PURDUE UNIVERSITY

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture
ISSN 1481-4374
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

Volume 8 (2006) Issue 3 Article 3

A Bakhtinian Perspective on Feminist Lesbian Crime Writing

Sarah Posman
Ghent University

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, and the Critical and Cultural Studies Commons

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, Purdue University Press selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Posman, Sarah. "A Bakhtinian Perspective on Feminist Lesbian Crime Writing." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006): <http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1315>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.
The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 1359 times as of 06/01/15. Note: the download counts of the journal's material are since Issue 9.1 (March 2007), since the journal's format in pdf (instead of in html 1999-2007).

PURDUE UNIVERSITY UNIVERSITY PRESS <http://www.thepress.purdue.edu>

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series.* Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Langua-ge Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monog-raph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

***CLCWeb* Volume 8 Issue 3 (September 2006) Article 3**
Sarah Posman,
"A Bakhtinian Perspective on Feminist Lesbian Crime Writing"
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/3>

Contents of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 8.3 (2006)
<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss3/>

Abstract: In her paper, "A Bakhtinian Perspective on Feminist Lesbian Crime Writing," Sarah Posman discusses how the Bakhtinian concepts "ethos" and "chronotope" add to the discussion of feminist lesbian crime writing. She sets out from a Bakhtinian typology of action stories and situates recent crime writing as a curious mixture of mission stories and transformation stories. Focusing on the innovative potential of feminist lesbian crime writing, Posman explores how such stories tackle the iconically masculine and heterosexual conventions of the detective story and manage to balance tradition and subversion successfully. Posman infuses her analysis with issues central to feminism and queer theory and considers how a feminist lesbian detective hero can "change the world," that is, how such an "other" ethos impinges on crime writing's conventional chronotopical constellation. The hero and world under discussion are those of the popular Kate Delafield series by Katherine V. Forrest.

Sarah POSMAN

A Bakhtinian Perspective on Feminist Lesbian Crime Writing

Mikhail Bakhtin proposed that "A verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages … there will arise an acute feeling for language boundaries (social, national and semantic), and only then will language reveal its essential human character; from behind its words, forms, styles, nationally characteristic and socially typical faces begin to emerge, the images of speaking human beings…. Language (or more precisely, languages) will itself become an artistically complete image of a characteristic human way of sensing and seeing the world" (Bakhtin qtd. in Hohne and Wussow vii). Following Bakhtin's optimistic hope for a state of "decentering" where a manifold of voices comes about with "social, national and semantic" changes, I pursue his notion applied to gendered and queer dimensions. The link between Bakhtin and feminist and queer theory may not be an obvious one since Bakhtin's writings do not deal explicitly with gender or sexuality, but it certainly is a viable one. Where Bakhtin posits an interplay of social voices by which a particular historical and cultural context establishes the self, feminist and queer theorists adapt this discursive and contextualized take on identity by infusing it with debate on gender and sexuality (on this, see, e.g., Vasvári, "Queer Theory and Discourses of Desire" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss1/2/>, and, in particular, Vasvári's analysis of lesbian poetry re the female police officer). In this paper, I explore how a Bakhtinian "decentering" can come about in a site where both feminist and queer concerns are made explicit: Katherine V. Forrest's detective novels featuring lesbian LAPD homicide detective Kate Delafield. In this paper I advocate a dialogue between feminism and queer theory and far from cling to "proper objects." My use of the phrase "feminist lesbian" testifies to this as it wants to invert the rigid connotations its reverse "lesbian feminist" carries. The discussion of this "other" take on crime writing will be grounded on the Bakhtinian concepts of "chronotope" and "ethos." These notions are not often taken up in feminist and queer readings of Bakhtin and I hope my preliminary exploration will kindle further interest in scholarship.

In "The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)" Bakhtin proposes a subdivision of the novel depending on the specific interrelationship of four parameters: time, space, hero, and plot. The subcategories he comes up with are the travel novel, the novel of ordeal, the biographical novel, and the *Bildungsroman*. In his book, *Tijd voor een verhaal* (Time for a Story), Bart Keunen takes up Bakhtin's typological project and extends the exploration of Bakhtin's four parameters with respect to action stories and reflection stories. My focus on crime fiction limits my scope to action stories; however, a brief characterization of these stories shows that they are determined by well-wrought plot structures, foreground action and suspense, and downplay ideas and psychology (on this, see e.g., van Gorp 47). Keunen's analysis of action stories are what Bakhtin calls adventure stories and these basically envelop the novel of ordeal and the travel novel. Keunen, following Bakhtin, categorizes the novel of ordeal and the travel novel as "mission" genres and "transformation" genres, respectively. He discerns not two but four different formats of action stories (see below). These four possible plot constellations are based on the specific intersection of the Bakhtinian concepts of "chronotope" and "ethos." The notion of "chronotope" welds together the parameters time (*chronos*) and space (*topos*), and constitutes a dynamic framework for the action to take place: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time" 84). Keunen understands the chronotope as functioning on two levels: the level of small text units and the level of an overarching world model. The first level chronotope can be pictured like a four-dimensional mental image which fuses the three spatial dimensions with the time structure of temporal action (see Keunen, "Possible City Worlds" 4). An example Bakhtin gives is the "chronotope of the road" in which the particular fusion of temporal and spatial logic can be visual-

ized with the phrase "on the road" (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time" 243). Since chronotopes can be said to coincide with a story's motifs, each story is made up of several of them and together they constitute a dialogic *polychronotopia* (see Keunen, "Bakhtin, Genre Formation" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/2/>). In a story's polychronotopia readers experience one chronotope as taking up a dominant position: "Within the limits of a single work and within the total literary output of a single author we may notice a number of different chronotopes and complex interactions among them, specific to the given work or author; it is common, moreover, for one of these chronotopes to envelope [*sic*] or dominate the others" (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time" 252). This "enveloping" chronotope determines the spatial and temporal limits of the fictional world by which we understand the story. In short, it constitutes the story's fundamental image of the world (Keunen, *Tijd voor een verhaal* 6). Furthermore, it functions as an interesting parameter to gauge the dominant ideology conditioning the story's production. An investigation of the relationship between the artistic and the larger social system entails not only an exploration of a story's projection of the world but also of its image of man. On this connection Bakhtin writes: "The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic" (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time" 85). "The image of man" corresponds to the notion ethos which denotes a story's hero and his actions (Keunen, *Tijd voor een verhaal* 20). Where Bakhtin's typology posits the chronotope as the starting point par excellence, Keunen actually upgrades the concept ethos to the ultimate focus within genre studies. He explains it as the expression of a deeper mechanism which determines a story's logical development towards a goal, allowing its readers to establish causal relationships between subsequent episodes (*Tijd voor een verhaal* 3). Thus, a story's ethos guides our understanding of the hero's motivation and the do-s and don't-s of the society at hand. In other words, the hero and his actions beg reader identification and liven up the chronotope constellation.

Focusing on action stories, Keunen discerns four possible correlations of chronotope and ethos and suggests two basic sets of binaries to characterize them: idealism vs. realism to denote the chronotopical design and mission vs. transformation to characterize the ethos (*Tijd voor een Verhaal* 190). Since, as I already indicated, it is the latter distinction which Bakhtin and other genre theoreticians use to denote the principal changes in literary history, I follow Keunen in using it as chief characterization. Mission genres are the oldest in European literature and are characteristic of the literature of autocratic and theocratic societies. These stories display a quest, a "searching" hero. An excellent -- and, literally, "excelling" -- individual is confronted with a problem, challenged to find its solution, and is hailed a victor when he does (usually, a man). In archetypal mission genres a mission ethos nearly always goes hand in hand with an idealistic chronotope -- exemplary are the Greek romance or the medieval chivalric novel. Indicators of such a chronotope are a circular time frame, from order to chaos back to order, and an often exotic, yet static, setting. Mission stories may put the hero's identity to the test but they are not into soul searching. Rather, they portray a fixed hero in a fixed world. By adhering to a rigid set of binary oppositions (good vs. evil, strong vs. weak, male vs. female) structured along aristocratic and religious codes, they serve the conservative aim of affirming the dominant position of social elites. The hero of the younger transformation genres, then, is not all that active or admirable as his transformation precursor. Indeed, Keunen calls him the "victim hero" because he undergoes passively a succession of chaotic experiences -- usually leading him from his initial state of misery to social prestige. The chronotope traditionally accompanying this ethos is likely to correspond to everyday life and can therefore be called a fairly realistic one; an overall linear time sequence is linked with a "normal" setting. The transformative, flexible identity of the hero gives these stories an existential tinge but, although this makes the genre more modern, stereotypical transformation genres nevertheless uphold traditional, communal values as exemplary by stressing the hero's growth towards society's standards (see Keunen, *Tijd voor een Verhaal* 111 and *passim*).

More recent action stories disobey the above explicated tradition in a complex way. What happens is not a neat import-export transaction of either ethos or chronotope but rather a gradual "infection" of mission and transformation. Action stories start combining a transformation ethos

with the larger than life aspect of an idealistic chronotope or linking a mission ethos with the more feasible surroundings of the realistic chronotope. The former is what occurs in the love stories in Mills and Boon romance novels where a miserable love life is transformed into heaven on earth and the latter is what speaks from modern exponents of crime writing. Your classic whodunit deploys a straightforward mission ethos; it is structured along strict binaries and posits the detective taking on what is bad and false in order to restore society to being good and true again. More recent crime writing modifies this straightforward mission aspect by making its spatial qualities more realistic. In *Tijd voor een verhaal* Keunen explains that these spatial qualities not only refer to the story's setting but comprise all the external and internal faculties helping or obstructing the hero in his challenge. What happens, in other words, is that the surroundings for the hero to operate in as well as his faculties become quite feasible for readers to identify with. Such modern disobedient action stories already hint at the fact that chronotope and ethos do not constitute a rigid grid of textual phenomena. Keunen stresses the pragmatic nature of the concepts: they require an author and readers to actually take shape (see Keunen, "Bakhtin, Genre Formation" <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/2/>). This is in line with Bakhtin's take on literature. He dreads a dogmatic, dead attitude, and pleads for a dynamic stance in which the chronotope functions as the pivot of artistic communication: "First and foremost, we experience [chronotopes] in the external material being of the work and in its purely external composition. But this material of the work is not dead, it is speaking, signifying (it involves signs); we not only see and perceive it but in it we can hear voices. … The text as such never appears as a dead thing; beginning with any text – and sometimes passing through a lengthy series of mediating links – we always arrive, in the final analysis, at the human voice, which is to say we come up against the human being" (Bakhtin "Forms of Time" 252-53). Here, Bakhtin points to how human beings, readers and writers, animate a literary text. Not surprisingly, his concept of the chronotope is grounded in life. Time and space are fundamental cognitive frames by which human beings experience and reflect on life as they live it. Furthermore, within the domain of sense-making activities one question has to be "who am I?" and by which we ponder the ethos of our daily lives. Far from abstract phenomena, chronotope and ethos are interdependent tools by which human beings give shape to life and literature. Both the author "encoding" the story and the reader "decoding" it do so from experience, conditioned by specific biological and cognitive as well as larger socio-cultural circumstances. The pragmatic quality of chronotope and ethos allows for tracing the dynamics between the artistic and the broader social system. In effect, the modern "infection" of different action formats takes Bakhtin's "verbal-ideological decentering" to new dimensions. In what follows I trace the hybridization of crime writing and discuss the feminist and queer endeavour of pushing the genre "off centre" while carefully balancing tradition and subversion.

I have already mentioned that recent crime writing disobeys tradition in its combining of a mission ethos with fairly realistic spatial aspects. A brief overview of the developments of the genre adds to the discussion of this hybridization. As one of the forebears of the genre, Anne Cranny-Francis mentions the sensational anthology of crime stories *The Newgate Calender* (first published 1773): these stories thrive on sensation and stress society as an organic unity of which all members are vital parts. Nineteenth-century modernization with its social upheaval makes such an organic view untenable and the renegotiation of dominant ideology is in order. Gothic fiction, a second precursor of crime fiction, picks up on this and thematizes the steady disintegration of identity and the absolute instability of the world -- often, however, with a conservative outcome. Next, the detective appears on scene as the container of this dangerous clash of individual experience and dominant ideology. Balancing rationalism and imagination, commonsense and creativity, nineteenth-century detective heroes such as Edgar Allan Poe's Dupin and Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes are the embodiment of bourgeois individualism. They tackle chaos and restore the world to order and stability by doing away with a grotesque criminal (see Cranny-Francis 144-55). The twentieth century sees a proliferation of the genre. Agatha Christie's genteel, eccentric amateur detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple follow Dupin and Holmes in fitting the facts of the crime to an ideological description of bourgeois society. They safeguard society by getting rid of a decrepit criminal. To a large extent this is also what happens in the tradition of US-American

hard-boiled detective literature where the likes of Philip Marlowe and Sam Spade set out to "do right." They operate, however, in a society which is more and more manifestly fragmented and chaotic. As the century advances "evil" moves from residing solely in monstrous individuals to become part of social institutions. The genre, in other words, becomes a possible site for social critique. Cranny-Francis modifies this connection between evil and social institutions correctly by pointing out that it by no means guarantees the exposure of the hold of ideology on the individual. Quite the contrary, crime fiction will often conceal this link in its attempt to preserve the image of a coherent and autonomous individual. The fragmentation and diversity of postmodern society does, however, manage to find its way into the genre. Crime writing of the last decades displays a diversity of authors reflecting consciously on the format as well as a growing range of male and female detective figures covering a large social, sexual, ethnic, historical, and geographical spectrum. Characteristic of crime fiction written since the 1990s is a blending of topical social issues, the mystery at hand and the detective's private life (see Bertens and D'haen 6; on contemporary crime fiction, see also, e.g., Steblyk <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss2/3/>).

In terms of chronotope and ethos, detective writing stems from an idealistic chronotope (the organic unity of the community and/or the fantastical of the Gothic fiction) and clear mission ethos (the detective as excellent individual). Along with changes in society, it evolves to a more hybrid genre getting "infected" with realism and fragmentation. Evil is portrayed as intrinsic to the dark side of a fragmented society and likewise the criminal is no longer per definition alienated in his immorality – traditional, rigid binaries slowly but surely approach a state of flux. In line with the spatial surroundings, the detective's abilities and disabilities get a more realistic, subjective colouring. This can entail a deviation from the traditional, safe circle from order over chaos back to order. Keunen observes how this pattern either no longer applies to society as a whole but is internalized with the hero taking refuge in his idiosyncratic value system, or is done away with altogether when the hero limits his task to questioning value systems and exposing their (corrupt) arbitrariness (*Tijd voor een Verhaal* 121-24). In short, contemporary crime fiction implies a complex interplay of mission ethos and the realistic aspects typical of the transformation genre. Some feminist and queer theoreticians pick up, optimistically, on this contemporary "hybrid" stance of detective writing. They applaud meta-reflections on the genre and an altogether more subversive tenet. On their account, that makes it possible for the genre to finally rid itself of its conventionally misogynistic portrayal of women and become a site for the renegotiation of sexuality and gender norms while others deny any such possibility and regard the formula of crime fiction necessarily bound up with a world whose sex and gender valuations emphasize male hegemony (see, e.g., Walton and Jones 87 and *passim*). To what extent is crime writing a male, heterosexual preserve and how petrified is this convention? In my analysis, I show that balanced subversion is possible and that it is not just a matter of making Philip Marlowe slip into a dress. Despite the fact that female authors were writing detective novels as early as their male colleagues, some even enjoying massive success, and despite the literary presence of successful female detective heroes, Sally R. Munt is right when she characterizes our collective image of "the" detective as "iconically masculine": "The image is archetypal – the warrior knight, the tough cowboy, the intrepid explorer -- he is the representative of Man, and yet more than a man, he is the focus of morality, the mythic hero. He is the controlled centre surrounded by chaos, and an effective reading must involve identification with this mediator of action, truth, and finally pleasure and relief through closure. Both the form and the content of this scenario are iconically masculine, in a literary and a cultural sense" (*Murder by the Book* 1). The early female detective heroes were unable to compete with their male colleagues because they were conceived of as purely imaginative creations - society's strained way of dealing with the changing position of women (*Murder by the Book* 4). Although Munt stresses the incipient feminist strain within the genre and highlights the innovative force of crime fiction written by women, she acknowledges that early women writers were not so much rewriting the form as augmenting it, adhering to caricature and self-mockery. Moreover, Munt accuses the dominant critical/scholarly tradition of unjustly highlighting one particular, patriarchal mode of formal rules and downplaying others, thereby suppressing subversive, feminist stances in crime fiction written by women (*Murder by the Book* 1-13). "Iconically masculine" as traditional

crime writing may be, it nonetheless betrays the recognition of a powerful female subjectivity and sexuality. For decades, women were portrayed as either victims or, notably in the US-American hard-boiled tradition, as evil *femmes fatales*. Referring to John G. Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, And Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1976), Cranny-Francis notes how the unremitting masculinity of especially the hard-boiled detective is in part a symbolic denial and a protective shield against complex sexual and status anxieties focusing on women (Cranny-Francis 157). The victimization and criminalization of feminine influences and the parallel motion of the detective hero fervently holding on to a macho independence can be read as the expression of conservative fears and anxieties arising from changes in traditional class and gender structures in western societies of the 1920s and 1930s (see Walton and Jones 89-95). Not surprisingly, the early female detective heroes were "harmless" protagonists either sexually unattractive (the old spinster) or unavailable (married). For decades, patriarchal discourse has resisted successfully the image of a sexually active as well as autonomous and intelligent female detective (see Cranny-Francis 164-65).

It took the feminist wave of the 1960s and 1970s with its explicitly political ideology to bring things up to speed in the detective genre. Women marched for the same social and professional opportunities and recognition as men; they claimed the right to go into detecting "for real" be it as a private eye or "part of the force" (for a [linguistic] account of how police women experience the masculine space of police work, see McElhinny, "Fearful, Forceful Agents"). Within academia, feminist scholarship set up investigations into a counter canon, "digging up" and reactivating literature written by women. Consequently, from the 1980s onwards statistics show a boom in both crime publications by women and stories featuring a professional female detective (see Walton and Jones 29-30). Maureen Reddy explicates the link between changes in society and in the field of crime writing: "Feminist literary criticism, feminism as a social movement, and feminist crime novels have grown up together, so to speak. Just as feminist literary criticism challenges the traditional assumptions of the discipline of literary studies, so too does the feminist crime novel challenge the conventions of crime fiction" (Reddy qtd. in Walton and Jones 91). In order to "challenge the conventions of crime writing" a critical attitude is apt but feminist writers should be careful in balancing rebellion and allegiance towards the genre. Simple gender role reversal (if such is possible) means merely buying into stereotypes and is therefore not effective. Cranny-Francis calls for women writers to "change the myth itself" instead of trying to fit themselves into it (159). Such does not mean a radical break with generic conventions but thinking them through in order to change them from within. Neither Cranny-Francis nor Walton and Jones seem too keen on the more avant-garde feminist subversions of the genre and they fear such could lead to a substantial loss of readership: "If the feminist appropriation of popular fiction is no longer popular, where then?" (Walton and Jones 39). Instead, Walton and Jones suggest the more subtle "reverse discourse" strategy. They borrow the notion from Michel Foucault and use it faithfully to denote a discourse "that repeats and inverts the ideological imperatives of the dominant discourse in order to authorize those marginalized by it" (92). This calls for an attentive examination of stereotypes in order to expose their contradictions. Thus, Walton and Jones caution that "reverse discourse" is not inherently progressive but applaud its promising qualities. In other words, a reverse discourse strategy has the potential to create a site in which differential creativity can be brought about; a locus for differences to come into view and smothering prejudices to be deferred. Walton and Jones astutely add a note of caution to the promising quality of the reverse discourse strategy by pointing out that it can be used with equal effectiveness to silence marginal voices (Walton and Jones 94).

A feminist "reverse discourse" requires the deconstruction of the phallocentric ideologies that seem endemic to social, cultural, political, as well as literary practices. With respect to crime writing, this is not considered possible by everyone. There is little hesitation to proclaim recent crime writing "feminist" in its portrayal of a "liberal-humanist-independent-career-woman-in-control-of-her-own-life," but the former deconstructive stance of feminism is met with reluctance, particularly with respect to the hard-boiled tradition (see Walton and Jones 99). Walton and Jones, however, do not equate the deconstructive feminist mode with the downfall of crime writing. They applaud a

cooperation of the two feminist stances which allows hard-boiled, strong-minded female protagonists to successfully subvert stereotypes (99). The best of these writings problematize gender assumptions by showing that there is no such thing as an authentic gender core. In order to explain the deliberate "feminization" which is often manifest in these novels, notably the attention given to "feminine" behaviour and dress, Walton and Jones refer to Judith Butler and her concept of "performativity." And indeed, the link they make is a viable one. Butler wants "performativity" to be understood "not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (*Bodies that Matter* 113). She insists on the peculiar notion of "performativity" and its connotation of a permanent process and discards "performance" as a singular event with an actor/subject behind the show. On her account, those performative repetitions which do not consolidate "the law" (the heterosexual masculinity-femininity binary) but that are nevertheless generated by that law highlight the discursive rather than the essential character of gender (on this, see Jagose 84). This is what happens in innovative feminist crime writing: it does not attempt to replace the masculine realm of the detective story by a feminine one but, on the contrary, infuses the "masculine" law of crime writing with "femininity" and repeats parodically expressions of gender in behaviour and dress. Walton and Jones note how the protagonists in these novels shift the signification of clothing and "gendered" attributes as well as of the bodies these items mediate. They mention Sue Grafton's hero Kinsey who de-eroticizes a bra by using it to cover up her ears and Sparkle Hayter's Robin who trades the iconic gun for "a bottle of cheap spray cologne spiked with cayenne pepper … and a battery-operated Epilady" (Walton and Jones 102). What these novels, consequently, posit is not a "safe" parody of, say, Philip Marlowe but a subversive repetition of gender stereotypes that calls into question the regulatory practice of identity itself. Such a deconstructive approach lends feminist crime writing the potential to combine the portrayal of feminist role models with the undercutting of essentializing identity categories and the exploration of the concept of identity itself.

Notions such as reverse discourse and performativity are of critical importance within queer theory. Queer theory has undeniable ties to academic feminism and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, for example, explicates that the viability of feminist studies is one of the major factors that have enabled queer studies to emerge (16). Both are connected to political movements outside the academy and both are interdisciplinary modes of inquiry that posit themselves "in critical relation to a set of hegemonic social and cultural formations" (Weed vii). Debate between the two is too complex to open up here but, stated boldly, queer theory defines itself against a caricature of feminism, a feminism focusing solely on gender (see Weed xi). Queer theory opens such an allegedly narrow focus with considerations of sex and sexuality. It "describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatise incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire" (Jagose 3). Importantly, in her paper "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" Butler tackles the political problem of the specificity of a lesbian sexuality. In order not to conceive of homosexuality as a "derivative" of an original heterosexuality, she renegotiates the "reality" of heterosexual identities. The latter, she claims, are performatively constituted through continuous imitation which theatrically produces the effect that postures as the normative measure of the real. Gay identities, then, may very well be implicated in heterosexuality but cannot be solely determined by or derived from it. Rather they invert the order of imitated and imitation, and, in the process, "expose the fundamental dependency of "the origin" on that which it claims to produce as its secondary effect" (Butler, "Imitation" 22). A lesbian detective hero in Butler's sense, now, seems incompatible with the "safe" world of detective writing. Sally R. Munt points out this need not be so and states that the archetypal detective and the lesbian (pulp) hero have two major features in common (120-22). First, they are both crusaders wanting "right to be done"; the detective single-handedly turns chaos into order and in the same spirit of "salvation" the lesbian hero embarks on a quest for love. Second, they are outlaws in the sense that neither of them fits the profile of John Q. Public. Furthermore, the crime novel and its strong claim on "secrecy" makes up for an excellent locus to explore attitudes towards the representation of sexuality. For, as Sedgwick points out, secrecy and mystery are often conceived of in sexual terms, "the" secret being "the love that dare not speak its name" (70-71).

Popular lesbian crime novels combine an inheritance of lesbian (pulp) fiction, in which identity and sexuality are focal points, and of crime writing, which is traditionally a site for airing anxieties concerning society. The combination of the two makes up for a distinct subgenre in which the sleuth usually functions as "other" in a hostile society. The hero, however, manages to "come out" victoriously through self-determination and a strong sense of community with her gay peers. Discovery functions as the key element in the narrative and identity formation parallels the solution of the crime (see Munt, *Murder by the Book* 125). Understandably, the formula does not assure a progressive stance; numerous (early) works prophecy good, authentic lesbianism vs. bad, inauthentic heterosexuality -- an essentializing, Manichean moral message which can hardly be called a dissolution of sexual hierarchies. Much of the work from the 1980s and especially the 1990s, however, questions binary thinking radically. Identity comes to be understood as a self-in-relation, made up of numerous, inconsistent subject positions and any "direct" expressive or causal relations between sex, gender, gender presentation, sexual practice, fantasy, and sexuality are challenged (see Butler, "Imitation" 25). Exemplary in this dynamic view is the "rediscovery" of the lesbian butch and femme gender stylization. I take up this issue because it tunes in with Butler's notion of performativity and is useful for the discussion of the Delafield series (for further reading on the matter I refer to Joan Nestle's *The Persistent Desire: a Femme-Butch Reader* and Sally Munt's *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*). After being discarded as "phoney heterosexuality" in the 1970s, butch/femme is taken up again in the 1980s and explored as a complex and dynamic erotic statement defining sexual identity as "less a matter of final discovery than perpetual invention" (Fuss qtd. in Munt, *Murder by the Boo*k 143). The complex, fluid nature of the butch/femme game defies an easy masculine/feminine analogy. Butler stresses that sexuality does not coalesce with a performance or practice and will always surpass definite narrativization ("Imitation" 25). Hence, not all lesbian women who identify as "butch" see themselves as stone butch; there will be femmy and aggressive butches just as there will be passive and butchy femmes. In effect, Butler notes, the "husband-like" butch may get caught up in a logic of inversion whereby the masculine "providingness" turns into a situation of need and self-sacrifice, that "most ancient trap of feminine self-abnegation" ("Imitation" 25). The butch, then "inverts into the femme or remains caught up in the spectre of that inversion, or takes pleasure in it" ("Imitation" 25). In this sense, the butch detective should by no means be interpreted as a mirror image of the masculine detective hero but rather as resolutely destabilizing any rigid take on the relation between gender, gender presentation and sexuality.

The challenges put to the world of crime writing by a feminist lesbian ethos, then, are significant. In the following sections I will relate my discussion of the Kate Delafield series to the Bakhtinian concepts chronotope and ethos. These notions are not an obvious choice since feminist theoreticians working with Bakhtin tend to focus predominantly on his notions of the "dialogic," "heteroglossia," and the "carnivalesque." Karen Hohne and Helen Wussow touch upon the notion of the chronotope when they project the female "I" as "a particular chronotope that has yet to be explored" (Hohne and Wussow xiv). I propose to modify their suggestion and, in line with my narratological and sociological foci on crime writing, examine how the female "I," the feminist lesbian ethos of Kate Delafield, bears on the series' chronotope (Kate Delafield is the creation of the acclaimed lesbian writer Katherine V. Forrest). Forrest was senior editor with the Naiad Press for ten years and received the Lesbian Rights Award from Southern California Women for Understanding and the Lambda Pioneer Award for her contributions as a writer, editor and spokesperson. Her protagonist Kate Delafield was the first lesbian police detective to have her own mystery series (on Forrest, see her website *Katherine V. Forrest* <http://www.art-with-attitude.com/forrest/forrest.html>). Eight Delafield novels have appeared so far and in all of them Kate's sexuality fulfils a central role – central, but not unproblematic. Although her sexuality is a public secret Kate clings to the closet and is unwilling to fulfil the public function of lesbian role model. Similarly, she refuses to stand out as a feminist. When she is asked whether she considers herself a feminist, she duly replies: "Of course. Women had to fight like hell to get into police work. Feminism made my whole career as a detective possible" (Forrest, *Apparition Alley* 81). She will not, however, "pave the way" for other women. She refuses to climb the police force ladder

and keeps to the level of a detective-three because "paper pushing and politics were not her idea of police work" (*Apparition Alley* 170). As I argue, Kate's individualist attitude is not always ideally suited to "change the world" but it does not stop the series from projecting an innovative chronotope.

Kate Delafield enters the series as "that most contradictory and controversial of figures -- the lesbian cop" (Palmer, "The Lesbian Thriller" 101). Forrest renegotiates the profile of the traditional detective by teasing out the tension between Kate's professional life as a member of a patriarchal law enforcement organisation and her personal life as a member of a stigmatised minority. Kate is pictured as an outsider among outsiders and fulfils this role con brio: "Growing up she had been taller and stronger, more aggressive than the other girls; in look and manner, hopelessly unfeminine by their standards. Among similarly uniformed women in the Marine Corps, she had been resented for her unusual strengths and command presence. She had been the woman reluctantly singled out" (Forrest qtd. in Munt, *Murder by the Book* 124). Although Kate is "a decent, admirable person," she is not an "excelling" hero (Forrest qtd. in Markowitz 47). She keeps low-profile in a chiefly male and heterosexual work environment and in a predominantly homophobic society. Indicative in this respect is the bigotry of her colleague Ed Taylor Kate suffers in the early novels. When in *Murder by Tradition*, for example, Kate and Ed investigate the murder of a young homosexual, Ed is rather lenient towards the suspect whom Kate suspects of gay-bashing. When Kate confronts him with his attitude, it becomes clear that Ed, the stereotypical redneck police officer, has other priorities than solving this particular crime. Kate's "outsider quality" is not that of the typical sleuth. Moreover, she does not adhere to traditional crime writing's humanist take on identity in terms of agency, coherence, and autonomy. Kate's ethos is conceived of as altogether more fluid and relational. Overall, indicative in this perspective is the series' queer dealing with gender, sex, and sexuality. Although Kate's butch position is a somewhat contentious issue among lesbian feminists, for some of whom the butch position still comes down to a forced mimicking of masculine behaviour (see Palmer, "The Lesbian Thriller" 19), Kate's ethos is incompatible with rigid identity labels. It challenges, rather, much in the sense of Butler, their imperatives. As Gillian Whitlock notes, "the difficulties of occupying any identity conistently and coherently are evident in the characterization of Delafield" (115). And indeed, in her relationship with her partner Aimee Kate "inverts" from butch to femme. When she brings this up to her friend and "dyke mentor" Maggie Schaeffer, the latter gives her a warm lecture and states that it is very normal to have a dynamic sex life, break stereotypes and swap roles (116). When in Hancock Park Kate's FTM (female to male) transgender nephew Dylan enters the series, Kate gets to appreciate queer as more inclusive than lesbian and gay. Sexuality is presented as a broad spectre and the persona of Dylan in a sense epitomizes Butler's notion of gender performativity. Dylan, "a slender, bony, flat-chested figure with dark hair in a mannish cut no more than an inch in length" shocks Kate (Forrest, *Hancock Park* 181). Not only by her masculine looks, "Dylan Harrison was at the farthest end of bull dyke: she could not look more masculine unless she exposed a penis", but also by her stating that she is not female, that her body is a mistake (*Hancock Park* 181). Interestingly, and this pleads for Forrest's representation of lesbianism which is finely tuned in historical and social detail (Whitlock 113), Kate and Aimee have a row on the matter. Kate is a 50-something lesbian and her "closed" conception of her sexuality dates prior to the changes of the late 1960s. The younger Aimee, by contrast, has a much more "open" perspective. Aimee figures Dylan is in "the same boat as [they] are" but it takes Kate a while to come to terms with why "it isn't good enough for [Dylan] to be a lesbian" (*Hancock Park* 183-85).

Palmer points out how the traditional sleuth in his role of independent loner is incompatible with the ideals of a feminist community ("The Lesbian Thriller" 93). Kate's ethos testifies to this and teases out the balance between individuality and community. Early on in the series Kate develops a sense of self by (hesitantly) approaching the "idealized" lesbian community of the Nightwood Bar (Whitlock 108). In *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* Kate and Ed find themselves on "lesbian territory." Here, Kate: "Felt stripped of her grey gabardine pants and jacket, her conservative cloak of invisibility in the conventional world. In here she was fully exposed against her natural background. She recognized aspects of herself in each of the women staring back at her" (*Murder*

at the Nightwood Bar 134). Munt notes correctly that phrasing lesbianism in terms of uncovering a natural core is not very innovative but applauds the representation of identity as a complex process (Munt, *Murder by the Book* 130). The latter is indeed what takes place in the quote; Kate gets a sense of self in the multiple and fractured intersection of looks. The Nightwood Bar turns into a home front for Kate but the communitas feeling is not essentialized. From time to time the notion of "family" crops up in the series, referring to the women of the Nightwood Bar, the LAPD force, Kate's actual brother, or even the nucleus Kate-Aimee. These "families" are, however, not unproblematic. In *Apparition Alley* Kate is shot by friendly fire and has to deal with a network of police backlash and corruption and in *Hancock Park* she feels unable to relate to her homophobic brother. It is precisely the rough and diverse nature of these networks that stresses the downfall of the autonomous hero and projects identity as a complex interacting of self and other. Kate "is based" in different relational webs. Moreover, the dissemination of the meaning of "family" discards the traditional heterosexual family as the centre of identity. In Kate's world new connections are formed which defy the traditional course of life. This dynamic also impinges, slowly but surely, on Kate's "traditional" detective characteristics: she is a taciturn sleuth with impossible hours and a love of the bottle, but when Aimee walks out on her in *Hancock Park*, Kate complies to her partner's wishes. For the sake of love and/or in the face of loneliness, she gives up these unsociable detective characteristics and even agrees to see a relationship counsellor.

The series does not restrict the renegotiation of politically reactionary binary thought to the field of sexuality. Zooming in on the professional Kate, it is evident that she is a very good cop. She is not only "Miss Integrity all the way through" (*Apparition Alley* 244) but is also known to be "a straight shooter, a real good detective who comes into everything with a clean mind" (66). Kate's minority position makes her acutely aware of the discriminating implications of (police) binary thinking and, spotless as her record may be, her way of solving cases is not all that transparent or "by the book." Kate upholds the detective convention of solving the mystery idiosyncratically but part of her method is the exact opposite of rational deduction. Both in *Murder by Tradition* and *Hancock Park* she gets to the heart of the case not by smart reasoning but by a profound sense of empathy with the victim. She visits the murder scene and actually asks the murdered victim's spirit for help: "What were your last thoughts when you sat here looking out at your garden, knowing it was the final time? Did you ever dream any of this would happen? Your spirit is here in this place, I feel it, Victoria. Tell me what I should know" *(Hancock Park* 214). Kate relies firmly on such "conversations" with the victims although she realizes she could never use them as evidence in court. Interestingly, this aspect relates to an important strand in feminism which focuses on a positive ethics of care and empathy as opposed to the patriarchal reduction of women to the role of caretaker (on this, see DesAutels and Waugh). Kate's peculiar, open-minded detective work combines such a feminist ethics productively with patriarchal police law and brings along a view on a very diverse world. She points out vast areas of grey in what her colleagues perceive as a black and white jungle. This peculiar method, moreover, stands out literally from her official police work by its slant typeface. In *Murder at the Nightwood Bar* the "criminal" she books is a dying woman driven to insanity by her husband and her faith. The *Beverly Malibu* puts into question the binaries good vs. evil, truth vs. lies and past vs. present by raking up political McCarthyism. In *Hancock Park* the defendant is clearly guilty albeit not of the charges he is tried for. Events in each novel plunge Kate into dealing with a wide range of social issues going from homophobia over AIDS, corruption in the police force, child molestation, marital violence, and suicide. In *Apparition Alley* Kate even momentarily picks up on psychologist's Calla Dearborn's African American roots to question the ties between the African American and the gay community as minorities. In spite of the series' social critique, however, Kate's focus is on individual cases rather than on the system. She uncovers and ponders social injustice but, although her indignation is always strong, in the end prefers a-political individualism over building towards structural change. True, this ensures interesting and at times tense conversations between Kate and the more politically-minded Maggie and Aimee.

I have shown that the Bakhtinian concepts of ethos and chronotope are central notions in a typology of action stories. The chronotope posits the temporal-spatial frame in which the action takes place and the ethos infuses this constellation with life, the human touch of the hero. To-

gether they make it possible to gauge the worldview and image of man the story projects. Traditional action stories portray a mission ethos in an idealistic chronotope or a transformation ethos in a realistic chronotope. More modern stories tend to mingle either ethos with either chronotope. The latter is what happens in recent crime writing where the traditional mission ethos gets caught up with fairly realistic spatial elements. Feminist and queer writers have explored this hybridization of the detective genre and challenged its traditionally masculine and heterosexual properties. My question has been how an feminist lesbian detective ethos bears upon the story's chronotope. The Kate Delafield series are a popular and by no means radical example of crime fiction featuring a feminist lesbian hero. Kate adheres to the typical image of the searching hero in that each novel presents her with a mystery to solve but she undercuts the archetypal hero's patriarchal macho traits in displaying a transformative, relational subjectivity. This implicates a more "fluid" world in which the boundaries constituting rigid dualisms like victim vs. criminal and true vs. false get blurred. A continuous, diverse networking is favoured over a rigid social hierarchy. The typical cyclical time frame corresponding to the natural course of life is problematized by the questionable "solutions" to the cases and by the novels' touching on social issues such as gay families. The series do not, however, get stuck in a negative affirmation of subjective disintegration and relativism. Empathy is foregrounded as an essential element of Kate's detective work and society is depicted as a diverse but interactive social spectrum. Forrest's hero puts the diversification of the hetero-patriarchal world of crime writing on the right track. The only false note is Kate's closeted and a-political standpoint. Maybe in the next novel she will realize that a "sealed-off" position like hers is not all that productive in the bringing about of a "a verbal-ideological decentering"?

Works Cited

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes toward a Historical Poetics." *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981. 84-254.
Bakhtin, Mikhail M. "The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)." *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. 10-59.
Bauer, Dale M. *Feminist Dialogics: A Theory of Failed Community*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1988.
Bauer, Dale M., and Susan Jaret McKinstry. *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1991.
Bertens, Hans, and Theo D'haen. Contemporary American Crime Fiction. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001.
Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter*. London: Routledge, 1993.
Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Ed. Diana Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991. 13-31.
Cawelti, John G. *Adventure, Mystery, And Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976.
Cranny-Francis, Anne. *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*. Cambridge: Polity P, 1990.
Dilley, Kimberly J. *Busybodies, Meddlers, and Snoops: the Female Hero in Contemporary Women's Mysteries*. Westport: Greenwood, 1998.
DesAutels, Peggy, and Joanne Waugh. *Feminists Doing Ethics*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
Forrest, Katherine V. *Murder at the Nightwood Bar*. Tallahassee: Naiad P, 1987.
Forrest, Katherine V. *The Beverly Malibu*. Tallahassee: Naiad P, 1989.
Forrest, Katherine V. *Murder by Tradition*. Tallahassee: Naiad P, 1991.
Forrest, Katherine V. *Apparition Alley*. New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 1997.
Forrest, Katherine V. *Hancock Park*. New York: Berkley Prime Crime, 2004.
Forrest, Katherine V. *Katherine V. Forrest* (2006): <ttp://www.art-with-attitude.com/forrest/forrest.html>.
Hohne, Karen, and Helen Wussow. *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994.
Irons, Glenwood. *Feminism in Women's Detective Fiction*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1995.
Jagose, Annamarie. *Queer Theory*. Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1996.
Keunen, Bart. "Bakhtin, Genre Formation, and the Cognitive Turn: Chronotopes as Memory Schemata." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 2.2 (2000): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol2/iss2/2/>.
Keunen, Bart. "Moralism and Individualism in Urban Fiction: A Deleuzian and Bakhtinian Critique of Spatial Transgressions in Contemporary Crime Novels." *Primerjalna knjizevnost.* 27.2 (2004): 105-19.
Keunen, Bart. *Tijd voor een verhaal. Mens- en Wereldbeelden in de (populaire) verhaalcultuur*. Gent: Academia P, 2006. Forthcoming.
Markowitz, Judith A. *The Gay Detective Novel: Lesbian and Gay Main Characters and Themes in Mystery Fiction*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004.
McElhinny, Bonnie. "Fearful, Forceful Agents of the Law: Ideologies about Language and Gender in Police Officers' Narratives about the Use of Physical Force." *Pragmatics* 13.2 (2003): 253-84.
Munt, Sally R. *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Munt, Sally. *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*. London: Cassell, 1998.
Nestle, Joan. *The Persistent Desire: a Femme-Butch Reader*. Boston: Alyson, 1992.
Palmer, Paulina. "The Lesbian Feminist Thriller and Detective Novel." *What Lesbians Do in Books*. Ed. Elaine Hobby and Chris White. London: The Women's P, 1991. 9-27.
Palmer, Paulina. "The Lesbian Thriller: Crimes, Clues and Contradictions." *Outwrite: Lesbianism and Popular Culture*. Ed. Gabriele Griffin. London: Pluto P, 1993. 86-105.
Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.
Steblyk, Cathy. "Corpi, Murakami, and Contemporary Hardboiled Fiction." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 5.2 (2003): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol5/iss2/3/>.
Van Gorp, H., R. Ghesquiere, and D. Delabastita. *Lexicon van literaire termen*. Groningen: Martinus Nijhoff, 1998.
Vasvári, Louise O. "Queer Theory and Discourses of Desire." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.1 (2006): <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol8/iss1/2/>.
Walton, Priscilla L., and Manila Jones. *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.
Weed, Elizabeth, and Naomi Schor. *Feminism Meets Queer Theory*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997.
Whitlock, Gillian. "'Cop it Sweet': Lesbian Crime Fiction." *The Good, the Bad and the Gorgeous: Popular Culture's Romance with Lesbianism*. Ed. Belinda Budge and Diane Hamer. London: Pandora, 1994. 96-118.

Author's profile: Sarah Posman teaches in the Department of English at Ghent University where she is working towards her doctorate in literature focusing on texts by Gertrude Stein and Deleuze and Guattari. Posman received her M.A. in Germanic languages in 2004, followed by an M.A. in literary studies in 2005, both from Ghent University. She has published articles on Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, and Denise Rileyand in *yang* and currently she is working on an article bout Stein's "Patriarchal Poetry" from a feminist Deleuzian perspective. E-mail: <sarah.posman@ugent.be>.