison. It is a good example of detective fiction, in that it posits an inherently stable social order. Rowe's use of generic conventions closely follows the structure of Agatha Christie's detective fiction. One of the "blurbs" on the cover states "Birdie [the detective] solves the crime with all the skill of a Poirot or Miss Marple". Rowe remains within the masculine conventions of detective fiction and does not interrogate patriarchal structures.

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1 Although related, patriarchy is primarily used to signify the socio-political practices of male-dominated society. Phallocentrism is a "system that privileges the phallus as the symbol or source of power" (Moi, 1985, 179).

2 Moi makes it clear the terms "French" and "Anglo-American" as applied to feminist criticism are not indicative of nationalities, but signal specific intellectual traditions (1985, xiv).
The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, by Marele Day, privileges the detection/solution narrative pattern, but uses the generic form of crime fiction to critique the psychological motivations of both criminal and detective, and the ideological institution of the "city", in this case Sydney. While Day's detective character, Claudia Valentine, subverts many patriarchal notions of the feminine, she nevertheless recalls the masculine form of the genre in her construction as autonomous subject. Day's narrative structures and thematic concerns, however, discuss the issue of socio-political change for women. In this, The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender resembles the works of the American writer Sara Paretsky, who has achieved a level of popular success with her detective V.I. Warshawski. The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender is positioned between the conservatism of Jennifer Rowe's novel and the radicalism of Still Murder.

In contrast to both The Makeover Murders and The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, Finola Moorhead's novel substantially re-works generic conventions and critically engages with a range of theoretical issues affecting the contemporary feminist movement. Moorhead explores a need for a new feminine subjectivity, situating the text at the margins of the crime fiction genre. Within Still Murder, the "ratbags on the fringe" (159) refers specifically to the lesbian characters Cath and Roo. I have appropriated it to signal the marginal, and potentially subversive, position of Still Murder in terms of its feminism and its generic conventions.

I have found the term "women's crime fiction" often prompts the reply "Oh, yes, Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, P.D. James". Within their specific historical contexts, the works of women writers such as Christie, James and Sayers challenged the social environment and opened up different speaking positions for women. It seems, however, contemporary crime fiction written by women has yet to separate itself in the public consciousness from the detective fiction of these writers. Within a contemporary socio-historical context, feminist crime fiction can be seen as both a continuation of and a reaction against the ideological concerns of earlier women writers. My texts are intended to represent the new, multiple speaking positions available to women, and the continuum, ranging from the conservative to the radical, within which they operate.

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*Rosalind Coward and Linda Sample argue that Paretsky's "acceptance of the individualistic and machismo codes of violence is highly problematic" (1989, 46), a quote equally applicable to many of Marele Day's work.*
**THE MAKEOVER MURDERS:**

*Women's Crime Fiction: Is It Necessarily Feminist?*

The Deepdene mystique was now well-established, and the butterfly motif, so tastefully embossed on Margot's thick, cream stationery, so discreetly etched on the brass plate by the great iron gates that guarded the property, presented an irresistible promise to the select few who stepped nervously or boldly through the front door and felt the atmosphere of the house enfold them like a huge, silent, silken cocoon.

(Rowe, 1992, 1)

The stately country house has been used time and again by detective writers. Jennifer Rowe does not disappoint in her use of setting. Deepdene is a country retreat for women, where, at the hands of Margot Bell and her staff, the female guests are "made-over". As the "butterfly motif" suggests, the text takes a patriarchal stance towards women's appearance, in that women must be physically attractive to gain a more privileged position within patriarchy. The guests are "transformed", "accomplished by a good haircut, a clever make-up, and some decent clothes" (2), from the "ugliness" of caterpillars to the "beauty" of butterflies. Edwina, one of the guests, speaks for all the guests when she realises her supposed "frumpiness" is seen as a "weakness, in a way [patriarchy] would never have considered had she been a man" (20). The ideological implications of the "make-over" motif immediately place the text within a politically conservative position, which is reflected in Rowe's use of generic conventions.

Throughout *The Makeover Murders* Rowe returns to generic features established by Agatha Christie, such as the detective figure, the murderer and the murder. For experienced readers of Christie's detective fiction, the map of the house and the list of characters at the beginning of the book is an early signpost of the structural limits within which the text operates. The plan of the house became a traditional feature of the "clue-puzzle", a term used by Stephen Knight to describe Christie's narrative structure (1980, 107).

Verity Birdwood (Birdie) exemplifies one of Christie's main structural features, the detective figure. For example, Birdie's asexuality recalls Christie's heroine, Miss Marple. Birdie is introduced to the text as neither "he" nor "she", but with the "neuter" pronoun:

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6 Matt noticeably Agatha Christie and other British crime writers.
7 The clue-puzzle encourages a passive identification between reader and detective, as the detective "represents the reader who could only aspire to such observing and ordering powers" (Knight, 1980, 107).
It was small, and black, with huge, blinking eyes... It was streaming with water... Weed and grass clung to its head and arms. It squelched as it moved. (22-23)

Birdie is de-sexed in favour of remaining a cerebral presence in the text. She is repeatedly characterised in terms of cerebral processes: "Lucky I didn’t go the same way, she thought" (24); "Birdie’s mind ran idly" (26); "as if Margot had read Birdie’s thoughts" (47). The text complies with what is an underlying argument in much French feminist theory, that the body of the woman is repressed in phallocentric language.

Alternatively, Helene Cixous argues the female body is viewed by patriarchy as made up of partial objects that do not form a complete whole (1980, 259). When the female body is present in Rowe’s text, it is divided into parts, as with the description of the female guests. Edwina has a "strong, heavy face, thick iron-grey hair cut short... a bulky figure" (7). Josie has "watery-pale eyes, short lashes, snub nose, undistinguished mouth" (9). The women in the text are not whole subjects but separate objects. Cixous claims that women must "write your self. Your body must be heard... Inscribe the breath of the whole woman" (1980, 250). According to French feminism, the subversion of phallocentric constructions of femininity can only occur when the whole female body is metaphorically present in language. Thus, in constructing women characters who are either physically absent or physically separate, Rowe reinforces phallocentric representations of women.

Birdie’s physical absence from the text may be compensated for by her cerebral presence. Her observation and ordering of clues is a seemingly lucid process, potentially transforming notions of women as illogical. Despite calling on Detective Sergeant Dan Toby for help, Birdie appears to solve the crime single-handedly as Toby and his constable, Colin Milson, spend a large part of the story drugged. Birdie doesn’t solve the crime, however, without a clue discovered by the two policemen: "I knew, because of the buttons, that the Grey Lady murderer was here... William was the obvious choice"* (249). The buttons are the most vital piece of evidence in Birdie’s detection and provide the solution. This clue is only accessible, however, through Birdie’s alliance with the police. Birdie may be presented as logical but she cannot operate effectively as a female detective without the assistance provided by the police, as an institutionalised form of patriarchal power.

Jennifer Rowe echoes Agatha Christie’s conservatism in her treatment of murder, as well. Mike Woolf argues the solution to the crime and the conclusion of the story restores the "moral and social cohesion which has been temporarily splintered" (131). One could go further and claim
the act of murder itself goes some way to restoring social cohesion, at least. As Stephen Knight argues, in Agatha Christie's detective fiction the victims are "not presented as very admirable" (1980, 115). While the act of murder disrupts the social order, it does dispose of characters who threaten that order with their "unadmirable" qualities. In The Makeover Murders, both female murder victims are presented as lacking commendable personal traits. Margot is a "shallow, calculating bitch" (20) who blackmails her male lovers. Angela is "simple-minded to the point of being just plain simple" (133). The representation of the murder victims reinforces the patriarchal framework within which the text locates itself. But in the narrative world of the text, generosity and intelligence are constructed as eminently desirable qualities. Angela and Margot, therefore, are "undesirable" elements.

It is possible, though, that a resistant, feminist critique may push beyond such a conservative reading to articulate how Angela and Margot actually threaten patriarchy with their independence. Margot may blackmail her lovers but she has gone from a young model "struggling to become established" (5) to an elegant "high-powered lady" (16) who provides "expert assistance" (20) to her guests. Angela does not "repress" her body, as patriarchy would have her do, but is aware of it in a way disallowed the other female characters: "it's so important to be aware of the blood, and the breath" (135). Their murders, then, re-establish patriarchy's privileged position while at the same time splintering the "moral and social cohesion" of the patriarchal order.

The social cohesion offered in the solution is reinforced by the character of the murderer, William, who is constructed as insane. In many of Agatha Christie's novels, the perpetrators of violence were often represented as insane which, as Anne Cranny-Francis suggests, "conveniently explains... why s/he would expose the contradictions of bourgeois ideology to critical scrutiny" (1990, 160). William's insanity offers an "escape hatch" for the reader unsettled by the questions the murders raise, questions concerning patriarchal constructions of "proper" social conduct for women. If, however, the criminal is insane, then s/he is unable to be reasoned with and unable to be understood. Furthermore, if the insanity is located within an individual, then s/he is responsible for their actions, thereby absolving society at large from blame.
What is hinted at but never explored in the text is William's obsession with mother figures. William openly admits

"I felt very close to her... I asked her to marry me. And you know what she did?... She laughed! She laughed and laughed and laughed! Just like Lois, when I asked her. Just like Mother, before she went away. She was just like them. She didn't love me! She was evil, and bad." (254)

The text is a reflection of Freud's construct of the Oedipal process, as William is caught in a murderous cycle that seems to act out the child's separation from the mother. William appears to wish a return to the supposedly idyllic pre-Oedipal state, particularly when he asks the various mother figures to marry him. When they reject his proposals, the murders become an act of retaliation for refusing access to the pre-Oedipal.

In his discussion of narcissistic pathology, Stephen Frosh argues "the continuing lure of narcissism derives from the delayed 'psychological birth' of the human infant...with an eternal longing for an ideal state of self which in fact is a phantasised re-absorption into the symbiotic state" (1991, 96). He goes on to state, however, "such a regression... represents a loss of self-other boundaries of a kind more characteristic of psychotic than narcissistic states" (1991, 96). As the text remains silent on this issue, William's relationship with the mother who "went away" and possibly delayed his psychological birth, is only speculation. What the text unconsciously implies is William's "blaming" of the mother, as symbolised in the murders. The text lays the responsibility for William's insanity, and by implication the murders, on the woman who has not fulfilled the mothering role patriarchy requires of her, that is, devoted self-sacrifice.

Alternatively, William can be read as "essentially" insane. By avoiding any exploration of the psychological causes of psychosis, William's insanity can be posited as genetically inherited. In reference to the mother, the phrase "went away" suggests "taken" or "put away", colloquial terms for involuntary incarceration in psychiatric institutions. Even this "genetic" insanity, though, is never fully explored in the text. William's insanity simply "is". The reader, then, can avoid an "engagement with the problem of [the] social evil" (Cranny-Francis, 1990, 158) suggested by the possible causes of insanity.

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* Frosh defines narcissism as "the regressive tendency, absorption in the oneness which was once the foetal and infantile experience of the mother, but which is... a refusal to engage with reality" (1991, 94).
In The Makeover Murders, Jennifer Rowe creates a seductive view of the social order, where criminality is a temporary aberration and the result of insane characters. It offers a world which can be explained and understood and constructs a society that is inherently stable and "normal". In this way, the text may function as a fictional appeasement of anxieties affecting contemporary society, particularly for the reader threatened by the increased social power of women. Like Agatha Christie, Rowe's women are portrayed as victims (Laurel Moon, Belinda). When their social or intellectual position approaches that of the male characters, their potential threat to patriarchal systems is undermined by either murdering them (Margot, Angela), or eliminating their sexuality (Edwina, Birdie).

In her historical context, Agatha Christie exhibited what Alison Light calls a "conservative modernity". Light argues that Christie's detective fiction deliberately moved away from Victorian ideological constructs and literary forms. She states "Christie... offers a modern sense of the unstable limits of respectability" in her portrayal of "a society of strangers whose social exchanges have become theatrical and dismembered from a sense of place". According to Light, Christie articulates a "conservative Englishness but in a modern form" (1991, 62). I would argue Rowe exhibits a conservative Australian-ness but in a now dated form. In drawing so heavily upon Christie's work, The Makeover Murders constructs representations of society, and more specifically women, that are regressive rather than progressive, in that they do not interrogate the contemporary experience of patriarchal society.

On the one hand, Maureen Reddy argues feminist crime fiction entails an "essential subversiveness" that exposes patriarchy's "fundamental conservatism" and encourages the reader "to re-think his/her assumptions" (1988, 2). The Makeover Murders does not subvert or expose patriarchy's conservatism. Rather, it unquestioningly accepts and reinforces the patriarchal system. On the other hand, "male" writing, according to Helene Cixous, is that which reproduces the classic representations of women or writing which is run by a typically masculine economy, perpetuating a repression of women (1980, 245-246). According to this distinction, Jennifer Rowe's The Makeover Murders is an example of "male" writing in its reproduction of traditionally masculine representations of women. The Makeover Murders demonstrates that all contemporary women's crime fiction is not necessarily feminist. In contrast, The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender demonstrates the extent to which feminist crime fiction can potentially revise and subvert the "male" writing of masculine crime fiction.
In many re-writings of crime fiction, feminist writers utilise the generic conventions of mid-twentieth century American crime fiction, the hard-boiled fiction of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Both writers created a perception of society as fragmented and chaotic, with the individual the site of stability and (temporary) recuperation of normality. Mike Woolf claims Hammett and Chandler created an "urban fiction which has as its real concern the texture of contemporary experience, that uses crime and criminality as metaphors for a reality in which social disorder, even evil, is a perceived norm" (1988, 132). Marele Day appropriates this feature of the masculine genre to create a text which represents the new social roles available to women and employs the urban setting of hard-boiled fiction to interrogate the patriarchal construction of "reality" as solid and unchanging.

Marele Day explains the reasons for choosing the hard-boiled genre:

I chose to put Claudia Valentine, PI, into this hard-boiled American school because it allowed a greater questioning of traditional roles, both in terms of the real world, and of the conventions of the genre... this was also more appropriate to my primary purpose which was to write a book about Sydney, and to imagine it from a female point of view. (1989, 47)

The two main narrative concerns in the text are the female-as-detective, and the city. Day’s detective character, Claudia Valentine, opposes the asexuality of a Miss Marple and the misogyny of a San Spade or Phillip Marlowe. She is attractive, aware of and comfortable with her sexuality, an intelligent, street-smart woman of the world out to catch the bad guys. Claudia epitomises a feminism that at its most obvious level strives for social equality.

Day’s fictional representation of a socially empowered women is (potentially) politically empowering. Jennifer Rowe’s use of a third person narrative in The Makeover Murders posits Birdie as the passive narrated object. Day’s use of a first person narrative, however, reinforces Claudia’s construction as empowered and empowering by positioning her as the active narrating subject. She is characterised as a woman in control; in control of her body and in control of her
voice. Although she occasionally plays with words, she nevertheless consciously works to keep strict control over that play:

But the mind makes mistakes. Sometimes a perfectly good item is relegated to the dump, and wells up again from subterranean depths. Subterranean, subconscious, subliminal, sub. Lower position, covertness, secrecy, under, under the surface. I had only been trying the overt, the visible letters of the keyboard but underneath each of them was a secret symbol, a subtext. (141)

In the example above, Claudia guides the play of language towards her desired conclusion, that is solving the crime. This series of connections, from "subterranean" to "sub" to "subtext", eventually provides Claudia access to a computer program. As character/narrator, however, she cannot prevent a second narrative from appearing in the text. In an action that belongs to "guerrilla tactics" (42), Harry Lavender's narrative "slips through the interstices" of Claudia's narrative.

This is one of the most complex and interesting aspects of Day's text. The second narrative is The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, a biography of Sydney's crime king, Harry Lavender, written by the murder victim. The narrative of Harry's biography is written in the first person, and as such, has the effect of "naturalising" crime. Harry's narrative constructs crime as an inherent part of contemporary Australian life by tracing its origins back to the beginnings of the colony. Claudia's narrative subverts this view of crime by discussing the social implications of crime on those involved. The double narrative contrasts a "masculine" view of crime, as an essence of late capitalism and a justifiable method of achieving certain ends, namely socio-political power, with what is posited as "feminine". That is, in contrast to Harry, Claudia focusses on the material conditions crime and criminality create. Harry imagines his crimes have provided "so much for so many" (15), for which his reward is "a mountain with [his] name on it" (42). Harry is a criminal "who could persuade governors to do [his] bidding" (42). Claudia, however, explores the effect crime has on the idyllic city of her childhood: "Doors which in [her] childhood were left open all night... were now bolted, alarmed... A sign of the times" (33).

The double narrative of The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender also interrogates what Gary Day asserts is the usually unquestioned assumption in crime fiction that things can be known (1988, 40). The idea of knowledge, of knowing, is vital to the masculine form of the crime genre; it implies an objective reality that underlies the fragmented social order. Reality can, presumably, be revealed by those men rational and logical enough to interpret the signs. Anne
Cranny-Francis argues, however, that as feminist crime fiction often includes more than one narrative, no single narrative can be relied upon as the definitive site of knowledge (1990, 195). Although Claudia's (feminist) narrative is privileged over Harry's (patriarchal) narrative, encouraging a reading position that identifies with feminist concerns, the double narrative subverts the notion of one reality for all. Day creates a reality that is a negotiation between conflicting discourses.

What is "real" for Harry, as representative of the dominant socio-economic system, is not necessarily "real" for Claudia. Harry sees the text of his life, assuming physical form in his biography, as his "life and crimes... entering into the unalterable hologram of time and space" (134). Day constructs Harry's notion of history and reality as an "unalterable" image into which he can insert himself, achieving immortality in the process. Harry's view of what is "real" is contrasted with Claudia's reading of the biography at the conclusion of the text. Her:

eyes followed the dots, eating, devouring them, the dots that became letters that became words that became sentences, paragraphs that became The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender. (169)

In an action that is similar to the cancer that eats away at Harry's body, Claudia consumes the written text of Harry's life. The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, however, is also the life and crimes of Harry Lavender, that which occupies a position in time and space. The question arises: what is "real"? The written text of Harry's life? Or the lived text of his life? This isn't answered in the novel, but what is hinted at is the textual nature of reality. There is a third Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, the novel written by Marele Day. It is the third Life and Crimes which comes closest to the textuality of the "real" because it specifically refers to a work of fiction, a complex structure of words and meanings that never resolves itself into one possible reading. Just as it is possible to make multiple readings of the novel, so it is possible to make multiple readings of the "real".

The double narrative goes some way towards establishing feminist generic structures. Jacques Derrida makes a distinction between "speech" and "writing". "Speech" has traditionally been privileged over "writing" in western ideological systems as it constructs a sense of presence. Toril Moi, in summarising Derrida's arguments, explains that the "presence" of a speaking subject leads to "the idea that a text is somehow only fully authentic when it expresses the presence of a human subject", such as the detective in crime fiction "who thus can be cast as

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1 This is an interesting dichotomy. A hologram is diffracted light that forms an image of the object. This idea is juxtaposed with the concept of time and space, two terms which usually determine the field of experience and the boundaries of reality.
the unitary origin of his or her discourse" (1985, 107). The detective then becomes the symbol of the autonomous individual who provides an "authentic" or "true" meaning. The Derridean notion of "writing" however, is, according to Moi, an endless displacement of meaning which defers resolution (1985, 107). By ending the novel with the first few lines of Harry's narrative, Day creates a circular structure that does just that. Resolution is continually deferred in the text; one reading leads endlessly into another. Day, then, moves away from the privileged speaking position so common to the masculine form of the genre.

As with the conflicting notions of crime, the double narrative also allows for an exploration of different concepts of the city. The city of Sydney is an important focus in The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender. It is alternately portrayed as an interlocking network of institutionalised corruption that leads all the way up to Harry Lavender; or as a sentient (female) being dominated by (male) violence and aggression. The urban setting ties the text to the traditions of hard-boiled fiction where the city is a metaphor for the chaotic nature of society and is a place of unnamed menace (Palmer, 1991, 14).

Harry sees the city as a beehive, which in turn resembles a computer. The city is made up of "hexagonal cells (which) store information that feeds the system. A pattern as perfect as a circuit board, the chips themselves like silicon bees relaying information" (132). Harry, of course, is "the queen bee who generates the world of the hive, the motherboard that holds all the other boards that make up the computer box" (132). Harry's construction of the city is based on a system of order and control where "deviation is not tolerated" (132). Harry's city, then, is a place in which crime plays a major and necessary role. Crime becomes a part of a controlled system of social order.

Day opposes this view of the city with Claudia's view of Sydney as flawed. For Claudia, Sydney:

had been a sickly child, poxy and plague-ridden. But she'd grown strong, like a mushroom on a dung-heap... A beautiful crimson fungus had sprung out of the ground like a spider flower. But in its centre was a dark foetid substance that smelled exactly like human excrement. (47)

The "dark foetid substance" is Harry Lavender, the ultimate symbol of patriarchal corruption and decay. The problem with Claudia's view of the city and its relationship to Harry is that once Harry has died, the corruption continues. According to Mike Woolf, the detective "achieves, at best, a temporary illusion of control beneath which chaos prevails" (1988, 132). The circular structure of Day's text implies a continuation of the existing chaotic social system.
that cannot be threatened by the death of individuals. Corruption is inscribed within institutions and language which re-writes itself continuously.

Harry and Claudia agree on one aspect of the city, the significance of facades. Claudia introduces the notion of Sydney as comprised of a series of facades; on her way to a funeral, she notices an "elegant night spot that used to be a funeral parlour... Memories are short in this city and facades change all the time" (2). Harry also notices facades, yet he uses them as a guide to the history of the city:

Just above the glass facades are older facades... behind the blatant signs are secret hidden things. Beneath the concrete and glass there is a stream... paid for in rum... A layer of bitumen and stone to keep the memory of convicts and rum at bay. But these things have a way of seeping through the interstices of the city, the chinks in the armour through which I too seep. (84)

It is implied that "these things" which seep through the "interslices", or gaps in the edifice of the city, are the basis of an objective, historical reality. In drawing a parallel between himself (when he and his narrative sneak through "the chinks in the armour") and this reality, Harry positions himself as sole interpreter of the "real". Harry is a symbol of patriarchal power and the city acts as a metaphor for the surface nature of contemporary society. Following this connection, patriarchy can be seen to position itself as the underlying "truth" of society.

Day subverts this self-privileged position, however, by giving Claudia access to the same reality. Claudia refers to "Macarthur, enshrined, along with his sheep, on the two dollar note... who bought up an American ship's entire cargo of rum, then used it as currency... this is not what the history books like to tell us about Macarthur" (70). Claudia is raised to the same privileged position as Harry, as interpreter of the "truth". Reality is not the sole preserve of patriarchy but becomes accessible to both women and men with the intellect to discover and interpret it. And the woman, in this case, does not merely reproduce patriarchal stereotypes, a representation which may reinforce patriarchy's position as "truth". Rather, Claudia signifies socially empowered femininity.

As Marele Day herself points out, one of the fundamental issues involved in writing feminist crime fiction is exactly how to make the detective distinctively female: "she was to be a woman in her own right who could operate in the male structures while maintaining her female identity" (1989, 49). Anne Cranny-Francis supports this statement when she says the female detective "should compromise neither her femininity nor the conventions of the genre... [she] should
bring female characteristics to the role which transform it" (1990, 166). This raises the problematic issue of exactly what Cranny-Francis defines as "female characteristics". Her apparent assumption is that there exists a paradigm of womanhood which applies to all women. The phrase is falsely unifying and prescriptive.

However, Day does subvert such patriarchally-defined "female characteristics" as women as "naturally" temperamental, and the maternal. For example, the novel inverts the view of women as "subject to moods and emotions" through Claudia's deliberate actions to control and guide her emotional and spiritual reactions. She works to harness them in a harmony of mind, body and spirit, the concentration of these to a point of bright light, intense and cutting as a laser... emptying the mind of everything else except that bright pearl of light, the target, the bull's-eye you could hit blindfolded, the arrow that could go through walls and find its mark. (100)

Patriarchy privileges, as does masculine crime fiction, an unemotional, logical reasoning process that is based solely in the mind. Claudia does not separate the "mind, body and spirit" but harmonises them in the detection process. Later, Claudia reveals "I was too involved now to let go... Even if I wanted to. But I didn't want to" (108). Claudia uses and controls emotions, suggesting a contemporary femininity that doesn't (necessarily) have to repress the body and the spirit to achieve socio-political empowerment.

The second "characteristic", the maternal, has long interested feminism, particularly the three French feminists, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Cixous and Irigaray posit the maternal as specifically feminine and which allows for the exploration of the feminine "elsewhere", the "dark continent" of feminine subjectivity (Stanton, 1986, 169). Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, calls for a psychoanalytic theorisation of the maternal drive in an attempt to answer "What does this desire for motherhood correspond to?" (1986, 206). Kristeva appears to believe "the slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself" of the maternal is for the present moment impossible "without annihilating one's affective, intellectual and professional personality". For Kristeva, the ability of the woman to balance her maternal and professional aspects is "for this moment, utopian" (1986, 206). Marele Day seems to agree with Kristeva by creating a mother, in the character of Claudia, who cannot reconcile the professional and maternal aspects of her personality, and so relinquishes the child-rearing process to her ex-husband.

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9 World Book Dictionary, 1976 edition. All subsequent definitions used in this dissertation are taken from this dictionary.
Claudia's mothering role is generally absent from the text. Brunda Walker argues this absence "is the equivalent of repression" (1989, 72). However, Claudia does subvert patriarchal constructions of the maternal, particularly with reference to the supposed "sacredness" of the mothering role. The devotion of mothers to their children is based around an idea of sacrifice; the mother is supposed to sacrifice her subjectivity and pleasure for the sake of the child's individuation. Claudia demonstrates a different type of devotion and sacrifice. She gives up her children in order to offer them a more stable environment with their father. Claudia admits she "wouldn't be surprised if there were a few hard edges, scar tissue, especially with the kids, that was hard, leaving the kids" (28), but goes on to reveal "Gary's a good parent. They have a great life in the country" (28).

According to Elizabeth Gross, the mother "is a screen onto which the child's demands are projected and from which images are introjected. 'She' does not exist as such" (1990, 96). If this is so, then Claudia can only "exist", or achieve subject status, when she leaves behind her role as mother. Luce Irigaray claims "a woman's (re)discovery of herself can only signify the possibility of not sacrificing any of her pleasures to another" (1980, 104). Claudia does not sacrifice her children to her own pleasure, but neither does she sacrifice her pleasure to her children. This is only possible, though, after an inversion of the individuation process, when Claudia separates herself from her children.

One of the pleasures Claudia does not sacrifice is sexual pleasure. In an article written for The Independent Monthly, Susan Geason, herself a crime writer, attacked the tendency of American and British feminist crime writers to construct female characters who are politically "perfect", who don't have casual sex, who don't drink or smoke, who are always in control. Geason goes on to state Australian feminist writers, however, "are less politically correct and more morally and ethically flexible... Australian feminists reserved the right to drink in pubs and dance on tables as well as march for abortion-on-demand" (1993, 35). In this novel at least, Claudia doesn't go as far as dancing on tables but she does indulge in casual sex (the opening paragraph of the novel has her waking after a drunken night with a blond man whose name she doesn't remember).

Day revises the masculine detective figure, to whom promiscuity is a "natural" way of life, by creating a character who, while exhibiting a healthy sexuality, rejects the exploitive sex of a Sam Spade or Mike Hammer. During her investigations, Claudia meets Steve Angell (a metaphoric saviour) whose eyes are "like the pools you find beneath waterfalls" (25). Claudia
admits "it was all [she] could do to stop [her]self taking off [her] clothes and diving in" (25). Her initial reaction to Steve is intensely sexual, but she goes on to recognise she has "dived in before and found the waters murky and cold" (49). As much as Claudia may enjoy casual sex, she hesitates at a purely sexual involvement.

In Claudia’s characterisation, Marele Day creates a representation of a potentially progressive female sexuality. Day then undermines this potential when, as his surname implies, Steve Angell "saves" Claudia from the sins of casual, meaningless sex. Claudia acknowledges

Next time I got involved it would be with someone who'd also gone through the dark night and was awake enough to see the dawn. Someone like Steve Angell. (49)

This is one area where the political possibilities of The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender are not realised. It is only after Claudia has met Steve Angell, and he has offered her the redemption of a bourgeois, heterosexual relationship, that she rejects casual sex. Marele Day approaches the patriarchal stereotypes of women as location of sin, and men as redeemer or saviour. This is only one possible reading, though. As Day herself argues, Claudia’s "job, and her independent lifestyle still take first priority" (1989, 51).

Overall, however, I would argue that the text creates a positive representation of the contemporary white, middle-class woman in Australian society. Marele Day’s significant structural revisions of the masculine hard-boiled genre help establish new generic positions for feminist writers of crime fiction. The double narrative, the circular structure, the appropriation and inversion of patriarchal stereotypes and Claudia’s construction as socially empowered woman open up the traditionally limited space of crime fiction. A "new genre"? Not necessarily. The structural revisions Marele Day has chosen to make do not create rigid representational limits for a feminist genre. Rather, they signal new possibilities for further exploration and experimentation. In Still Murder, Finola Moorhead does just that. The text is a radical experimentation with generic forms in which Moorhead explores a philosophical feminism that aims to transform feminine subjectivity.
THERE IS NO REASON TO WRITE BUT TO BE REVOLUTIONARY.
(Moorhead, 1980, 3)

"Lesbians in the house was the beginning of the end, I suppose. The way I had been was unquestionably right, balanced, classic, a man and a woman, and my man was handsome, a brave of the real world, who took the heat off me when I needed him to... The Roos of this world inhabit the margins, ratbags on the fringe, no real threat to anybody."
(Moorhead, 1991, 159)

Still Murder exemplifies Tzvetan Todorov's claim that to "improve upon" detective fiction is to write 'literature', not detective fiction (1977, 43). Finola Moorhead uses the broad generic structure of crime fiction to create a radical work of feminist literature. In an interview in Australian Left Review, Moorhead spoke of her second novel, Remember The Tarantella, as an attempt "to marry the avant-garde literary scene I was in with the feminist scene that I was in" (1988, 38). The same could be said of her next work, Still Murder. As Moorhead herself states in the frontpiece, she is "actively and theoretically involved in the development of women's liberation and feminist analysis". In this text, Moorhead "marries" the French "feminist analysis" of Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva to produce a "revolutionary" generic form. The two main characters, Margot Gorman (the investigator), and Patricia Phillips (the investigated), initially represent two different aspects of the feminist argument. Margot symbolises a social feminism, reminiscent of Claudia Valentine, in her construction as successful policewoman. Patricia, on the other hand, represents a philosophical feminism which theorises the marginal position of women.

Possibly the most complex and the most problematic area in the text is the question of feminine subjectivity, and more specifically, how that subjectivity relates to, or is defined by, relationships with other women. Pat acts as a mother figure to Margot, offering Margot a positive model of "identity", based on an identification of similarities between women, rather than on the woman as "opposite of man". Luce Irigaray claims women "do not experience the same interiority [men] do" (1980, 103). This specifically feminine interiority can then lead

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Christine Holmwood states "Irigaray insists that women need an identity of their own, not an identification with man" (1991, 205).
to a female-centred identification. Feminine identity is central to the development of Margot’s character.

At the beginning, Margot is presented as defining herself in relation to the men in her life. As a policewoman, a profession which promises vocational strength and control (Munt, 1988, 95), Margot believes she must “prove” she is “one of (the boys”. She is “figuring, planning, to be the best member of a team” (41) her supervisor had ever seen. Yet, in what is revealed to be an illusion of “equal opportunity”, Margot and other female officers are still relegated traditionally feminine roles. When going undercover, the female members of a team must “watch the mad lady” (43) or “walk the streets” (43). While involved in a stakeout operation in which the criminals “would not have had a qualm about despatching this particular bronzed Aussie” (54)12, the police force requires Margot to wear “high heels and tight skirt [which] would have cramped [her] style of self-defense” (54). Margot’s ambition to be “the first woman Commissioner of Police in the state of New South Wales” (42) is frustrated by a continual relegation to what she sees as “the dead-end wasteland of womenstuff” (47).

It is this “womenstuff” Margot tries to resist when she comes into contact with Pat, the mad woman Margot must protect. Margot initially sees Pat as standing with the “droopy spinelessness that loonies get after a while” (45)13. For Margot, Pat lacks “backbone”, or the uncomplaining stoicism which is required of men and women when faced with adversity. Similarly, Margot wonders whether Pat thinks “being institutionalised would protect her from the rude realities of the everyday world” (45). Margot’s initially resists Pat, characterising her as “weak” and incapable. At the same time, she begins to record Pat’s speech in her diary. At one stage, in a passage that could come straight out of a text by Cixous or Irigaray, Pat refers to the body of a woman as

“...a space... or a place for man. It is a background, a location, a context against which he can pit his enormous, fragile ego, so that he can take on an autonomous identity.”

(60)

The act of recording Pat’s speech hints at a subconscious interest in the mind of another woman and is a harbinger of Margot’s eventual change in attitude towards the “madwoman”. Margot’s conscious response, though, is to resist the challenge implicit in Pat’s words by revealing “her stuff was getting too uncomfortable” (61).

12 Here, Moorhead has Margot choosing to define herself in traditionally masculine terms, the “bronzed Aussie” image usually referring to a paradigmatic vision of Australian masculinity.
13 Ironically, Pat symbolizes herself in terms of Frida Kahlo’s images of multiple puncture wounds and back braces. Margot’s “spinelessness” contrasts Pat’s diary when she states “the flame inside [her] got as solid as a red marble column” (168).
The word "stuff" marks Margot's resistance to Pat's radical feminism. As a noun, "stuff" is "material, substance or things of uncertain kind or not needing to be particularised or of inferior quality". According to Margot, Pat's feminist concerns are not important enough to warrant specific definition and are "inferior" to Margot's view of her basic equality with men. A slang use of the verb can mean the act of copulation with a woman, or to break, ruin or mess something up. The two slang terms suggest Margot's discomfort with Pat and what she reveals about the patriarchal, phallocentric system in which Margot operates. Alternatively, Pat's feminism could be said to "stuff up" Margot's male identification. Pat herself sums up Margot's response when she shouts "only a mad woman goes harping around shouting what all women think, isn't that so, nurse?" (64). Margot is "uncomfortable" with Pat's "stuff" because Pat explicitly "speaks" what Margot, possibly unconsciously, only "thinks".

Margot comes to tolerate and eventually respect Pat. At the beginning of Margot's diary her sceptical reactions to feminist thought are implicit, but she begins to explicitly consider the patriarchal system. This movement is paralleled in Margot's dawning respect for Pat as a person rather than simply a "madwoman". Speaking with Pat, Margot gradually approaches an understanding of Pat that is based around their shared sexuality:

I can't the problem of men and civilisation. I gave up long ago. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, I say. But I ask her "Why does it all matter so much?"... "I don't understand, that's all." At that moment I thought she was the sanest person I had met. (74)

Margot and Pat react differently to patriarchy, but Margot appears to recognise they share a similar experience, in that neither woman understands it. It is only after this admission that Margot can go on to reveal "something about her had hooked into my brain" (76). This point signals the beginning of the change in Margot's subjectivity, from male-defined to female-defined identification, as when she finally states "I used to feel more comfortable in the company of men. Now, I think I was naive" (240).

Margot allies herself with the police and by association patriarchy as social practice. Margot states "I reckon I exist on an equal basis with men" (118). Her new emotional alliance with Pat and other women helps Margot recognise that this isn't necessarily so. After being mugged by
a group of women, possibly members of a radical feminist group, Margot explains why she protects them from the officially sanctioned retribution of her male colleagues:

I really did not want a wholesale purge of women's libbers places all over Sydney by trigger-happy cops. A lot of the libbers do a really good job... I've seen them succeed where social workers and cops, and even the Salvos haven't, with some really hard-bitten cases. (213)

This is paralleled by Swan's protection of Pat. Violence perpetrated by women is vindicated by the text as it always has a reason and remains unpunished. This is also the moment when Margot allies herself with women. It is an admission that women can be victims of men and may need to be protected from male aggression and violence. Margot is suddenly aware that the State (in the form of social workers and cops) and the Church (the Salvation Army) cannot help women to overcome their status as victims. In the novel, help can only come from a community of women.

Margot's psychological transformation is verbally expressed when she separates herself from the police "brotherhood". She becomes consciously aware that she has been excluded from the power structures of the police force when she states "I would have to tell him I'm not one of the boys" (245). Margot then aligns herself in opposition to the dominant patriarchal system. She first recognises, and then rejects, the power-games within implicitly corrupt policing institutions:

if all this has something to do with the corruption in either or both the New South Wales Police Force or the National Crime Authority, both boys' clubs which think they are above the law, then I reckon I might start up in private practice: Margot Gorman, Gumshoe. (248)

Margot's psychological transformation finds social expression in her rejection of the police. In the competition for power between "the Cleanskins and the Black Knights" (41), factions in the police force, Margot is an object, "'only a pawn in the game'" (119). Margot rejects objectification and establishes her subject status by threatening to go private, thereby putting herself in direct competition with the police force.

In the competition for power, it could be argued that Margot is finally overcome by the "boys" when she is drugged by her superior Swan (who acts as a wielder of patriarchal power) as she approaches the solution to the crime. In the masculine form of crime fiction and, as Sally Munt argues, in lesbian/feminist crime fiction, the solution signals the formation of identity (1988, 100, my italics). Using Munt's analysis, Margot would not achieve a sense of identity as she is denied access to the solution. However, I would argue Finola Moorhead inverts Munt's argument. In Still Murder it is the detection process which leads to identity: "the mystery is
compelling- but the very compulsion is turned, redirected to feminist... concerns" (Daniel, 1991, 7), one of which is feminine subjectivity. It would seem, then, the formation of Margot's identity parallels the detection process as she investigates her "self". Moorhead leaves it to Pat to explicitly state what is implicit in much of Margot's narrative:

the weapons must be carefully handled
for some targets are in the self...
I cannot know myself until I destroy a part of me
I am...
Both
investigator and investigated...

Margot is the subject and object of an ongoing investigation that doesn't lead to a (re)solution, but rather to a sense of identity-in-process. Julia Kristeva's "subject in process" is characterised by a continuous dispersal and reassembly of diverse elements. Margot, then, is the subject in process whose previously unified subjectivity is initially dispersed by Pat, and then re-assembled to incorporate the diverse elements Margot discovers in herself during the detection process, as with her protection of the "women libbers".

According to Swan, however, Margot is as a woman who has strayed off the path of conventional righteousness by "protecting someone. It'd be girls" (293) and may even be attracted to lesbianism. He asks "'You're not that way inclined are you, Margot?'" upon which Margot "seethed", realising the political agenda of the remark: "the way men get you off the point by saying something personal" (69). Swan questions Margot's sexuality to unsettle her. It could also be read as a representation of patriarchal attempts to discourage the communitas of women. Women united in friendship presents patriarchy with a political and ideological threat it cannot ignore. If heterosexual patriarchy re-names non-sexual female friendship "lesbian", it can define that friendship as perverse, evil, impure. Patriarchy strives to separate women, to disconnect them from each other and themselves. Helene Cixous accuses men of committing "the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led [women] to hate women" (1980a, 248). Swan demonstrates such a campaign to prevent women coming together.

Swan gives Margot a few days rest with her family in the hope that "keeping her service record excellent and [giving her] a new and exciting job may make her forget" (293) her female-centred identification. Margot, however, is aware of the intentions behind these actions. Margot is taken off by her sister "to be doctored by her husband" (253; my italics); "doctored"

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14 See for example Makiko Honow-Pinkney's discussion in Abjection, Melancholia and Lure, 1990, 168.
implies "cured". Margot recognises that her increasing resistance to patriarchy is seen as an illness that must be cured before she can once again take her "proper" place in society.

Similarly, Margot states "It was all organised by [her] family" (253; my italics). The use of the word "organised", which can mean "to give orderly structure to, systematise, bring into working order", demonstrates the function of the patriarchal family. Margot's family must work towards bringing her into "working order", they must re-insert her into the orderly structure of patriarchy. The family must re-train Margot in the art of male-identification. Margot's intentional use of "organised" signifies her awareness of the political agenda motivating the collusion between State and Family. Margot's feminine identity entails a resistance to and subversion of male-identified subjectivity.

Although the figure of the lesbian is important for feminist theory, particularly in terms of re-defining feminine subjectivity, Pat and Margot's relationship has less to do with lesbianism than with friendship. Adrienne Rich broadens the definition of lesbianism "to include a range... of woman-identified experience... the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of political and practical support" (as quoted by Zimmerman, 1985, 184). As much as this definition of lesbianism may offer a potential for political resistance, it does not distinguish between the sexual and non-sexual friendships of women. Elizabeth Abel maintains that:

through the intimacy which is knowledge, friendship becomes a vehicle
of self-definition for women clarifying identity through relation to an
other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self.
(as quoted by Gardiner, 1985, 136)

The idea of a feminine "essential" is a problematic one in itself, yet Abel's use of it does imply an identity that is based on a recognition of shared experience.

Pat and Margot's relationship depends upon, as Elizabeth Abel suggests, their reflection of each other as women. This is inscribed structurally in the multiple narratives. In The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, Harry's and Claudia's narratives tend to reduce into a binary opposition, positing masculine against feminine, detective against criminal, good against bad. The traditional hierarchy of the binary opposition, male over female, is inverted, but still posits only two ideological positions. The masculine and the feminine are caught up in a continual reflection of each other, using their opposites to define themselves. Claudia uses Harry to unify her purpose (and subjectivity): "I would get Harry Lavender. If it was the last thing I did" (108). And it may well be, as Helene Cixous argues the hierarchised binary opposition necessarily entails a
battle to the (symbolic) "death", ultimate (symbolic) power going to the (male) victor (1980b, 91).

Finola Moorhead, however, resists binary oppositions, replacing the hierarchised male/female opposition with the non-hierarchised female/female relationship. Pat's narrative is situated in the structural centre of the novel, as her character becomes a motivating force of the other narratives, giving them a symbolic life as they revolve around her character. This is juxtaposed against the centre of Pat's narrative, which is the description of a hypothetical killing technique: "'Come in low, under his line of sight... Take his head with your left hand... twist his face away from your knife, then go in at the base of the skull'" (152). The text radiates from this description of the murder as each narrative reflects forwards or backwards to this central point. The binary opposition of life/death is joined together, both structurally and thematically, in Pat.

The figure of Pat is by far the most complex in Still Murder. Her characterisation raises questions concerning the nature of psychosis, bisexuality, and calls for a symbolic order based around the female body. The multiple narratives of the text construct her character in different ways. In Margot's diary and notebooks, she is woman-as-victim, driven to madness by the hate of her husband. To Peter Larsen, the Vietnam veteran, she is Felicity, a goddess who dispenses sex, love and comfort. To Cath, the lesbian lover, Pat is "'the most beautiful woman I had ever seen... you were a goddess'" (162).

This use of a lower case "i" is intentional. Ann Rosalind Jones asserts "Lacanian theory reserves the 'I' position for men. Women, because they lack the phalus... occupy a negative position in language" (1985, 83). The lesbian, if possible, occupies an even lower position in language and in society. Cath is aware of how patriarchy positions her:

as i am not even symbolically his mother, my femaleness does not make me maternal, nor nominally heterosexual so that his world may see me as one of them. i am not his virgin sister, as i am a sexually potent being with no allegiance to any of his systems. i am the enemy. (167)

Cath's use of the "i" position signals her recognition of the phallocentric language system against which she locates herself. Cath is one of "the rabags on the fringe" who occupies the margins of patriarchal society. There is an alternative reading; Cath's letters to Pat are all written after her rape by Pat's husband, Steve. This may suggest Cath's image of herself as diminished subject. Even so, Cath adopts this position willingly; the last words in her "Monologue of a Victim" are "i'm free" (273). The use of the diminished "i" is Cath's strategic
inversion and subversion of the phallic "I". This ideological position offers Cahl a "freedom" of self-expression phallocentric language would deny her.

Pat's "freedom" from patriarchal structures is symbolised in her "psychosis". One definition of psychosis is "a disease... which produces a deep and far-reaching disruption of normal behaviour and social functioning". Pat's psychosis, though, is less a disease than a liberated and liberating space. She creates alternate personalities who are vehicles for her psychological empowerment. The most important personality is Leni di Torres, "the bruja of the waves... Spanish for witch" (126). Irigaray argues woman "is always fluid" (1991, 126). Cixous also metaphorises women as oceanic: "we are ourselves sea, sand, coral, sea-weed, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves... Heterogeneous" (1980, 260). Leni di Torres crosses oceans to destroy Pat's homogeneous, or unified, subjectivity within the patriarchal social order.

Leni also acts as Pat's appropriation and subversion of the phallocentric perception of "women being women, just as men imagine them, in covens, in caves, in trios" (138). Pat's use of a witch figure echoes Julia Kristeva's argument that "thus female specificity defines itself in patrilinear society: woman is a specialist in the unconscious, a witch, a bacchanalian" (1986, 154). By extension, Leni is a metaphor for the feminine unconscious, a space which allows for the overturning of meaning systems.

One of the problems with the metaphoric function of Pat's alternate personalities is that of "naming". The appropriation of language and meaning is an important project for feminism, and yet it may seem no appropriation can completely escape traces of a patriarchal meaning system. Donna Stanton argues there is a danger that by metaphorising the feminine unconscious, as women we "become entrapped in the structures of the already named; or else we do not name and remain trapped in passivity, powerlessness and a perpetuation of the same" (1986, 164). If one of the functions of metaphor is to represent what is unrepresentable, then Leni di Torres is a potentially empowering representation of the feminine unconscious. Naming Leni a witch, though, draws upon traditional images of witchery as evil, against God, the preserve of women and outcasts. Elaine Showalter explains that within European folklore, the witch figure "visited men by night and rode them to exhaustion" (1977, 119). However, Helene Cixous argues "the point is not to take possession [of language] in order to internalise or manipulate, but to dash through and 'fly'" (1980a, 257), transforming phallocentric language in the process, as it would

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10 Donna Stanton explains that for Irigaray and Cixous "she terrifying storminess of the sea... eludes mastery, even destroys identity" (1986, 169).
appear Pat does. She appropriates the traditionally "evil" associations of the witch and inverts them to construct a witch who is "the incarnation of Frida's anger" (143), an anger Pat sees as directed towards men.

The trope of madness, although once again a problematic area, is an important metaphoric vehicle in Still Murder. Pat's psychosis allows an exploration of the feminine unconscious and constructs an image of feminine subjectivity as multiple, as opposed to the unified masculine subject. Pat's alternate personalities, the traveller after death, the boy she "imagined should have been her own" (278), and Leni di Torres, can be viewed as representations of Irigaray and Cixous's theories of the plurality of the feminine. Cixous believes the woman "doesn't defend herself against these unknown women she's surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability" (1980a, 260). Irigaray's argument, that the woman is neither one nor two, is always the other in herself, is linked to a feminine sexuality, "always at least double, [which] is in fact plural" (1980, 102). Pat's character, then, is a representation of the female split subject, and her psychosis a space for the play of and subversion of phallocentric meaning systems.

Within the psychological space which psychosis offers Pat, her speech becomes an example of *écriture féminine*, the feminine writing Cixous and Irigaray argue is essential to liberating women from phallocentric structures. Pat's diary exhibits the stylistic features Ann Rosalind Jones lists as common to *écriture féminine*: "double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear structures, open endings" (1985, 88). Pat's narrative continually switches from one subject to another, seemingly without transitions or links. In the first page of her diary she jumps from her psychiatrist's "cuckoo-clock on the mantelpiece" (125) to "I used to hang my stories around the house" (125); back to the notion of time, "in the knock of the tock in the nick of the tick" (125) and then to "the deafening drum of the rain won't stop" (125). Pat returns to these concerns sporadically throughout her narrative, cumulating layers of meaning, as opposed to constructing a linear movement through language.
Pat adopts different speaking positions, particularly that of her teenage lover, Peter Larsen, the veteran whose repressed guilt over his experiences in Vietnam has sent him mad. In one passage, Pat refers to him in the third-person but constructs herself as an omnipotent, detached narrator who can enter his mind:

He is not tame anymore... His brutality is contained in hisaloneness in the wilderness, invented and perpetuated by himself. He defines existence through his ability to survive, as if he were the first man, a cave man... Each time he makes love he rapes again the ten-year-old he raped there... How he came in that tiny hole, he can never imagine but he did. (133-134)

In an extended passage, Pat’s speaking position reveals the omnipotent, third-person narrator as a construction. Read by itself, it would seem the “narrator” is appropriately ambivalent, detached and objective. Read in the context of the diary, the reader recognises the ironic distaste in Pat’s narration, particularly as her first words in the text suggest her emotional response to rape:

"Isn’t that a terrible curse? ‘Fuck you. Fuck you dry!’... Now I won’t be able to stop thinking about it."

"What?" I spoke like a clumsy nursing-aide.

"Rape." (46)

Pat exposes the ideological underpinnings of the supposedly ambivalent, objective third person narratorial voice.

The multiple voices of écriture féminine are echoed in Pat’s multiple subjectivity which is, in turn, related to her construction as the “perfect” woman by the men in her life. She is "Felicity and Trish, two different women to two different men: who am I?” (136). For Peter Larsen, Patricia is Felicity. In a confessional letter to her, Larsen admits:

With your name being Felicity I could make you anything I liked, and I ended up putting you on a pedestal... I wanted to drop down on my knees in front of you and beg you to marry me... A man goes off to war, he fights like a demon because he has a woman, and she’s safe, he comes home and he climbs into her womb and there he weeps. (19)

"Felicity" is the nurturing mother goddess for whom war is committed, who promises forgiveness and comfort to those men who seek relief from the repressed guilt of patriarchy. According to Steve, "Trish needs a protector in this world of wolves... She is my china doll" (35). "Trish" is the delicate girl-child, incapable of independent, rational thought; she is the figure who helps define the male as symbolic Father.
Pat's psychosis develops out of her relationship to these two men, but is a reaction against the roles the patriarchal male requires her to play. Pat appropriates and controls these multiple roles and symbolises them in her alternate personalities, in the process overturning images of the passivity of the psychotic woman. The psychiatrist, Anne, explains Pat's psychosis as "an unbearable friction between her feminine and her masculine self" (280). Pat, however, gives an explanation with far more political overtones:

I snapped when I saw the look of hatred on Steve's face. Hatred of me... he hated me and looked at me as if I were something to fear, a stampede of elephants coming to smash his house, garden, cranium and balls... Well, seeing he was giving me this power, I wasn't going to let it go. I was not an individual but a flood of the loathed and reviled. (144)

The reader, encouraged to identify with the character who has "hooked into [Margot's] brain" (76), is guided towards a positive re-conception of psychosis as liberating, empowering and active. For Pat, psychosis is a release from the roles she has played for years, roles which have "paralysed me, trapped, curtailed the real me inside myself" (142).

Pat's diary, literally titled "A Madwoman's Diary", is explained in the contents page as her attempt "to sort out the meaning of her life". This exploration of the feminine self revolves around the idea of a specifically female sexuality, particularly as it relates to bisexuality. Luce Irigaray relates the multiplicity of feminine sexuality and, by extension, feminine subjectivity, to the "touching of at least two [lips] which keeps woman in contact with herself" (1980, 101); she goes on to state "woman has sex organs just about everywhere" (1980, 103). In her diary, Patricia describes a fabric party she throws for her lesbian friends, Cath and Roo, through the voice of Peter Larsen, who watches the party from the garden:

Felicity seems to be in a state... She makes herself naked and then slings lame around her hips and puts as much jewellery around her neck as she can find. She takes from the hall-stand a big man's gabardine coat and goes out, leaving the door open... She glides barefoot, bejewelled, along the street at dusk. (137)

Patricia knows she "was performing for invisible eyes" (138), suggesting an awareness of the difference between male and female sexuality. Toril Moi explains Irigaray's reading of Freud, where his theory of sexual difference is "based on the visibility of difference: it is the eye that decides what is clearly true and what isn't. Thus the basic fact of sexual difference for Freud is that the male has an obvious sex organ, the penis, and the female has not" (1985, 132). Irigaray inverts the masculine sexual gaze to posit a female sexuality that is based "more in touch than in sight" (1980, 101). For Irigaray, feminine sexuality, motivated by the constant
touching of two lips, centres around tactile sensations. Pat’s descriptions of the jewellery, the lame, the coat, all suggest an intensely textured sexual experience and symbolise a feminine sexuality that determines presence rather than absence, as phallicentrism would have women.

Although Patricia is described as (hetero)sexually active, it is when referring to her relationships with other women, Cath in particular, that her (bi)sexuality is explored in depth. Pat makes only one direct reference to marital sex which is a form of rape, feeling herself “being taken while semi-conscious” (175). Patricia’s sexual relationship with her husband is one where she must play the whore and the mother as Steve confesses to her “all manner of weird sexual behaviour and fantasies” after which Pat “had forgiven him” (175). Opposed to this construction of heterosexual sex is a far more positive image of the lesbian relationship. Cath and Patricia’s relationship is described in terms of the psychological and emotional equity they feel for one another. Language plays an implicitly sexual role in their relationship; they share “an exciting conversation” in which the “ideas were erotic” (170). Pat leads Cath “out the back door, down the cobbled lane to the gardens” where they “made love on the dead leaves and twigs near a Moreton Bay fig” (170). This experience of making love can be contrasted to Margot’s experience of heterosexual sex, which she finds “for the most part a voluntarily endured assault” (192). In a parody of the outdoor love-making of Cath and Roo, Margot says she “humiliated” herself on her “back on the twigs with a young buck” (241). Patricia, however, exemplifies a feminine sexuality that encompasses the body and the mind in a literal “love-making”. Where patriarchy would have women as “this hole fringed with desire for their penis” (Cixous, 1980, 260), feminism privileges a sexuality that includes, rather than excludes, the whole body.

The formation of identity is related to the process of acquiring language, the signifying process. Yet if language constantly defers meaning by endlessly referring to other signifiers, then identity must be a constant deferral process as well. The lack of resolution in the stories of Pat and Margot suggests an ongoing identity process. Margot is dispatched to her family; Pat “escapes” from Rozelle. It is revealed in an interview with a teenage boy, who is the physical representation of one of Pat’s alternate personalities, that he helped Pat “get on a train to Melbourne where her sister had a place” (284). In contrast to Margot, who is forced to return to her family, Pat requests a return. Her sister welcomes her, if not exactly with open arms, at least willingly: “you can stay here any time, as long as you like... We’re family. We care” (186). The implied oppressiveness of Margot’s patriarchal family is transformed into the family as comforting. However, even Pat’s return is ambiguous as she never actually arrives, only
leaves. The ambiguities of these "endings" imply an ongoing negotiation with their respective identities.

This is one of the areas in which Finola Moorhead has inverted accepted and expected outcomes of crime fiction. As Sally Munt argues, in reading Still Murder it is "a safe strategy to accept ambiguity and confusion" (1988, 108). The murdered, Steve, is not the victim but the villain who gets his punishment not at the conclusion of the novel but prior to the beginning of the story. The victim, Patricia, is the murderer who is allowed to go free. Margot, as the detective, is the victim of a cover-up, but investigates herself. The police detective, Swan, supposedly committed to punishing crime, lets the murderer go free. The warrior, Peter Larsen, supposed to repress his guilt to remain sane, has an intimate relationship with psychosis. Nothing is what it seems.

The title itself reflects a tension between the masculine and feminist forms of crime fiction. In the masculine form of the genre, the title may be a statement, as in "killing is still murder". In this interpretation, however, "still" can signify motionless or silent. In this reading, the murder becomes a still moment in time, as the text never moves away from the moment Pat kills Steve, but rather circles around it; or it is silent, as the action of the murder is never present in the text, but only referred to by other characters. Alternatively, in the blurb on the book cover, it is phrased as a question: "in love and war there is killing, but is it still murder?". Does Pat murder Steve? When a woman who states "if there were a million, pinpricks could kill you" (143), replies with "a million pinpricks can make you kill" (143), is it "murder" to kill the one responsible? The text doesn't answer the question specifically, but it does suggest that the patriarchal, phallocentric system of contemporary society must re-define itself, and its morality, to acknowledge the social condition of women through a theoretical transformation of femininity.
CONCLUSION:
Implications & Arguments

It remains arguable as to whether feminist crime fiction is "the great new feminist genre". Jennifer Rowe's *The Makeover Murders* demonstrates all contemporary crime fiction written by women is not necessarily "feminist", in any sense of the term. Rowe's strict attention to traditional generic structures perpetuates phallocentric notions of women as victims, as passive and as "lack" or "absence". In *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender*, Marele Day moves away from and beyond the thematic and structural limits of hard-boiled crime fiction. Day helps establish new generic possibilities for feminist crime fiction by constructing a double narrative and a circular structure. *Still Murder*, by Finola Moorhead, is a work of feminist literature that uses some generic features of crime fiction, as opposed to a work of crime fiction that uses some features of feminist thought. Moorhead radically re-works generic structures, developing a multiple narrative structure that explores a range of ideological positions. Thus, *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* seems to bridge the gap between the conventional "male" writing of Jennifer Rowe, and what Moorhead herself sees as an "experiment with form" (Walker, 1992, 38).

*Still Murder* and *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* reflect different feminisms. Day privileges a feminism that focusses on socio-political empowerment, or as Alison Littler puts it, a feminism that is used "in a liberal-humanist-independent-career-woman-in-control-of-her-own-life sense" (1991, 133). Moorhead's use of feminism "refers to a woman deconstructing phallocentric ideologies wherever they are naturalised" (Littler, 1991, 133), primarily through an exploration of feminine subjectivity. Despite this difference, both feminisms construct progressive, positive images of contemporary women.

Julia Kristeva appears to link the concrete and abstract feminist concerns of *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* and *Still Murder* when she addresses this problem in her outline of the project for women. Kristeva argues that a "masculine, paternal identification... is necessary in order to have a voice in the chapter of politics and history". Kristeva acknowledges a concrete feminism which strives to "gain entry to social practice". In what appears to be a progressive and positive connection, Kristeva also acknowledges an abstract feminism. She argues women should achieve change by "recognising the unspoken in all discourse", or by aligning ourselves with "that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers"
(1986, 156). I would argue, as it appears Kristeva does here, that the concrete and abstract feminisms should operate concurrently if any change is to occur.

However, I also agree with Gayatri Spivak when she attacks Kristeva for perpetuating the figure of the universal Woman. Spivak states "a deliberate application of the doctrines of French High 'Feminism' to a different situation of political specificity might misfire" (1987, 141). The works of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva seem to offer a political revision of the notion of femininity only to those women trained to interpret their writing. The question, of course, is what exactly do theories of feminine subjectivity offer women disadvantaged through race and class? Alternatively, what do these theories offer women occupying a privileged race/class position, such as those portrayed by Marele Day and Finola Moorhead?

In The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender, the absence of a discussion of feminine subjectivity may be due to Claudia's construction as socially-empowered woman. Claudia doesn't necessarily change the patriarchal system, but she does successfully negotiate, even challenge it. In contrast, Finola Moorhead constructs characters to whom a female-centred identification creates an alternative subjective position but which disempowers them socially. There is no middle ground in either text. Women are either socially or psychologically liberated, but not both at the same time.

While offering the feminist critic a useful structural tool to examine texts, I acknowledge that the demand of French feminism for a feminine symbolic order is a potentially problematic area, as contradictions and limitations within their theories nevertheless arise. Irigaray and Cixous set out to construct a politics of difference; that is, to subvert the Freudian notion of woman as a lesser or diminished version of man. Cixous and Irigaray argue that "difference" should be symbolically expressed in ecriture feminine, women's writing, and parler femme, womanspeak, respectively. Both systems aim to re-centre the symbolic structure of language around the female body, as opposed to the phallus. Cixous maintains woman must "write your self. Your body must be heard... Inscribe the breath of the whole woman" (1980, 250). Irigaray defines woman's speech as "woman retouch[ing] herself constantly. She just barely separates from herself some chatter... a sentence left in suspense- When she returns to it, it is only to set out again from another point of pleasure or pain" (1980, 103).

Irigaray goes on to state "when 'she' says something, it is already no longer identical to what she means" (1980, 103), as woman is already somewhere else in language. Irigaray's theory
is similar to Cixous's in relating the feminine mind back to the female body. Using these theories, it could be argued The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender is an example of woman "seizing the occasion to speak" (Cixous, 1980, 250), but which does not "speak" or "write" the female body and feminine unconscious. Still Murder, in contrast, could be seen as an example of *écriture feminine*.

One of the strengths of *écriture feminine* is that it aims to attack phallocentrism where it is located, in language. However, in constructing a uterocentric discourse that aims to express women's difference from men, both Cixous and Irigaray have been shown to fall into the trap of erasing differences between women by positing a feminine "essence". In tracing the feminine symbolic back to the womb and female bodily drives, Cixous and Irigaray may return to the figure of the universal, "essential" Woman, a figure which is supposedly relevant to all experiences of womanhood, despite class and race backgrounds.

While this mystical definition of womanhood is seductive and welcoming, offering a return to the relative security of a womb-like subjective process, it does not address any of the material conditions women still experience as part of their socio-political position. In contrast, a social feminism, specifically targeted towards the concrete, material effects of patriarchy, is more conscious of how race and class inflect gender issues. It should be stated, however, that this feminism has its limitations as well. Omitting to question the formation of feminine subjectivity may perpetuate the patriarchal construction of the unified, autonomous subject.

The respective limitations of the different feminisms are reproduced in The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender and Still Murder. Marele Day's use of language play and the double narrative potentially undermines a phallocentric system. Yet Claudia's construction as socially-empowered woman recalls the humanist tradition of the unified subject. The material, concrete condition of women's social context is initially raised as an issue within the multiple narratives of Still Murder. Moorhead, however, shifts the focus of the text to French feminist theory, and in doing so, reproduces images of women as neurotic, hysterical and incapable of operating within the socio-political sphere.

These limitations noted, I nevertheless believe both texts do create positive images of women. Placed within the historical context of both crime fiction and the broader area of writing by women, Marele Day and Finola Moorhead can be seen as widening the traditional boundaries
of representation. The different feminist concerns that motivate the texts entail certain limitations, particularly in terms of their mutual exclusivity. It must be stressed, however, that *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender* and *Still Murder* do suggest a positive potential for further "transgressions" (in the sense of breach) of those limitations, hopefully reflecting a society where women, through a feminine subjectivity, can achieve socio-political power. It is debatable whether these texts signal the arrival of "the great new feminist genre", possibly because the statement is so non-specific. What these texts do signal is the range of different theoretical and political positions available within the crime fiction genre, positions that, in turn, involve a potential to subvert patriarchal, phallocentric modes of thought.
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