

# **Trouble With Iphigenia: Feminist Critiques of Feminist Crime Fiction and the Case Against Sara Paretsky**

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I woke up feeling like death. Ironically appropriate, given what the day held in store. White light poured in, even before I opened my eyes and a variety of sounds, all too loud. Someone was pounding on my brain like a two year old who's just discovered a hammer. In between blows I managed to prise open the eyes. Close by the bed was a bottle of Jack Daniels: empty. And an ash tray: full. Clothes were strewn all over the place and through the french doors roared the sights and sounds of Sydney. As I got out of bed I realised that I wasn't the only one in it. There was a good looking blond in there as well. I didn't recall issuing the invitation but I must have. No-one gets into my room, let alone my bed, without one.

Out in the kitchen the naked bulb bravely competed with the glare of the day. There was another ash tray of butts, two glasses and a bowl of olives and cockroaches, sardonic little reminders of the night before. After a couple of unsuccessful attempts - I managed to light the gas under the coffee and, closing the stable door after the horse had bolted, crammed a handful of vitamins down my throat.

The coffee revived me a little, a hot then cold shower even more. The blond slept on, unperturbed by my rummaging through the clothes on the floor looking for something suitable to wear. Thank God the black suit was hanging in the wardrobe neatly pressed. The black shoe where I had apparently left them the night before - one in the waste paper bin and the other on the mantelpiece. I dressed and took a long hard look at myself in the mirror. As long as I didn't start haemorrhaging from the eyes things would be alright. I grabbed the dark glasses. Just in case.

"Time to go sweetheart". I whispered into the blond's aural orifice. Not a flicker of an eyelid or a murmur. Next time I shook him. "C'mon mate, wake up. I've got to go to a funeral."<sup>1</sup>

Welcome to the world of (more or less) feminist fiction. My project in this article is to survey the case mounted against one of its most prominent practitioners by feminist critics of the genre, specifically the Australians among them, and to outline a case in her defence. Appearing pro bono and apparently without instructions (although I'll go on to counter that suggestion later) I'm also pleading in a partisan spirit. An unsuitable position for a lawyer, no doubt, but not perhaps for a feminist.

First, though, given the likely heterogeneity of the jury constituted by the readership of this article, it seems appropriate to flesh out that introduction to the genre and briefly to outline its projects.

*Why feminist crime fiction? And how?*

The answer to that first question has three parts. First, to quote Anne Cranny-Francis, the (Australian) author of a book-length study of feminist rewritings of "genre fiction" - crime fiction, sci-fi, romance, fantasy, and utopian fiction - because it "sells by the truckload".<sup>2</sup> So it gets its messages across to a wide audience, and particularly to the kinds of audience who aren't likely to frequent the places where Women's Studies and feminist critical theory are firmly in the curriculum - sites of potential consciousness raising, if you will, or renovator-special outbuildings of the Ivory Tower.

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<sup>1</sup> M Day, *The Life and Crimes of Harry Lavender*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> A Canny-Francis, *Feminist Fiction*, Polity, Cambridge, 1990, p 2.

Second, because in its "unreconstructed", "politically incorrect" or, as we used ironically to say, "ideologically unsound" form, it is said to - and I accept that by and large it does - reproduce and thus produce sexist, racist, and bourgeois individualist discourse. Because Paretsky writes in the "hard boiled" mode, I'll choose un-reconstructed "hard boiled" examples from works by Raymond Chandler, as well as from writing about Chandler, to sketch the grounds for these readings. Think of the women in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, say: the Sternwood sisters, archetypal "festering lilies"<sup>3</sup> of the genre, corrupt but resistible because they are "too damned easy [to take]",<sup>4</sup> and "Silver Wig", a twentieth-century west coast incarnation of the courtly love object, untouchable because she is someone else's wife, the ever-neatly-compartmentalised object of desire whose inscription by patriarchy (as wife) saves the untouched romantic hero from ever sullying his flesh, who is always employed in the lessons that love hurts and male sexual sublimation (a development of libertinism)<sup>5</sup> redeems.

As for evidence of racist discourse, perhaps it is enough to reproduce that characteristically Chandleresque sentence from the beginning of *Farewell My Lovely*:

It was one of the mixed blocks over on Central Avenue, one of the blocks that are not yet negro.<sup>6</sup>

"Bourgeois individualism" is one of the most criticised of the ideologies embodied in and promoted by unreconstructed crime fiction. In brief, the argument is that these texts present crime as individual and anti-social (when it doesn't spring from the corruption embodied by the daughters of Eve), not a socio-economic product; that these texts suggest it is possible for an(heroic) individual to help in isolation from (corrupt) culture, and that such isolated individuals typically restore order to the bourgeois, individualist, patriarchal, racist worlds of these texts.

Stephen Knight's analysis of Chandler's appeal in his *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*<sup>7</sup> is characteristically reflexively revealing as well as critically acute:

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<sup>3</sup> The allusion is to Shakespeare's "Sonnet 94".

<sup>4</sup> Chandler, *The Big Sleep*, Penguin, London, 1948, p 147.

<sup>5</sup> K Muire, *The Comedy of Manners*, Hutchinson University Library, London, 1970, p 119.

<sup>6</sup> R Chandler, *Farewell My Lovely*, Vintage, New York, 1988, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> S Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1980.

If Chandler's work is examined in terms of its underlying ideology, reasons emerge why it has generated praise from university graduates in English and people of similar tastes and needs. The pressure of the form and the content suggests that an isolated, intelligent person, implicitly hostile to others and basically uninterested in them, can verify his own superiority by intellectual means and personally threatening problems by thoughtful, passive inspection and so continue his lonely life - and earn a living in the process. A richly satisfying message is fabricated for the alienated person of the same education, and the natural audience has not failed to find Chandler comforting.<sup>8</sup>

By way of peroration, I might take a little testimony from Chandler, on a kind of *res ipsa loquitur* basis:

...down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective...must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything...I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin...

He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly... He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him...

If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and without becoming too dull to be worth living in.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Knight, above, n 7, p 138.

<sup>9</sup> Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1950, p 533.

The third answer to "why" feminist crime fiction is perhaps the most important: it lies in the idea that "il n'y a pas de hors-texte",<sup>10</sup> or "We aren't unique individual essences existing prior to language"<sup>11</sup>; that the stories that we tell, tell us. To quote Anne Cranny-Francis:

As part of the formation of subjectivity of women and men from a very early age sexist discourse (including its gendered component discourses [that is what it is to be a real man and a real woman in male dominated society]) determines not only what they do but, how they think - about themselves as well as others. This discourse is "naturalised" as the obvious mode of representation and self-representation of women and men. The most important work and task of feminist discourse is to challenge this naturalising action, this obviousness, this common sense.<sup>12</sup>

And now to one who writes it. One can only take a leaf from Marele Day's book, as I did in opening this paper, using parody to expose the implication of patriarchy's stories about gender roles in the production of exploitative casual sex. One can, like Lewis and Guerin, employ shared authorship as part of a critique of masculine authority.<sup>13</sup> One can, like Claire McNab, employ a woman protagonist who is both senior police officer and lesbian,<sup>14</sup> at the same time resisting patriarchy's legislation of what Adrienne Rich has described as "compulsory heterosexuality",<sup>15</sup> and challenging what Cranny-Francis describes as the "rigid demarcation of experience into the private/domestic/feminine and public/social masculine"<sup>16</sup> And one can issue more formal challenges to epistemology and structure, as well as to gender roles, as Valerie Miner does in the book which seems to be the "critic's choice" for the "best" - a term, I want to signal to you, as loaded as a luger

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<sup>10</sup> J Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans Gayatri Spivak, Johns Hopkins UP, Baltimore and London, 1967, p 158.

<sup>11</sup> D Lodge, *Nice Work*, Penguin, London, 1989, p 293.

<sup>12</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, p 2.

<sup>13</sup> Lewis and Guerin, *Unable by Reason of Death*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> In the Detective Inspector Carol Ashton series: *Lessons in Murder*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1990; *Fatal Reunion*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1990, *Death Down Under*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1990, *Cop Out*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 1991.

<sup>15</sup> A Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose 1978-1985*, Norton, New York, 1986, p 23.

<sup>16</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, p 5.

- feminist crime fiction novel to date, the evocatively-titled *Murder in the English Department*.<sup>17</sup>

That text makes those challenges in order to suggest that patriarchy and feminism have different standards of proof of criminal guilt. And it would help here, I think, briefly to outline those challenges. Insofar as challenges to gender roles go, Miner's Nan Weaver is a divorced former school teacher from a working-class background who's got a Ph.D. as a mature-aged student. She's an (at least temporarily) celibate heterosexual, a 48-year-old who jogs and drinks too much; her important relationships are with her sister, niece, a gay male colleague. Like the murderer, her (nonfeminist) upper middle class graduate student, Marjorie Adams, she has experienced sexual harassment by a male academic superior.

The epistemological challenges posed in the text are perhaps best signalled by a brief extract. It comes after Nan has picked up the murderer's scarf from the scene of the crime. The murderer tells Nan she left it with her the last time she consulted her about her thesis. Nan responds in this way:

Remembering the black and red Joan Crawford dress Marjorie was wearing during their last appointment, Nan couldn't believe she would make up such an absurdly unstylish alibi.

"Thank you", said Marjorie. "I bought it in Paris several years ago. I'm so grateful to have it back."

Now Nan couldn't imagine Hepburn handling that line with more aplomb. "I bought it in Paris," Nan thought to herself. Imagine that. Imagine anything. Imagine a murder around the corner....

Nan did wonder just how much she imagined. No, no, she was absolutely sure Marjorie hadn't worn this green and purple scarf with the Joan Crawford dress.<sup>18</sup>

The readings produced by the discourses of fashion and film; specifically film which plays with the notion of "femininity"; threaten to supplant the

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<sup>17</sup> V Miner, *Murder in the English Department*, Methuen, London, 1988.

<sup>18</sup> Milner, above, n 17, p 88.

evidence of the "objective" eyes and ears. At another point, after covering up and erasing forensic evidence in order to protect Marjorie, Nan reclaims the reading of blood stains for a women's narrative:

Nan walked into the clean, bright kitchen, her eyes following the flowers on her sister's swishing polyester ass. Their old family kitchen on Kelly Hill had felt like this, a dispensary for food and other care. Until Nan was in high school she assumed everybody kept their bandaids and merthiolate in the kitchen cupboard. Tonight, for some reason, Shirley reminded her of Mom. Mom leaning across the linoleum table, listening to ten-year-old Nan confess to the blood dripping between her legs. Mom's face had betrayed shock at such physical force in one so young. But she soon recovered, reassuring young Nan that this was the most natural thing in the world. The blood made Nan a woman. Now would Shirley tell her that the blood on her dress and Marjorie's scarf was the most natural thing in the world? Would she be absolved of another wound which she did not inflict?<sup>19</sup>

The text's most marked structural challenge is found in its ending. *Murder in the English Department* eschews the neat endings of "realist" (read "bourgeois individualist") fiction. Nan Weaver drives into the sunrise, knowingly putting her attempts to get tenure at risk, expressing pleasure at the seasons. As Anne Cranny-Francis has noted, "natural" realist narrative, plotted, with causation manifest, with the due sense of an ending, encodes our society's dominant discourse.<sup>20</sup>

Seasonality represents another way of looking at things, suggests that time is circular and not progressive. And the novel's ending comes well after the solution to the crime. As our hero drives into the sunrise, the radio records the verdict, handed down a week since. Marjorie is acquitted of murder because:

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<sup>19</sup> Minner, above, n 17, p 48-9.

<sup>20</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, pp 10-14.

Judge Marie Wong ruled [in a landmark case] that rape is an act of such physical violence that it warrants substantial use of force in self defence.<sup>21</sup>

These then are some of the "hows" of feminist crime fiction. But its easy to get it wrong. As Cranny-Francis is not alone in suggesting, Miner gets A+ for "feminist" and B- for "crime fiction".<sup>22</sup> Which brings me to the "bad cop" of a number of feminist critiques of feminist crime fiction, Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski.

*The case against Paretsky*

Paretsky scores an A+ on the crime fiction scale. The fact she is published in the main by Penguin rather than by a women's press, and in both the USA and UK markets suggests she achieves the criterion of selling by the truckload, as does the fact Hollywood cast Kathleen Turner as V.I.<sup>23</sup>

Paretsky gets very mixed grades for "feminist" Cranny-Francis mentions her twice, and only in passing;<sup>24</sup> the brevity is curious given that early in her introduction she claims the conventions of traditional detective fiction: "are challenged in various innovative ways by contemporary female and feminist writers of the genre, from Sarah Paretsky ... to Valerie Miner ...,"<sup>25</sup> and Miner gets pages of attention and exegesis. The reason seems to emerge in Cranny-Francis' closing comments on feminist rewritings of "hard-boiled" crime fiction. She says:

Their achievement is to develop a radical female characterisation, the competent, caring, professional woman, one who breaks the virgin/whore dichotomy of traditional female characterisation. The narrative of bourgeois individualism is left entirely unchallenged in the text, along with its assumptions about race,...

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<sup>21</sup> Miner, above, n 17, p 166.

<sup>22</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, pp 174, 202. See also M T Reddy, *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*, Continuum, New York, 1988, p 158.

<sup>23</sup> *V I Warshawski*, dir. Jeff Kanew, Hollywood Pictures Company, 1991.

<sup>24</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, pp 27, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, p 27.

and accordingly they are only "critical and provisionally radical" rather than "radical or subversive".<sup>26</sup> I suggest later Paretsky's texts in fact meet all the demands Cranny-Francis implicitly makes of them here.

Ann Blake's assessment is more explicitly dismissive. She says:

[K.G] Klein names Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski as the female detective least sabotaged by the constraints of the genre to have appeared so far, but she recognizes that Warshawski's individual successes restore order within their patriarchal world which is her oppressor.<sup>27</sup>

When I first read this, it seemed to reflect an extraordinary selective reading of Paretsky's oeuvre. The texts constitute a *roman fleuve*, a genre which stresses the provisionality and arbitrariness of realist novelistic closure. Blake's assessment fails to register that at the end of each of Paretsky's texts, things in the patriarchal institutions which V.I. opposes - organised religion, the Mob, organised labour, big business, corporatised medicine - are both never the same again and always the same.

At the end of *Killing Orders*, for example, the operations of a particularly conservative secret Catholic organisation are in the process of being exposed. Its power to corrupt and oppress, symbolized by the murder of a lesbian stockbroker at the behest of a senior churchman and her profoundly conservative mother, is thus negated. And yet what the Catholic Church, the text's figure for patriarchal religion, will continue to do by way of oppression is signalled by the critique of the politics of anti-abortion in both this text and *Bitter Medicine*.

So I tracked down Blake's source, only to find it eluded me. While she notes V.I. and other hard-boiled feminist detectives are "...forced to compromise between their ideological position and their official professional careers..."<sup>28</sup> Klein in fact concludes:

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<sup>26</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, p 176.

<sup>27</sup> A Blake, "Deadlier than the Male: Women as Readers and Writers of Crime Fiction" (1990) 8(2) *Law in Context* 54-69 (special issue *Feminism Law and Society*, ed Judith Grbich).

<sup>28</sup> K G Klein, *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1988, pp 202-3.

The tensions between the demands of the detective novel and ... feminist ideology require a careful balancing act; Paretsky's is not the only way, but it is virtually the only example ...<sup>29</sup>

and she notes Warshawski characteristically both breaks down "the system", and expands the collective base of power to include the powerless.<sup>30</sup>

Before challenging the validity and grounds of Cranny-Francis' and Blake's criticisms in detail I note the most damning of the local criticisms of Paretsky, that of Bronwen Levy. She refers to:

Sara Paretsky's depiction of something approaching "designer feminism".<sup>31</sup>

This suggests Paretsky has transgressed what my own experience leads me to believe is an unwritten but aggressively policed rule in certain feminist circles; that is, she cares about clothes. It also fails to register that V.I. is adept at camouflage.<sup>32</sup>

#### *In defence of Paretsky*

I turn now both to suggest the basis for the feminist critical discontent with the Paretsky I have surveyed and to outline the ways which her work meets the criteria demanded of crime fiction that is both radical and feminist. Both of these fields intersect in two stories whose literary source lies in two of the component parts of what might call a classical antecedent of the roman fleuve: Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

The basis of the critical discontent with Paretsky which both Blake and Cranny-Francis display lies in their trouble with Iphigenia a forensic blind spot: the failure or reluctance to follow Paretsky's paper-trail into her detective's origins and matrix, and to choose a way to read her highly self-conscious reinscription and problematisation of the Iphigenia myth. The

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<sup>29</sup> Klein, above, n 28, p 216.

<sup>30</sup> Klein, above, n 28, p 216

<sup>31</sup> B Levy, "Introduction to Marele Day: Reading Women's Crime Fiction, Some Problems" (1989) Vol xv No 1 *Hecate* 42-45.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, *Bitter Medicine*, Penguin, London, 1988, pp 289-90; *Toxic Shock*, Penguin, London, 1990, p 48; *Guardian Angel*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, pp 16, 314-5, 375.

characteristic mode of that myth, particularly in its rendering by Euripides, which is also the characteristic mode of Paretzky's work, is ambiguity - call it "writerliness"<sup>33</sup> if you like - that tendency to open up text co-operatively to the reader's interpretation.

The problem the three feminist critics I have spoken of have is they want a readerly feminist text, "controlled by the author to offer only one valid interpretation and viewpoint",<sup>34</sup> albeit an interpretation and viewpoint which urged a paradigm shift which in my view is devoutly to be wished. Challenging traditional crime fiction formally, epistemologically and in terms of the discourses of gender, such texts, like *Murder in the English Department*, unselfconsciously reproduce its rhetoric, its patterns of argument and persuasion.

This desire for readerly feminist text is suggested by Cranny-Francis' comments on *Murder in the English Department*:

The **reading position** of Miner's novel produces a **complex understanding** of both the **similarities** between women, the product of their construction by (patriarchal) gender ideology, and of **their differences** which are a function of their individual negation of (bourgeois) class ideology.<sup>35</sup> (emphasis added)

The stasis and limitations that Cranny-Francis' language articulates reflects the essentializing and ahistorical tendencies of these readings and the texts which co-operate with them.

The Iphigenia myth seems at first blush to be similarly easy to read:<sup>36</sup> in its

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<sup>33</sup> I am employing Roland Barthes' distinction between the "readerly" and "writerly" text in *S/Z* trans. R Miller, Hill and Wange, New York, 1974, pp 4-5. Knight appears to invert Barthes' usage of these terms.

<sup>34</sup> Knight, above, n 33, p 148.

<sup>35</sup> Cranny-Francis, above, n 2, p 176.

<sup>36</sup> I am relying on Guillard's libretto for Gluck's *Iphigenia en Tauride*, Chaudens, Paris, n.d., the Penguin edition of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, (Euripides, *Three Plays* trans Philip Vellacott, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1953) and the Everyman verse translation of *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris* by R Potter *The Plays of Euripides in English in 2 Volumes, Volume 1*, Dent, London and Toronto; Dutton, New York, 1906). R E Goodkin notes that "Paretzky tell me that her heroine is named after the protagonist of Gluck's Iphigenia operas (*Iphigenie en Aulide*, the libretto for which is largely based on Racine's *Iphigenie* and *Iphigenie en Tauride*) but that she is also familiar with Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*". (*Killing Order(s) Iphigenia and the*

first part, Iphigenia is to be sacrificed by her father, Agamemnon, in order to speed the fleet which seeks to bring Helen back from Troy. Iphigenia and her mother Clytemnestra, are tricked into exposing Iphigenia to this fate by a false promise that she is being brought to the site of the sacrifice in order to be married to Achilles, who knows nothing about the proposed marriage. Unpacked, this reads in this way: the institutions of patriarchy, even the apparently benevolent ones, manipulate and exploit women. But the story's resolution and Euripides' rendering profoundly complicate this reading.

Lies, double-dealing, contesting readings and second thoughts pepper the text, perhaps nowhere so obviously as in the differing responses of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra to Iphigenia's eventual salvation.<sup>37</sup> Iphigenia and Achilles engage in a contest of honourable self-sacrifice in which she only prevails by chance;<sup>38</sup> in the event her self-sacrificial rhetoric in this scene, which vividly dramatises the paradox of her martyrdom - under Attic patriarchy she can be empowered only in annihilation - is retrospectively rendered bathetic: Diana saves her from the knife and bears her away to her temple in Tauris. But even this intervention has a price, as Iphigenia laments:

But now a stranger on this strand,  
'Gainst which the wild waves beat,

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Detection of Tragic Intertextuality", (1989) Vol 76 *Yale French Studies* 81-107) In *Deadlock*, Penguin, London, 1984, p 129 V.I. comments "I know a lot of breathing exercises and can sing all the main arias from *Iphigenie en Tauride*, the only opera my mother sang in professionally before she left Italy in 1938".

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Clytemnestra says:

And have the gods, my daughter, borne thee hence?  
How then shall I address thee? Or of this  
How deem! Vain words, perchance, to comfort me  
And sooth to peace the anguish of my soul,

and Agamemnon

Lady, we have much cause to think ourselves  
Touching our daughter, blest: for 'mongst the gods  
Commercing she in truth resides. But thee  
Behoves it with thine infant son return  
To Argos, for the troops with ardour haste  
To said And now farewell! My greetings thee  
From Troy will be unfrequent, and at times  
Of distant interval: mayst thou be blest!

(The reference is to the Everyman edition of *Iphigenia in Aulis*, p 333.

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Iphigenia decides to die gloriously, in accordance with the goddess' decree, and in order to deliver Greece from the Barbarians. Achilles, thrilled by her heroism, decides to risk death himself in order to save her to be his wife. Iphigenia responds, concluding "But let me save my country, if I may" (Everyman edition, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, p 327) and Achilles reiterates his own intentions.

I hold my dreary, joyless seat,  
 Far distant from my native land;  
 Nor nuptial bed is mine, nor child, nor friend.<sup>39</sup>

Having resisted being "saved" by Achilles for marriage, she is saved by the Goddess who originally required her submission as sacrifice. And she is saved in order to direct the sacrifice of Greeks who stumble upon Tauris - a kind of patriarchal fantasy of feminist revenge which glances proleptically towards *Basic Instinct* - Iphigenia breaks her vows in order to save her brother, Orestes, and brother-in-law, Pylades.

The story infects again. As it does when Iphigenia uses what her brother characterizes as a peculiarly feminine rhetorical competence<sup>40</sup> to persuade her (Greek) handmaidens to cover for their flight, promising ex post facto protection from the local despot that, but for divine intervention, she would be unable to deliver. That is, she sells her "sisters" down the river to save her brother. Or rather, she would have done so were it not for Minerva's intervention, which is itself the completion of the story of Orestes' quest to save his sister from the exile that is also safe have.<sup>41</sup> The story concludes as Minerva legislates for the substitution of the sacrifices of men to Diana (which have substituted for the sacrifice of the virgin Iphigenia to Diana) the symbolic drawing of "one drop of blood" from a man's throat.<sup>42</sup> The most powerful articulation of this text's medium and message comes from Minerva:

Let this be law for ever: when the votes are even, you shall  
 spare and not condemn.<sup>43</sup>

The Australian commentators seem to be the only ones who fail to register Paretzky's gradual revelations about the meaning of her protagonist's name: Victoria Iphigenia Warshawski. Klein touches on the question.<sup>44</sup> Maureen

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<sup>39</sup> Everyman edition, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, p 248, Iphigenie's laments, "O toi, qui prolonges mes jours" (Acte I, "O malheureuse Iphigenie" (Acte II) and "Je vois toute l'horreur" (Acte II) traverse much of this ground.

<sup>40</sup> Orestes says "One other thing: these women here must keep the secret. Speak to them, use all your persuasion - a woman's appeal is more moving" (Penguin edition, *Iphigenia in Tauris* p 105) There is no equivalent in the operatic score.

<sup>41</sup> Detailed in Euripides *Orestes* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

<sup>42</sup> Penguin edition, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, p 118. There is no equivalent in the operatic score.

<sup>43</sup> Penguin edition, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, p 118. There is no equivalent in the operatic score.

<sup>44</sup> Klein, above, n 28, pp 212, 215.

Reddy<sup>45</sup> is markedly alert to its importance, and Richard E. Goodkin has more recently offered a detailed if not unproblematic intertextual reading of the Paretsky texts against Racine's *Iphigenie*.<sup>46</sup> Particularly in the light of what I have said about Euripides' Iphigenia texts, the juxtaposing of "Victoria" with "Iphigenia" signals contestation and paradox. We are told V.I. was named Victoria for Victor Emmanuel, and Iphigenia for the heroine of Gluck's operatic version of *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

As if Victor Emmanuel were not a "writerly" enough signifier of his own,<sup>47</sup> V.I. elsewhere expressly associates "Victoria" with the Victorian "angel in the house"<sup>48</sup> whom, like Virginia Woolf before her, she wishes to do away with. The conclusion of *Killing Orders*, a chapter called "The myth of Iphigenia", signposts the "writerly": a mother who is determined to promote her daughter's education and independence can also be a young woman who falls in love with a much older married man, and a mother who sacrifices her daughter's peace of mind to family piety and the appeasement of her own sexual guilt. I will return to that chapter in my conclusion.

I've suggested the trouble that Australian feminist critics of feminist crime fiction have had with Iphigenia, and I want to now outline, very briefly, the evidence which this leads them to ignore. Cranny-Francis, like Blake, wanted a challenge to bourgeois individualism: that seems to be provided by the orphaned and determinedly independent Vic's network of firm connections with friends, neighbours, former neighbours, former colleagues, lovers and former lovers, extended family. Similarly, in these texts, the wrongs produced by patriarchal capitalist institutions reach to the disempowered, the marginal, the poor, the black, the hispanic, the female, and along those connections to Vic. There is no division between public and private; the personal is always political. Vic herself is constructed by patriarchal capitalist institutions even as she opposes them: in *Killing Orders* she enlists the aid of the mob in avenging the death of her old friend from Chicago U. pro-abortion struggles, the aforementioned lesbian stockbroker. She accepts a Mafia Don's payoff, which buys her apartment. She endures the excruciating recognition of her

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<sup>45</sup> Reddy, pp 90, 120.

<sup>46</sup> See note 36 for publications details.

<sup>47</sup> In *Burn Marks*, Virago, London, 1991, V.I. notes "... Gabriella had driven home the point forcefully to Elena all through my childhood - 'I didn't name her for Victor Emmanuel to have people talk to her as though she were a silly ingenue' ... " I have in mind Victor Emmanuel's pattern of alternating resistance and submission to fascism.

<sup>48</sup> In *Burn Marks* V.I. records: I didn't want to think about [my aunt] any more - and not just because I didn't want Victoria the Victorian Angel nudging me to look after her", p 203.

own lust for and enurement to violence, produced by the violence visited upon her.<sup>49</sup>

Race and class are repeatedly foregrounded in these texts, but here again the positions are complex. In *Guardian Angel*, for example, Vic's elderly Italian neighbour's racist rejection of her black police officer lover, Conrad Rawlings, is both socially contextualised and countered by Rawlings' revelation that:

My sister heard about you from some busybody on the grapevine and won't let me sully her living room now...Yeah, white girl: cuts both ways. So don't let the old guy worry you.<sup>50</sup>

This in turn is unsettled and challenged by Vic's explicable feminist reflections on the relationship and its contexts.<sup>51</sup>

Other evidence that I'd want to offer for the defence includes formal experiments, like the interruption of the conventions of both romantic fiction and realistic plotting in *Bitter Medicine's* first account of Vic visiting her lover's house. We're there the first time they sleep together chez Warshawski:<sup>52</sup> the text leads us to believe we are getting a linear and complete account of both detective story and romance, and then Vic notes: "I'd been to Peter's a few times already."<sup>53</sup> Perhaps most important is these texts' attention to history: both personal and public,<sup>54</sup> history and herstory,<sup>55</sup> sixty-eight and Reagan years.<sup>56</sup> Like Catherine MacKinnon's feminist jurisprudence,<sup>57</sup> say and unlike Caro; Gilligan's work on ethics,<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Killing Orders*, Penguin, London, 1987, pp 197-9.

<sup>50</sup> *Guardian Angel*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, p 437.

<sup>51</sup> *Guardian Angel*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, p 437-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Bitter Medicine*, Penguin, London, 1988, p 122.

<sup>53</sup> *Bitter Medicine*, Penguin, London, 1988, p 178.

<sup>54</sup> See, for example, *Bitter Medicine*, p 208; *Killing Orders*, pp 15, 52, 71, 150, cf *Killing Orders*, 25, 77.

<sup>55</sup> See, for example, *Bitter Medicine*, pp 21, 272, cf *Bitter Medicine*, pp 35, 26, 50, 163, 201, 310; *Burn Marks*, p 60.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, *Bitter Medicine*, p 291; *Killing Orders*, pp 52, 71, cf *Bitter Medicine* pp 143, 163, 257.

<sup>57</sup> C MacKinnon, "Difference and Dominance" (1987) *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*.

Paretsky's texts suggest that the discursive construction of gender roles is powerful but mutable. It's precisely in their writerly diachronicity that we find a space to act - which I hope satisfies legal practitioners among the readership as to my instructions.

I'd like to end with Paretsky's reinscription of the myth of Iphigenia. Vic asks her friend and mentor, Lotty Herschel

Do you know what my middle name is.....?

Do you know the myth of Iphigenia? How Agamemnon sacrificed her to get a fair wind to sail for Troy?... I can't stop dreaming about it. Only in my dreams it's Gabriella [her mother]. She keeps laying me on the pyre and setting the torch to it and weeping for me.....

And suddenly the grief for Gabriella, the grief for myself overwhelmed me and I started to weep. The tears of my many years of silence would not stop. Lotty was at my side holding me. : "Yes my darling, yes, cry, yes, that's right. They named you well, Victoria Iphigenia. For don't you know that in Greek legend Iphigenia is also Artemis the huntress?"<sup>59</sup>

And there's the rub, of course. At this point in history there are no feminist happy endings, but contestation, conflict, painfully difficult ambiguities that are also invitations to read in ways which can make differences. And the case for Sara Paretsky is that her work radically challenges what Knight, apropos of Chandler, called "the essential idealism of the[crime fiction] form, its disengagement with the difficult compromises of reality".<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> C Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Harvard UP, Cambridge, 1982.

<sup>59</sup> *Killing Orders*, pp 232-3.

<sup>60</sup> Knight, above, n 7, p 151.