



The Female Detective through Popular Culture:

Kate Beckett in *Castle*

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Abstract

Popular culture has been argued to construct and perpetrate most of society's current ideas and beliefs, especially when taking into account its representation of gender roles. The following dissertation will study how popular culture has acted in the construction of the professional woman and, more specifically, of the female detective character. This preliminary research shows that professional women in media are often subject to patriarchy and deemed to domestic life, as working aspirations become sources of female anguish. Following an in-depth analysis of Kate Beckett as a product of a female detective TV series, the final aim of this project will be to defend the character's potential as a good professional female detective even though it is a constituent of popular culture. The application of cultural and feminist studies to the character's analysis will corroborate the assumption of Det. Kate Beckett as an adequate feminist role model.

Keywords: popular culture, detective fiction, feminist detective fiction, gender, *Castle*, Kate Beckett.

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1. Introduction.

The changing realities concerning gender role conceptions and the consequent influx of professional women in society have notoriously found in popular culture an important ally through which to explore, subvert and perpetrate newly discovered images of women –whether it is to celebrate them or to advocate for more traditional representations. In this sense, detective fiction –and more specifically its hardboiled tradition– was one of the initially preferred genres to exploit women’s developing conventions given its potential to examine and discuss societies’ concerns. The combined potential of both popular culture and its response to women’s higher public profile, and detective fiction will be the point of departure of the following dissertation, which will focus on the analysis of Kate Beckett, the protagonist of the TV series *Castle*, as a contemporary female detective figure and a product of popular culture. The aim of the character’s exploration will be to reach conclusions about whether the series ultimately presents a professional female detective role model with which women can identify, and whether it conforms to or challenges feminist and/or postfeminist agendas.

1.1 Data Collection.

The primary sources for analysis will include several *Castle* episodes ranging from season 1 (2009) to season 6 (2014), as well as the TV series’ novels, allegedly written by the show’s protagonist –Richard Castle– and starring Kate Beckett’s alter ego –Nikki Heat. Although a more in-depth analysis has been made of the series’ first season and first novel, the entirety of what encompasses *Castle* has been taken into consideration in order to focus on Kate Beckett’s character development through the evolution of the show’s several narrative arcs. Additionally, secondary sources will consist of texts that will enable me to establish the framework of the analysis, which will include (1) the origins and development of detective fiction; (2) the origins and development of feminist detective fiction; and (3) the evolution of the representation of professional women in the media.

1.2 Methodology.

In order to analyse the data obtained from *Castle* it will be interesting to draw on cultural studies, as it is a method that permits to “explore culture [by benefiting] from several disciplines to examine the relations of culture and power” (Barker, 2012: 35). In this manner, cultural studies, together with feminism and gender studies –theories that cultural studies draws on– will be especially relevant for the analysis of the character’s development and significance in relation to the presentation of professional women in the media. This will help to determine how the media functions as a tool to understand society but also shapes and determines societies’ beliefs. Additionally, applied to feminism and gender studies, it translates into the notion that while the media has been argued to perpetrate negative images of women, it has also been fundamental for the promotion and advancement of women’s aspirations (Klein, 2006). Finally, the data gathered from the series’ episodes and novels will be examined through textual analysis, a method which enables us to observe the “most likely interpretations that might be made out of a text” (McKee, 2003: 2) and, hence, reach conclusions about whether *Castle* aids in the presentation of Kate Beckett as a female role model.

2. Introducing *Castle*.

On March 9, 2009 *Castle* premiered on ABC as the network's new police procedural. Under the catchphrase "A whole new chapter in crime solving" and a set of strong characters at its core, the show successfully combines attitude and humour in equal measure.¹ Created by Andrew W. Marlowe, *Castle*'s premise of intertwining the life of a best-selling crime novel author with the lives of a hardcore gang of detectives –especially with that of a somehow by-the-book female detective–, has proven to be the key for the creation of a well established TV show. Six seasons, 128 episodes and a gradual increase of viewers –from an average of 10.19 million (ABC Medianet, 2009) during its first season to 12.63 million (Deadline.com, 2014) during its sixth– corroborate the aforementioned success, alongside with three consecutive People's Choice Awards for TV's favourite crime drama. To fully grasp the show's dynamics, the following paragraphs will be devoted to the analysis of its major characters and narrative arcs.

2.1 Main Characters: An Insight into the 12th Precinct.

Richard Edgar Castle (Nathan Fillion), roguish mystery writer and "the bad boy of best sellers"² is presented as the embodiment of success. In spite of two failed marriages and his Broadway diva mother, Martha Rodgers (Susan Sullivan), who has found her way into his home and for whom he feigns innocuous annoyance, Rick Castle –formerly Richard Alexander Rogers but overzealous for a more literary name– has raised an exemplary daughter, teenager Alexis Castle (Molly Quinn), and lives in a world of fame and luxury. Nevertheless, his 19 best-sellers (RichardCastle.net, 2014) and his highly successful series featuring detective Derrick Storm do not seem to be enough to satisfy the needs of his intrepid imagination. This is the reason why, in the midst of a severe case of writer's block, he decides to kill off his best-selling character, putting an end to his Derrick Storm series. "There were no surprises" he argues to his daughter during the launching party of his last novel, "I knew what was going to happen every moment in every scene. It's just like these parties. They've become so predictable. Just once, I'd like someone to come up to me and say something new" ('Flowers for Your Grave' 1.1). Just then,

¹ 'Whodunit: The Genesis of *Castle*'. *Castle: The Complete First Season*. DVD Extras. 2009.

² 'Season 1 Promo'. *Youtube*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyZc_aY1vnE Retrieved: 13/05/2014

he is approached by detective Kate Beckett; there has been a murder and he needs to be questioned.

Katherine Beckett (Stana Katic) is a tough, savvy homicide detective from the NYPD (New York Police Department) known for her first-class investigating skills and her apparent penchant for the “freaky cases” as they are the ones which “require more” (‘Flowers for Your Grave’ 1.1). The youngest woman to be a homicide detective in the NYPD (ABC.com, 2014a), Det. Beckett’s thirst for bringing justice to victims seems to be fuelled by a personal drive and, as the audience will soon learn, that is exactly the case. Johanna Beckett, Kate’s mother and a successful New York civil rights attorney, was brutally murdered in a dark alley when Beckett was only 19, leaving her devastated. That, together with an insufficient cop investigation which “attributed it to gang violence; a random wayward event”, left the killer on the loose just because “[the cops] couldn’t think outside the box, so they just tried to package it up nicely” (‘A Chill Goes through Her Veins’ 1.5). This dreadful event not only prompted a 19-year-old Kate Beckett to switch careers –from pre-law to the NYPD–, it also shaped the current detective and encouraged her to always think outside the box, covering all the facts as accurately as possible in an attempt to bring closure and justice –what she did not get– to the victims and their families.

Kevin Ryan (Seamus Dever) and Javier Esposito (Jon Huertas) are the partner detectives in Beckett’s investigative team and they are usually on the receiving end of Det. Beckett’s demands during the investigation; “they go out and do a lot of things like digging in files and dumpsters”.³ On the one hand, Det. Ryan is portrayed as a light-hearted, focused and loyal detective, whose past in the Narcotics squad has provided him with a dark background and a “wealth of obscure knowledge” (ABC.com, 2014b). His balanced management of a professional and a personal married life –he marries in ‘Till Death Do Us Part’ (4.11) and is expecting a baby by season 6–, makes of him a cheerful and dedicated professional, fully committed to the task of bringing criminals to justice. On the other hand, Det. Esposito, with a tougher yet

³ ‘Whodunit: The Genesis of *Castle*’. *Castle: The Complete First Season*. DVD Extras. 2009.

unceremonious façade, is presented as the opposite of his partner. Esposito's past in the Special Forces and in the Organized Crime Task Force (ABC.com, 2014c) has nourished him with harshness and military knowledge, making of him a loyal detective capable of enduring all kinds of adversities for the sake of justice. The detectives' opposite attitudes towards crime-solving make of these partners the perfect duo, providing the show with a sense of friendly dynamism.

Captains Roy Montgomery (Ruben Santiago-Hudson) and Victoria Gates (Penny Johnson Jerald) will be the characters in charge of the 12th Precinct throughout the seasons and thus the bosses of the detective gang. Roy Montgomery (seasons 1-3) is an affable yet diligent boss who appreciates and encourages the detectives' work, but also reprimands them when necessary, making sure that the investigations are successfully and professionally wrapped up. His high regard of Det. Beckett soon enough leads to a mentor-protégée relationship between the captain and the detective; "you are the finest homicide [detective] I've ever trained, bar none" ('Sucker Punch' 2.13), he acknowledges to Det. Beckett during an especially hard case for her. Nevertheless, this relationship acquires a whole new meaning in 'Knockout' (3.24) when Captain Montgomery is uncovered as one of the cops who knew the truth about the conspiracy around Johanna Beckett's murder.

I put it all into the job, Kate. I became the best cop I could be. And then when you walked into the 12th, I felt the hand of God. I knew he was giving me another chance and I thought, if I could protect you the way I should have protected her. ('Knockout' 3.24)

These are his last words to Det. Beckett before he sacrifices himself in a suicide mission, in a vain attempt to protect the detective from the dangerous, higher forces behind the conspiracy. After Montgomery's death –which the detectives honour as that of a hero while covering up the dark truth of his past– a brand new and totally different Captain is introduced to the 12th Precinct. Captain Victoria Gates (seasons 3–), not so affectively nicknamed Capt. "Iron" Gates ('Rise' 4.1), is a strict detective from the Internal Affairs Division who willingly accepts her new charge as an opportunity to bring her professionalism to a whole new level. Almost the

youngest female detective to enter the NYPD, beaten out by Det. Beckett by only six weeks (ABC.com, 2014d), Gates' no-nonsense attitude has made her "first and foremost, a fair and decent cop" (ABC.com, 2014d), and not even her harsh façade –her first encounter with the detectives includes the following words: "if my mother drops by you can call her Ma'am, call me Sir or Captain" ('Rise' 4.1)– will prevent her from backing up her detectives when they deserve it.

2.2 Main Narrative Arcs: Castle and Beckett's Relationship vs. Johanna Beckett's Murder.

One of the most salient aspects of *Castle* is without a doubt its abundance of crazy, unusual murders; a woman inside a washing machine ('Nanny McDead' 1.2), another frozen, hanging from a ceiling ('A Chill Goes through Her Veins' 1.5), and a man rolled up in a rug ('Hell Hath No Fury' 1.4) are some of the macabre mysteries that the 12th Precinct team must investigate during the show's first episodes. This being established, *Castle's* creator, Andrew W. Marlowe, has stated on several occasions that, whereas the appeal for the freak murder cases is strong, the show's biggest investment is a gang of terrific, realist characters worthy of the audience's attention.⁴ Hence, it is no wonder why these characters, with their several flaws and strengths, are presented as the show's core and are constantly challenged by the requirements of their job. Nevertheless, unbeknownst to the detectives, one of their most interesting challenges – especially for Det. Kate Beckett– will be that of accepting the intrusion of the "charming bad boy" ('Flowers for your Grave' 1.1), Richard Castle, into their work and lives. First as an assistant during a series of murders copied directly from his books, and then as a rather permanent NYPD civilian consultant, under the pretence of doing research for his newly inspired set of novels based on Det. Beckett, Richard Castle's antics will not go unnoticed at the 12th Precinct.

In the midst of crime solving, the development of Castle and Beckett's relationship is the most prominent narrative arc of the show. From the first episode, there is an initial subtle tension and

⁴ 'Whodunit: The Genesis of *Castle*'. *Castle: The Complete First Season*. DVD Extras. 2009.

attraction between these two characters, an attraction that arises, nonetheless, from their total opposite personalities. While Det. Kate Beckett is annoyed by Castle's childishness and self-centeredness during their investigations, he becomes all too eager to make of crime solving a pastime, as if he was outlining one of his books. This is the reason why Beckett has to constantly remind him that "[they] are solving murders. Not writing a book" ('A Chill Goes through Her Veins' 1.5) and that "in real life [they] don't dismiss a suspect because he appears too guilty" ('Hell Hath No Fury' 1.4), gloomily concluding that "a cop doesn't get to decide how the story ends" ('A Chill Goes through Her Veins' 1.5). Nevertheless, as the first season develops, Castle slowly manages to unveil Det. Beckett's façade by, surprisingly, studying every detail of her personality. His wild guess about Beckett having ulterior motives for becoming a cop which are related to a dark event of her past, presumably the death of a beloved one, prove to be correct when, in a heart-wrenching moment between the two characters, Beckett reveals that her mother was brutally killed when she was 19. The fact that the murder was never solved endowed her with a permanent emotional baggage that she cannot get away from: "you don't [get over it]" she confides to the daughter of a victim, "but one day you'll wake up and you'll find that you don't mind carrying it around with you. At least that's as far as I've come" ('Home Is Where the Heart Stops' 1.7).

As the series unfolds, Castle and Beckett's partnership consolidates as their mutual respect grows. Notwithstanding their newly acquired sense of partnership, they seem to repress their feelings for each other as they grow stronger yet more complicated. Additionally, the mystery about Beckett's mother's murder seems to haunt her –whether she wants it or not– as new developments present themselves to her, bringing her always a step closer to the real murderer but never directly to him. During Beckett's own quest for justice, Castle will become her most trusted partner and advisor, even though this will bring their partnership/friendship to an end at least twice when he confronts her about the perils of the investigation; once in 'Knockout'(3.24), which ends with Beckett shot and almost killed, and then in 'Always'(4.23), in which Castle finally reveals his feelings for her and admits that this war is going to get her killed and that he is not going to stick around to witness it.

Coincidentally, after Beckett ignores Castle's warning stating that "it's my life. Mine! You don't get to decide" ('Always' 4.23) and that "if they want a war, then I will bring them a war, straight to their doorsteps" ('Always' 4.23), she does not only get almost killed by the same man who shot her, but also suspended –together with Det. Esposito– from her job after going too far behind her captain's back. In a shocking announcement, she reveals that she does not accept her suspension and that she wants to resign instead. It seems that the conspiracy she is facing has finally defeated her and she is unwilling to sacrifice her life physically and metaphorically, as she reveals to Castle in a surprising twist at the end of 'Always' (4.23), when she finally decides to choose Castle over her past and "the wall [she] built up" around herself because "[she] just didn't want to hurt like that again" ('Rise' 4.1). For obvious reasons, Beckett's rest from the case does not go as she had anticipated, given that, as Det. Ryan informs her the morning after she resigns, she is still at risk of being attacked by her mother's killer. Now, however, she finds a stronger support in Castle and he is finally able to offer it to her. Their investigation leads them to the final clue towards the man who has orchestrated everything: William Bracken (Jack Coleman), a powerful US Senator thirsty for political advance. Knowing that there is no way of arresting the Senator because of his power and status, she decides to confront him in a face-to-face encounter that shows that Det. Kate Beckett is stronger than ever:

So here's how it is: the deal that you had with Smith, that's our deal now. And if anything happens to me or anyone I care about, that file goes public. Am I clear? ... And one more thing. Whoever it is you think I am, whatever it is you think you know about me, you have no idea what I am capable of or how far I will go. I am done being afraid. It's your turn now. ('After the Storm' 5.1)

Det. Beckett's new resolution could not be clearer. "I'll get justice for her" she responds when asked about her mom, "just not today. Until then, I'll get it for others" ('After the Storm' 5.1). Thus, after completing her suspension time, she comes back to the force, solving crimes as enthusiastically and professionally as ever while exploring her newly developed relationship with Castle. That is, until she catches the attention of a special investigator for the Attorney

General from the Department of Homeland Security, who thinks that she is “exceptional, smart, strong and an asymmetrical thinker” and sees “bigger things for her” (‘The Human Factor’ 5.23). Thus, he offers her a job in Washington DC, with the Attorney General. This presents Kate Beckett with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, yet she hides it from Castle, and schedules a job interview which makes her reflect about her life, her relationship with Castle and what she wants to accomplish. Unsurprisingly, when Castle finds out what Beckett has hidden for him, he gets mad at her, and this leaves plenty of time for both of them to reconsider where their lives are going. While Beckett decides that “this job is what I want” (‘Watershed’ 5.24), in spite of what it could mean for her relationship with Castle, he finally decides to confront her about the situation and, without knowing that she has already made up her mind, proposes to her. It will not be until she is sure that he is not proposing out of fear of her accepting the job and leaving, that she says yes.

Accordingly, Castle reassures Det. Beckett that the job is going to be a great opportunity for her, and “if that means things are going to get difficult and we have to figure them out, then I’m willing to figure them out, assuming you’re willing to figure them out with me” (‘Watershed’ 5.24). The new season opens with a brand new side of Detective –now Federal Agent– Beckett, struggling with a demanding new job and a long-distance relationship but content personally and professionally. Unfortunately, when ethics get in the way of solving a murder, Beckett’s strong sense of morality ends up backfiring and she loses the job with the Attorney General. “[A] part of me really admires you for the choice that you made, you are one of the best agents I’ve ever worked with” her superior, Agent Rachel McCord (Lisa Edelstein) admits to her, “but the people we answer to don’t feel that way” (‘Need to Know’ 6.3). After this, Beckett finds herself back again at the 12th Precinct doing what she does best, bringing justice to those who deserve it, while she and Castle deal with the preparations of their upcoming wedding. That is, until Det. Beckett –together with Castle, Det. Ryan and Det. Esposito– is able to put her mother’s murder to rest in ‘Veritas’ (6.22), a heart-wrenching and liberating episode that confronts the detective and Senator William Bracken, who is finally put behind bars.

3. Defining *Castle* As Detective Fiction.

The following section will be devoted to the analysis and classification of *Castle* within the sphere of detective fiction. Thus, to be able to fully understand the series the following paragraphs will consider the history of the genre, from the classical foundations of the detective formula to the hardboiled tradition, including the unfolding of some of the variants and sub-genres which have originated since the birth of the genre. Additionally, it will also be of importance to examine the status and evolution of the genre on television, as it has acquired its own relevance through the dissemination of crime drama television series. The analysis of the above will bring to the fore all the necessary elements for the inclusion of *Castle* as a constituent and perpetuator of detective fiction.

3.1 Detective Fiction's Origins: The Whodunits.

When it comes to establishing the foundations of detective fiction, the vast majority of researchers seem to agree on Edgar Allan Poe as the main originator of the genre, with the publication of what is considered to be the first detective fiction work: “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (Priestman, 1998). The story, published in 1841, engages readers in “a hideous and inexplicable crime” (Parini, 2004: 373) which policemen are “too cunning and instinctive” (Parini, 2004: 373) to solve. Subsequently, Auguste Dupin, “an eccentric and reclusive genius” (Parini, 2004: 373), becomes the interpreter of a series of clues only intelligible through a rational and deliberate process of unravelling (Priestman, 1998). Thereby, Poe’s invention of this tale of ratiocination –concept used by Poe to refer to the detective story (Priestman, 1998)– does not only signify the establishment of the archetypal detective (Parini, 2004), it also contains the main motifs necessary for the development of the detective genre (Priestman, 1998).

Another significant aspect of Poe’s creation is that it presents an enthusiastic single-hero – further exploited in “The Mystery of Marie Rôget” (1842) and “The Purloined Letter” (1844)– who demands an equally enthusiastic reader audience willing to attentively take part in his tale of ratiocination. For this reason, the narrator was a friend or companion of the detective, who

became a representative of the reader's speculations about the development of the investigation while providing an admiring perspective that allowed readers to see the exceptional nature of the detective (Parini, 2004). Therefore, the establishment of a close reader-detective relationship, one in which the audiences engaged in the same deduction process as the detective thanks to the intervention of a deferential narrator, would become crucial in the development of the detective figure (Priestman, 1998). Certainly, each of these peculiarities in Poe's fiction laid the ground for the propagation of a brand new genre, led by an eccentric and exceedingly analytical detective figure (Parini, 2004; Priestman, 1998).

The standardization of Poe's narratives explains why, a few years later, the genre became popularized with the success of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and the successive novellas and short stories he wrote featuring Sherlock Holmes as the leading detective. Doyle's fiction bound readers in a serial formula based on pure detection mixed with rational and historical explanations of motifs that culminated in a present-tense finale –i.e. a final deduction scene in which the detective unravels all the evidence to solve the case (Priestman, 1998). Additionally, though localized and not entirely disruptive of society's apparent well-being, individual villains in Doyle's literature are presented in recurrent shapes and could take the form of the least-likely character, ranging from rural people to members of the aristocracy. From the above analysis, it would not be fanciful to suggest that Doyle consolidated the detective fiction genre, thus becoming another major precedent (Priestman, 1998).

Gradually, the genre gained more popularity and massively appealed readers who were “all too willing to be taken for a ride by the fantasies as a substitute for confronting societies' real problems” (Priestman, 1998: 17). This became evident especially after the First World War, when detective novels secured a characteristic dry humour to cope with traumatic content, while offering a sense of reassurance and stability to a fractured society (Priestman, 1998). Accordingly, it was also after WWI when detective fiction entered into its Golden Age (1920s/1930s) and became a fully consolidated genre with the development of the *whodunits* or

locked room mysteries. These mysteries were basically narratives led by more buffoonish and less brilliant detectives who investigated “the stories and half-truths of a reasonably large group of suspects, immobilized in place and, effectively, in time” (Priestman, 1998: 20). Likewise, Golden Age whodunits also included minor suspect-related by-plots, as seen in Agatha Christie’s *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), which showed characters engaging in dubious activities that served to ensure that no one was free from suspicion (Priestman, 1998).

However, in some cases the proliferation of the detective novel did not necessarily imply its amelioration, given that writers of the genre began to feel comfortable enough to take some risky liberties with it, perhaps attempting against its own essence. In response to these newly increasing ‘bad habits’, the novelist S.S. Van Dine claimed that there are “very definite laws [for writing detective stories], and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them” (Van Dine, 1928). In short, these rules establish that a logical deduction of clues by strictly naturalistic means is essential in a proper detective fiction work; hence no tricks should be played on readers so as to let them investigate –or even solve the case– alongside the detective. Moreover, they also determine that the detective or an official investigator (or an obvious servant) should not turn out to be the culprits, concluding that there must be personal and explicable reasons behind the crime.

3.2 Detective Fiction in the United States: The Hardboiled Tradition.

Parallel to the British Golden Age of detective fiction, the United States experienced a detective fiction phenomenon of their own with the creation, in 1920, of *The Black Mask* magazine and its subsequent assembly of tough hardboiled detectives (Marling, 2009). This new type of detective –also known as private-eye– encompassed mainly two characteristics: a solitary status, granted by his social independence, and an inclination towards unorthodox crime-solving methods, characterised by an outstanding ability to use and endure physical violence (Priestman, 1998; Marling, 2009). Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, two of the most prominent private-eye writers of the magazine, presented them as outcast, crude heroes who were always in direct threat from criminals, and thus not afraid of putting their guns to use

(Priestman, 1998; Marling, 2009). Furthermore, whereas whodunits were for audiences willing to take a somehow enjoyable ride through a process of ratiocination, according to *The Black Mask* magazine's editor hardboiled fiction was addressed to readers who were:

[V]igorous-minded, hard, in a square man's hardness; hating unfairness, trickery, injustice, cowardly underhandedness; standing for a square deal and a fair show in little or big things, and willing to fight for them; not squeamish or prudish, but clean, admiring the good in man and woman; not sentimental in a gushing sort of way, but valuing true emotion; not hysterical, but responsive to the thrill of danger, the stirring exhilaration of clean, swift, hard action – and always pulling for the right guy to come out on top. (Shaw 1931: 9)

The above quote already suggests that hardboiled fiction was not just about some man willing to break the rules for action's sake; instead, the hardboiled detective goes beyond what is right and what is wrong because, ultimately, he knows that there are “more complex and ideological issues at stake” (Walton and Jones, 1999: 212). Correspondingly, solving the crime did not necessarily mean the detective's peace of mind. The real quest went beyond the detective, and even beyond the book, as it centred on the broader problems surrounding society –e.g. crime, poverty, prostitution and corruption (Walter and Jones, 1999; Priestman, 1998; Marling, 2009). More importantly, readers were also made aware of the vulnerable nature of the hardboiled hero in a corrupt society in which, while trying to find –and offer– some reassurance, he was but a mere counterpart to all that was dark in his world (Walter and Jones, 1999; Priestman, 1998; Marling, 2009).

Having considered this, it can be ascertained that hardboiled detective fiction was characterized by a dark aura of crime and harshness, and undoubtedly this had an effect on the detective. But still this could not affect his tough private-eye façade, which caused the hardboiled hero to retreat in the power of language to retain his own emotional stability (Walter and Jones, 1999). For the private-eyes, wisecracking, dark humour, euphemisms and vulgar terminology become intrinsic traits and their way of expressing “socially unacceptable sentiments” (Walter and

Jones, 1999: 134) by “detaching themselves emotionally” (Walter and Jones, 1999: 138) through language. Additionally, the private eye’s promptness in speaking was as exceptional as his adeptness as a listener; the hardboiled detective was known for his attention to the claims and the voices of others while becoming the moral support of the victims (Walter and Jones, 1999; Priestman, 1998). Moreover, a good private-eye had to know how to take advantage of his listening and speaking abilities in order to detect the betraying subtleties of those he had to face (Walter and Jones, 1999).

By the 1940s and 1950s, the hardboiled genre established itself as a successful Hollywood movie genre (Walton and Jones, 1999). The tough, lonesome and violent private-eye detective fighting crime and struggling to survive in a corrupt society not only appealed the audiences, it also resulted in hardboiled fiction becoming a suspense quest about catching criminals, rather than about knowing their identity. An equally significant phenomenon took place during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the hardboiled agenda of exploring societies’ problems coincided with a period of gender role changes (Priestman, 1998). Hence, female writers, such as Sara Paretsky or Marcia Muller, took the opportunity to redirect hardboiled fiction towards those changes, exploiting and subverting gender conventions with the introduction of the female character to the workforce (Walter and Jones, 1999). In short, they challenged the genre by “putting the woman in a man’s role and showing her succeeding against the odds” (Priestman, 1998: 56)

3.3 Other Developments and Subgenres: Police Procedurals and Anti-Conspiracy Thrillers.

For the purposes of this project and once the two main branches of detective fiction have been elaborated, it will be interesting to explore the basics of two other developments within the detective genre, as they can be of assistance for the analysis of *Castle* as detective fiction. In broad terms, police procedurals allowed for the exploration of teamwork within crime solving, thus focusing on a team of professionals and their different investigation techniques (Priestman, 1989). Oppositely, anti-conspiracy thrillers, belonging to the thriller genre, focused on a single

protagonist in a crusade against higher, unknown forces rather than on the unravelling of a past mystery (Priestman, 1998). This being established, the following paragraphs will be devoted to the discussion of their main features.

Police procedurals find their foundations in the United States of the 1970s, a time when crime was no longer something unusual and isolated, but something that could happen anywhere on a daily basis, thus leaving fiction with the need of more realistic methods to address the pressures of contemporary society (Priestman, 1998). Subsequently, writers found in police procedurals a way to allude to these needs while focusing on the lives and joint crime-solving efforts of a team of professional investigators. Additionally, the procedural action revolves around several investigation techniques and routines of crime solving used to investigate the multiple crimes taking place daily, with the added possibility that some of the crimes could remain unsolved at the end of the day (Walter and Jones, 1999; Priestman, 1998). Finally, the nature of police procedurals allowed for the exploration of two important phenomena, (1) the serial killer formula, which followed the team's analysis of the criminal's thoughts and potential courses of action –i.e. his psychological profiling– and (2) the exploration of gender equality, with men and women working as a team towards the same end (Walter and Jones, 1999; Priestman, 1998.).

Conversely, anti-conspiracy thrillers generally comprise stories about a single protagonist who must confront criminals “without the guaranteed support of the forces” (Priestman, 1998: 34), which would become a direct threat for the detective. Given its conspiratorial nature, this type of fiction reached its peak during the 1960s and the 1970s, a time when government controversies, corruption and espionage threatened the belief in institutions as sources of protection and social stability (Priestman, 1998). The anti-conspiracy thriller protagonist is aware of the fact that he must fight against these double-natured institutions without any type of back-up or protection, knowing that they are “too powerful to overcome by a simple naming of their crimes” (Priestman, 1989: 44).

3.4 Television and Detective Fiction: Crime Dramas.

Given the televisual format of *Castle*, crime dramas as the television's counterpart of detective fiction must also be examined. Undoubtedly, there will be similar characteristics between detective fiction literature and crime television dramas, as they both deal with the exploration of crime and murder through the eyes of an investigator. Nevertheless, the disparities in the exploration of criminality in crime dramas have played an important role in the construction of a crime ideology in contemporary society through television (Fabianic, 1997). Therefore, it will be important to consider the foundations and characteristics that constitute this television formula.

Prime television crime drama owes its origins to the success of detective fiction, especially after the Second World War, when existential motifs took hold of the detective's discourse (Lane, 2001). Consequently, as has been established in the discussion of the hardboiled hero, detectives began to realize and accept their role as anti-heroes in a profession that unravelled a world of "social sickness and corruption" (Lane, 2001: 137). This sentiment became an intrinsic trait of the crime drama detective of the 1950s and 1960s, who was no longer a lonely hardboiled private-eye detective, but was transmuted into a trained and disciplined group of police officers working together to solve a crime (Lane, 2001; Fabianic, 1997). In this manner, *Dragnet* (NBC, 1951-1970) became the archetypal procedural crime drama of the period, with the portrayal of investigators as conveyors of moral justice and certainty to a corrupt and criminal society (Lane, 2001; Fabianic, 1997).

It would not be until the 1980s that television crime dramas redirected their focus of attention from the exploration of the investigators dealing with crime, to the exploration of the investigators themselves, as human beings who questioned their own identity in such an uncertain and immoral world (Lane, 2001). Therefore, the formula became a character-driven drama centred on the lives of a group of investigators working, as a team and as a family, against the moral uncertainty of reality as a whole (Lane, 2001). At the same time, it also

focused on the concerns and struggles of the investigator as an individual, for whom facing crime on a daily basis progressively resulted in a loss of faith in humanity (Lane, 2001).

From the 1980s to contemporary times, television crime dramas have retained the aforementioned characteristics, now intrinsic of a television format led by a character with a tormented past or a major flaw –which has predetermined his or her job as an investigator (Lane, 2001; Nefarious, 2012)–, who works in a team which supports and aids during the investigation, and who is usually accompanied by a sidekick, often an inexperienced character or partner (Nefarious, 2012). Additionally, a chief figure who the team must report to becomes usual in the contemporary television formula (Nefarious, 2012), which also benefits from the serial format to enhance character development and explore the lives of this group of investigators (Fabianic, 1997). Conclusively, the series formula develops in the form of stand-alone episodes –possibly entwined by a major narrative arc– with a similar pattern characterised by (1) the presentation of the crime through a teaser, morbid scene, (2) the investigation of the crime, (3) the questioning of suspects through interrogation scenes, and (4) the finding of the actual criminal, usually after other major suspects are unexpectedly dismissed (Sierra, 2011; Nefarious, 2012).

3.5 *Castle's* Detective Formula.

Considering the foundations and development of the detective genre through literature and popular culture allows for the justification of *Castle* within the detective fiction sphere, as the series exploits the essentials of crime solving and the investigation process. Nevertheless, and perhaps one of the reasons behind the TV show's apparent success, *Castle* does not only offer a process of investigation, as is mandatory of crime fiction since the foundations of the genre, it also combines elements from the different subgenres and developments analysed in the previous section. From the whodunit category to the to the conspiracy theme, including the basics of television crime drama, *Castle* brings to the fore a selection from all the best of detective fiction as a whole.

On the whodunit front, Richard Castle is the character who better represents the essentials of the buffoonish detective of the genre's Golden Age. Accordingly, his process of deduction, prompted by his fascination about detail, resembles Sherlock Holmes' style in which a look at someone was enough for him to build up a story; Castle "notices everything about somebody, he gathers information on them very quickly [because] detail matters to him" argues Nathan Fillion about his character in the series.⁵ Moreover, his vast deduction scenes solely based on his storytelling skills as a writer are the embodiment of the essence of Edgar Allan Poe's tale of ratiocination –worth being mentioned is the fact that Castle changed his middle name from Alexander to Edgar as a tribute to the author ('He's Dead, She's Dead' 3.2). Additionally, there is something about Richard Castle that captivates his audience, not only the viewer audience, but his audience in the diegesis of the show (i.e. the 12th Precinct unit). Thus, on more than one occasion the real detectives get caught, fascinated, in the midst of one of Castle's narrations ('Ghosts' 1.8).

Oppositely, Castle's co-protagonist, Det. Kate Beckett is a faithful representation of the hardboiled detective. She is a tough, smart and savvy female detective with a remarkable ability to think outside the box, whose sole purpose is bringing justice to the victims by putting criminals behind bars, whether it involves chasing down criminals in rough persecutions or making them stew in the interrogation room. The above definition represents, without a doubt, the embodiment of a complete hardboiled hero with all the repercussions and existentialist issues it may pose; "there is no victory, there are only battles" Det. Beckett acknowledges about her job "and in the end, the best you can hope for is to find a place to make your stand" ('Knockout' 3.24). Moreover, being a female detective, Det. Beckett's character epitomises the essence of one of the most salient developments of the hardboiled tradition: feminist detective fiction –which will be fully discussed in the following sections. Finally, Det. Beckett's dark past –involving her mother's murder– serves a double function: (1) that of providing her with a personal baggage which prompted her inclination towards the NYPD –a usual trait found in contemporary hardboiled detectives– and (2) that of placing her in the midst of a dangerous

⁵ 'Whodunit: The Genesis of *Castle*'. *Castle: The Complete First Season*. DVD Extras. 2009.

conspiracy, orchestrated by an US Senator and ruled by power, money, corruption and political advancement.

Lastly, the aspects relating *Castle* to police procedurals and crime dramas are evident in the show's investigative process, which is carried out through the joint effort of a group of investigators working together, each of them important and with a history of their own worthy of being explored. Therefore, the essence of *Castle* relies on the mixture of a set of characters with strong personalities and compelling backgrounds, together with the presentation of all sorts of macabre and mysterious crimes. Additionally, *Castle* is a TV show presented in the form of stand-alone episodes –following Sierra's (2011) and Nefarious' (2012) formulaic pattern described in the previous section– which are, nonetheless, related to one another by the series' major narrative arcs and the evolution of the characters' development.

4. Defining *Castle* As Feminist Detective Fiction.

4.1 Feminist Detective Fiction in Novels: The Origins of the Genre.

Even though serious professional women investigators were scarce until the 1970s, it is possible to trace the first representations of detective women back to the late 1920s and the first Golden Age of detective fiction, with writers such as Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham and Dorothy Sayers. The protagonists created by these writers were female sleuths usually portrayed as gossip spinsters or girlfriends and curious old ladies (Priestman, 1998; Mizejewski, 2004). In brief, they were amateur female detectives who transformed their constraints and their “allowed gift for snooping” (Priestman, 1998: 22) into useful detective skills so as to solve murders in the whodunit style of their male counterparts. It is important to note that even though these women were not necessarily female detectives struggling in a profession dominated by men (Priestman, 1998), they offered an alternative to traditional detective fiction and an insight into what the professionalized female detective could become in the 1970s (Mizejewski, 2004).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the establishment of feminism in a changing society promoted a shift in the conception of gender roles, which found in crime fiction and the fictional

detective hero a source from which to exploit and explore prior conventions. Therefore, popular fiction of the time experienced an influx of professional women entering the workplace or training for newly discovered jobs for them –i.e. cops or detectives– (Walton and Jones, 1999), in which they were defined by the work they did rather than by what they looked like (Mizejewski, 2004). P.D. James’ *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972) and Maxine O’Challaghan’s *Death Is Forever* (1974) feature the first female hardboiled private eyes of detective fiction. Yet, as James’ title suggests, women were not still fully recognized in the detective genre and so the female detective character was not quite well-received or promoted, leaving the task for female writers to “independently perceive a gap in popular fiction ... and decide that the hardboiled genre could uniquely accommodate their interests” (Walton and Jones, 2004: 19).

Due to the impact of the aforementioned writers, the first serious professional women investigators began to appear during the 1980s, this time with writers –such as Sue Grafton, Sara Paretsky, Marcia Muller, Linda Barnes or Julie Smith– gaining full recognition and reinforcement for their re-exploration of the female private-eye (Mizejewski, 2004; Walton and Jones, 1999). These writers put “an independent woman detective at the centre of the narrative investigation ... exploring women’s experiences from their own point of view and in a personalized voice” (Walton and Jones, 1999: 30-31), thus establishing a direct line of communication with a growing female audience who identified with the female detective’s stories and ambitions (Mizejewski, 2004). Accordingly, by means of (1) providing women with empowering positions, especially through the language they use –tough talk and wisecracks– and the resistance to conventional codes it implies; and (2) reversing the traditional role of women from that of being observed to that of observing, the new Golden Age of female detective fiction attempted to redirect the male hardboiled tradition by challenging and subverting traditional gender issues for feminist purposes (Walton and Jones, 1999).

Despite the novels’ best efforts, the female detective character was still subject to the traditional and conservative male conventions of the genre, in which law enforcement was potentially

patriarchal and misogynist (Cranny, 1988). Therefore, even though feminist detective fiction portrayed women in authority positions, it also reproduced the stereotypical, sexualised –as femme fatales– and victimised –physically and/or emotionally– images of the females found in the hardboiled tradition (Cranny, 1988; Walton and Jones, 1999). Additionally, there was also an added tension between feminism and femininity, and how to portray a woman in a male position “disrupting gender roles” but “remaining faithful to [detective] tradition” (Walton and Jones, 1999: 99) for which the writers of the time were condemned. Nevertheless, not despite these conventions but because of them, it was possible for feminist detective novels to raise awareness of the conflictive issues of the time while proving that women could succeed in a man’s job and in a genre traditionally dominated by male writers (Mizejewski, 2004; Walton and Jones, 1999).

4.2 The Female Detective in Films: Hollywood’s Stereotypes.

In Hollywood films, the female detective took a different path from that of the novels, as it centred on the threat that the triumph of the female detective could pose rather than on the female detective’s potential to transgress gender role expectations. Therefore, Hollywood films seemed to perpetuate the traditional notion of women as objects of investigation subject to the male perspective: firstly, by retaining the figure of the femme fatale from film noir and the later incorporation of the female detective to the force as an undercover working girl (Tasker, 1998), and then, by anchoring the female character to law enforcement roles –not PI jobs– ruled and dominated by men (Walton and Jones, 1999). Moreover, there has also been a tendency towards pushing the female detectives towards a domestic life outside the force, turning them into victims whose involvement in crime-solving ends up being disruptive and unappealing and/or being kicked out of the working world (Mizejewski, 2004).

The film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, which reproduced the style of the hardboiled novels of the time, already established a pattern in which the hero was a solitary man fighting corruption while involved with a seductive but dangerous woman whose sexuality and attempted independence deserved to be punished (Walton and Jones, 1999; Tasker, 1998): the femme

fatale. Even though by the 1960s and 1970s film noir had evolved into the representation of the hardboiled hero, the figure of the femme fatale prevailed (Walton and Jones, 1999), and resulted in the re-articulation of the woman in the workplace as the undercover working girl, a reminder that she was still an object of desire in a male space (Tasker, 1998). The final representation of the woman investigator in Hollywood films evokes the “anxieties around gender and sexuality” (Tasker, 1998: 117) of the time, which translated into a cliché portrayal of the woman investigator as tough and threatening to men –as a femme fatale–, but at the same time subject to men and drawn into a family life outside the force (Mizejewski, 2004).

Other complementary conventions of the Hollywood female detective involved (1) an exploitation of the woman within patriarchy, subjected to subordinate roles such as students or trainees, and (2) a strong inclination towards violence and female victimization, with detectives usually landing in the role of victims before redirecting their career to that of wives and mothers (Walton and Jones, 1998). *Impulse* (Sondra Locke, 1990), *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990) or *VI Warshawski* (Jeff Kanew, 1991) are some of the films which embody these characteristics of the female investigator, together with the added factor of a romance plot (Mizejewski, 2004), which served to push women into domestic roles. Moreover, these films also benefited from the “visual pleasure” (Walton and Jones, 1999: 237) of women being punished for their threat to traditional patriarchal conventions, with them being kicked out of the force if they could not become good mothers or wives (Walton and Jones, 1999).

The stereotypical representations of the female investigator as a femme fatale subjected to a domestic life began to see their downfall during the mid 1990s and the success of the action heroines in Hollywood (Mizejewski, 2004). Correspondingly, action women introduced a new type of woman to the Hollywood film who sported “serious skills in shooting, martial arts and glossy lipstick” (Mizejewski, 2004: 141), and whose body was “an action body, trained and toned” (Mizejewski, 2004: 143). For women investigators, this involved a redefinition of the female detective character into that of a powerful one, immersed in non-romantic and non-domestic roles, capable of killing, and using and enduring violence (Mizejewski, 2004). *The*

Silence of the Lambs (Jonathan Demme, 1991) was one of the first films to make its female investigator, Clarice Starling, respectable and visible despite her being “a lone woman in a group of men” (Mizejewski, 2004: 181). Other examples of empowered female investigators include the film *Out of Sight* (Steven Soderbergh, 1998) which uses a *homme fatale* character to threaten the power of the female detective, but yet, it ends up proving that the female detective can succeed without having to choose between the law or her lover; and *Fargo* (Joel and Ethan Cohen, 1996) which completely reverses gender roles by having a prestigious female detective as a protagonist married to a domestic man (Mizejewski, 2004).

4.3 Feminist Detective Fiction on Television: The Flexible Format.

Television has portrayed the female investigator in a wide variety of forms, as it has the potential to renegotiate and accommodate its series to the changing demands of audiences – mostly female– as they occur (Mizejewski, 2004; Walton and Jones, 1999). Furthermore, while it is true that the major reasons behind these changes are economic and subjected to ratings and target audiences, television series have been more adventurous in the representation of female investigators throughout the years. The police procedural genre has been one of the most exploited for the representation of women in the force, given that it was an initial safe bet that allowed to “bring female characters into the TV crime/detective narrative without running the perceived risk of putting them centre screen alone” (Tasker, 1998: 97). This allowed for a vast exploration of gender roles, power and sexuality issues in predominantly male environments without raising too much hostility (Tasker, 1998; Mizejewski, 2004).

Despite this approach to the female detective character, television’s intention to appeal and please female audiences has also been counterbalanced by trends picturing the female investigator as an object of observation. Especially through the late 1960s and early 1970s, the female investigator looked unnatural in a men’s environment, and thus was provided with situations in which the detective simply had to look sexy while in undercover situations –in which she acted as lure or bait (Mizejewski, 2004). It would not be until the late 1970s that television found in *Charlie’s Angels* (ABC, 1976-1981) a series capable of enduring the

tensions between feminism and antifeminism while keeping ratings high. The show's combination of undercover women solving crimes under the supervision of a man, with the women's non-traditional jobs and lives not marked by a romantic ending seemed to provide enough material for women to enjoy the fantasy that the show's sensationalism offered (Mizejewski, 2004).

The 1980s left television with three series "featuring strong, bright, non-glamorized women investigators" (Mizejewski, 2004: 71): *Cagney & Lacey* (CBS, 1982-1988), *Remington Steele* (CBS, 1982-1987) and *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-1989). *Cagney & Lacey* explored feminist concerns –i.e. gender roles, sexuality, relationships and friendships– (Walton and Jones, 1999), and featured two women as "cops and best buddies" (Mizejewski, 2004: 72). Nevertheless, this triggered speculation about the relationship between the characters being a lesbian one (Mizejewski, 2004). On the other hand, *Remington Steele* and *Moonlighting*, popularised the screwball formula, known for romantically attaching the female detective to "an independence-dependence relationship" with a male character, based on "mutual craziness and bickering" (Mizejewski, 2004: 73). In *Remington Steele*, the female detective is the most sensible of the two and the one who has more credibility, often having to direct the untrained male character, who only acts as a fictional superior and –with time– as a partner. In *Moonlighting*, both partners are equally trained –professionally, in wit and in sexual innuendo (Mizejewski, 2004). In both cases, the series resulted in the female detective depending too much on her male counterpart, but they proved that "smart, attractive, heterosexual and non-glamorized" (Mizejewski, 2004: 77) women investigators had a place in primetime television.

During the 1990s, Clarice Starling's success in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988/1991) would see its legacy in primetime television. Initially, *Prime Suspect* (ITV, 1991-1996) and *Under Suspicion* (CBS, 1994-1995) featured detective women with bleak lives isolated in a man's work (Mizejewski, 2004). Then, and more successfully, *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002) and *Profiler* (NBC, 1996-2000) included FBI women devoted to their work and not subjected to romance plots with their male partners. For these women sexism at the workplace is not an

issue, and instead of appearing in undercover outfits or high heels, they dress in more formal and sober outfits (Mizejewski, 2004). From there onwards, contemporary representations of female investigators include independent women in mixed environments, but they most often find their independence and authority limited by romance plots or some form of victimization. Some of these series include *Crossing Jordan* (NBC, 2001-2007), *Alias* (ABC, 2001-2006), *Open Case* (CBS, 2003-2010), *Bones* (Fox, 2005–), *Rizzoli & Isles* (TNT, 2010–) or *CSI* (CBS, 2000–).

4.4 *Castle* As Feminist Detective Fiction.

One of the most unexpected things that one may notice when watching the series as it develops is that, even though the show is named after Richard Castle's persona, it might as well be called *Beckett*. The fact that the show focuses on Kate Beckett's life –and evolution– through the seasons is made evident since episode one, which ends with the premise that a successful and famous writer decides to enrol the NYPD as a civilian consultant solely because he has found the perfect character for a new series of female detective novels: Kate Beckett. This fact holds the necessary evidence for the justification of *Castle* as feminist detective fiction –both on television and in the novels based on the character–, given that a single female detective, and not any of her male counterparts, fits the requirements of hard-work and determination necessary to inspire the writer. Nevertheless, in order to fully understand the series as feminist detective fiction more of Kate Beckett's leading role must be learnt.

Initially, feminist detective fiction often scrutinized the female detective's looks; research into the subject has shown how, from the representation of female detectives as models to the more down-to-earth renditions, the female body has always generated controversy and scriptwriters had to find a way to depict female detectives in a feminine fashion without falling into patriarchal stereotyping. Kate Beckett is portrayed as a smart, strong and independent woman, hard-working and devoted to her job, yet she is indisputably beautiful and classy, which should not prevent her from getting her job properly done. This may be the reason why Sara Vaughn, *Castle*'s make-up artist has given much thought on how the detective should look, as it was

important for the creators of the show not to evoke the slutty femme fatale of the past, but to reflect the looks of a modern female detective in contemporary society:

It was important to show off Beckett's skin in a natural way without making the look overly glamorous, which might diminish the realism of Beckett as a professional policewoman. ... What we accomplished was to make her character feel naturally beautiful while providing a modern twist to a confident, professional policewoman. (StanaKatic.com, 2009)

Once the issue of the female detective's looks has been tackled, another aspect that makes of *Castle* part of the feminist detective tradition is that it addresses the multiple issues surrounding the female detective, both in her life and in her job. Det. Kate Beckett is the leading character of her squad –including Ryan, Esposito and Castle– with the responsibilities and the capabilities it entails. Additionally, her core values and her sense of justice will usually turn her job into a constant challenge for her –as a woman and as a detective–, as she will feel that it is in her hands and in the hands of her team to bring people justice. As if her duties as a detective were not enough, a new responsibility –named Richard Castle– will be thrown her way in a *Remington Steele* or *Moonlighting* kind of fashion. This will not only test the limits of the detective's patience, but it will also be the source of (1) all sorts of insights into Det. Beckett's personality, through an exploration of her life in the show and through her alter ego in the novels, Nikki Heat, and (2) an inevitable romance plot, with the fears and dilemmas it may entail for both characters.

The exploration of these elements, as well as the analysis of Kate Beckett's overall role in the 12th Precinct alongside her male partners, will prove to be an interesting study of how feminist detective fiction has evolved in popular culture –from the less psychologically sophisticated first female detectives to the more complex contemporary investigators. Moreover, it will tackle most of the notions unravelled in the development of feminist detective fiction and will determine whether *Castle* reproduces or challenges those conventions with Det. Kate Beckett –on television– and Det. Nikki Heat –in written fiction.

5. The Representation of Professional Women in the Media.

5.1 From the 1950s to the Postfeminist Backlash.

During the Second World War, women were encouraged to join the workforce to occupy the jobs that had been vacated by men. Still, when the War was over, women were forced back to their traditional home-making roles. Thus, early representations of women in popular culture were intent on emphasising and perpetrating the importance of women's domestic role for the survival of the happy family. However, with the development of the feminist movement and the re-inclusion of women in the workplace, the late 1960s and early 1970s media began to incorporate some images of career women, single mothers or families in which the father was not the only breadwinner (Press, 2009). This permitted popular culture to explore a "more feminist image [of the woman] that was less passive, more powerful, and more independent" (Press, 2009: 143). Unfortunately, as happened during previous feminist struggles –as in the early 1900s and the 1940s– every time women's voices began to gain force, the response was an anti-feminist backlash (Faludi, 1991) and the late 1980s would not be an exception.

The backlash trend of the 1980s supported itself behind the conviction that even though women seemed to have succeeded professionally, they were dissatisfied and unhappy; women's liberation had prevented them from developing their femininity and they now faced the consequences of sacrificing their personal lives for career advancement (Faludi, 1991). In short, the 1980s reverted to earlier representations of women as mothers and housewives, with the difference that now there was an element to justify women's retreatment: the apparent failure of women in their feminist quest for empowerment, which only brought pain and nostalgia for an uncomplicated past (Faludi, 1991; Munford & Waters, 2014). Additionally, the backlash was backed up by a controversial postfeminist premise that highlighted women's newly acquired equality while "undercutting the ideals and visions of feminism" (Press, 2009: 143). In the end, the widespread message sent by the postfeminist backlash towards women was simple: "education and work strip women from their femininity" and create "unhappy single and

childless women” (Munford & Waters, 2014: 3), hence their only viable solution was a return to the household (Faludi, 1991).

Nevertheless, as widespread as the backlash’s message was, it has been argued not to match women’s reality of the time; “it is justice for their gender, not wedding rings and bassinets, that women believe to be in desperately short supply” (Faludi, 1991: 7). Therefore, both, women’s supposed liberation and the afflictions attributed to feminism proved to be myths only perpetrated for the sake of a conservative representation of womanhood. As Susan Faludi (1991) argues, social studies demonstrated that employed women were happier and more assertive of their independence, as they had personal accomplishments to be proud of. Oppositely, traditional married women enclosed in a household were argued to be prone to ailments and distress. Additionally, single women were not worried about being unmarried, that is, until the backlash’s promotion of marriage as the right choice pressured them to believe that, “only then, did [they] begin to feel depressed” (Faludi, 1991: 33). Conclusively, the threat to the supposedly widespread woman’s distress was the backlash itself, which –unlike the aforementioned studies– had no data to rely on, just a set of myths widely propagated by the media until they were believed to be true (Faludi, 1991).

5.2 Women in Popular Culture: Professional Women on Television.

One of the best allies for the perpetuation of the backlash rhetoric would be popular culture, which echoed postfeminist representations of women and chastised the few single and/or professional women that made it to Hollywood and television for their intended independence and threat to the family as an institution (Faludi, 1991; Negra, 2009). Under the pretence of disciplining subversive femininity (Negra, 2009), two types of women became the object of victimization and punishment in popular culture: the unmarried and the employed (Faludi, 1991). These women were, at the same time, provided with two choices: an escape of the workplace –which resulted in retreatism and, possibly, marriage–, or personal depression – which undermined their careers and also resulted in retreatism (Faludi, 1991). Additionally, the

backlash also translated into a gradual disappearance of women from primetime television, which promoted dad shows and only included women as “victimized girls” (Faludi, 1991: 156).

By the mid 1980s television faced the consequences of its shortage of female representations; women being the main consumers of television, ratings began to drop because of their poor representation in the media, and networks were forced to incorporate female leads to their primetime shows (Faludi, 1991). Still, the postfeminist ethos prevailed and women’s apparent right to choose soon became blurred by the message that “having it all implies walking a tightrope between professional success and personal failure” (Genz, 2010: 99). As this statement reflects, women’s relationship with the workplace was widely challenged and, on most occasions, ended with the female character back to domestic safety. This was ensured by (1) providing female protagonists with low-paying and low-status jobs; (2) representing the workplace as shallow, mean and wrongly feminized, hence a men’s world; (3) a retreatist epiphany which trivialized and undermined the job; and (4) an eclipse of the job by other factors – i.e. romance and family (Negra, 2009). In any case, the message was clear and advocated for the abandonment of the workplace through the glorification of domestic life (Negra, 2009).

During the 1990s and the 2000s the “choice theme” (Press, 2009: 144) continued to be reproduced on television, which showed women repeatedly facing dilemmas between the work and the family; needless to say, the family was, on most of the occasions, the preferred choice. However, shows progressively began to put emphasis on professional women as well and, albeit the traditionalist romantic focus, introduced increasingly innovative feminist victories. This is the case with *Murphy Brown* (CBS, 1988-1998), *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988-1997) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 1997-2003). Yet, further analyses of primetime television allude to a reluctance to present ambitious women outside the domestic, and the apparently conflicted relationship between women and the public sphere is still exploited. Hence, domestic life is presented as the most appealing, comforting and rewarding choice, and the price that career women must pay for their exploration of non-domestic spaces is generally very high, resulting in unhappiness, stress and/or failed personal relationships.

5.3 Is There Hope for Professional Women on Television?

There is an undeniable truth in the fact that television has been one of the means through which the postfeminist backlash and neo-traditionalist views have been reproduced, making of television a perpetrator of many negative representations of women. Nevertheless, as Allison Klein (2006) argues, that is not the whole truth about television, given that it has also been the means through which the new changing realities about women have been represented and furthered. Accordingly, television has also opted for the introduction of “characters who are flawed and far more human than the perfect housewives” (Klein, 2006: 11), combating the fallacy of perfect women while functioning as sources of empowerment. “I am as drawn to the flaws and foibles”, writer Allison Klein argues about these types of women, “as much to their strength and ambition” (Klein, 2006: 128), emphasizing that both sets of qualities were equally important for the characters’ verisimilitude. These women, though far more multidimensional and complex than in previous representations, were not perfect and yet they became the chosen role model for women that decided to “reject belittling and sexist [images] and relate to [those] that were somewhat realistic and inspiring” (Klein, 2006: 10).

Consequently, we can find several women in contemporary primetime shows for whom balancing their domestic and professional lives –or even a total commitment to their career– is not the big dilemma it used to be, nor an excuse for a return to the supposedly ideal domestic path that all women had to undergo (Klein, 2006). Instead, they act as representatives of situations that real women face and as an example that “life [is] never that simple” (Klein, 2006: 127), in allusion to the plain pre-established domestic shortcut that was offered as a liberating alternative for overstressed females in shows that promoted traditional forms that femininity. In this sense, we find women such as Meredith Grey (Ellen Pompeo) for whom starting a family has not involved a halt in her career in *Grey’s Anatomy* (ABC, 2005–); or, in the same show, the co-workers/couple Calliope Torres (Sara Ramirez) and Arizona Robbins (Jessica Capshaw) who seem to do just fine with their daughter and their career as doctors. Oppositely, in the same show we find the character of Cristina Yang (Sandra Oh), who is fully committed to her

professional career since, for her, creating a family has never even been an option; or the aspiring Leslie Knope (Amy Poehler) from *Parks and Recreation* (NBC, 2009–), whose career has gone from Deputy Parks Director of a small town to National Parks Service Director –and probably beyond– with romance and family present but playing a secondary role. All in all, it seems that in the end perhaps there is hope for professional women to find allies in television shows which show that, indeed, it is possible for women to ‘have it all’.

6. Kate Beckett As a Feminist Role Model.

The following section will be devoted to the analysis of Katherine Beckett’s persona, both as a professional woman and as a female detective, taking into account the character’s function in the construction of a feminist role model. For this purpose, it will be interesting to consider whether –if at all– *Castle* relies on female stereotypes for its presentation of the detective, especially when it comes to the depiction of the character’s background, her looks, and her personal and professional aspirations. Additionally, the show’s main narrative arcs –i.e. Johanna Beckett’s murder, and Castle and Beckett’s relationship– will be examined, as they are closely connected to the development of the character, and hence, can influence her status as either a successful role model or another victimized romantic heroine.

6.1 Katherine Beckett As a Professional Woman.

One of the main and most frequent issues concerning the presentation of professional women in the media has been related to their looks; femininity and beauty have been, throughout the years, the principles governing the portrayal of women in popular culture, also conditioned by the approval of the male gaze. Nevertheless, not all characters fall into these conventions, and Kate Beckett’s looks throughout the seasons are an example of how they can be exploited for the creation of tough and professional female characters. In her case, a detailed and well-crafted combination of hair, wardrobe and makeup constitute the foundations for a “well-served [character] being able to be feminine and tough” (Katic, 2012), no matter if she is wearing high heels or flats, jeans or pant suits, shirts or sweaters, or blazers or leather jackets –outfits that she has been wearing throughout the seasons. Additionally, the evolution of Beckett’s outward

appearance –from the first season’s more casual outfits to the later season’s more stylish demeanour– has been closely connected to her character development and her emotional evolution (Katic, 2012), and she has rarely been depicted as an object of attraction or of sexualized remarks.

Remarkably, almost all the admiration that she gets is directed to her outstanding professional behaviour and skills, catching criminals and making them confess in the interrogation room; “She is like a tiger in there”, Capt. Roy Montgomery argues while watching her from behind the mirror of the interrogation room, “I never get tired of watching her (‘The Dead Pool’ 3.21). This is also found in ‘Hedge Fund Homeboys’ (1.3): “Watch this”, Capt. Montgomery anticipates to Castle in similar conditions when she is about to make the criminal confess; “watch her now”, he proudly cheers. Therefore, while it is indisputable that Stana Katic brings her beauty and attractiveness to the character, what is really emphasized is Beckett’s professional competence and her exceptional aptitude and dedication to her job; “most people come up against a wall, they give up. Not you”, Castle acknowledges to her during one of his appraisals of the Kate Beckett persona, “You don’t let go. You don’t back down. That’s what makes you extraordinary” (‘A Death in the Family’ 1.10). Not her looks, nor her style, but her “core values that are focused on bringing the bad guy to justice” (Katic, 2013a) are what the writers advocate for in the portrayal of Katherine Beckett. As Katic herself states, “what she is at her core really is a little bit of a super heroine ... It doesn’t necessarily matter what framework she’s working in [the NYPD, the General Attorney, or the Interpol] just so long she’s protecting people” (Katic, 2013a).

Additionally, her professional skills are complemented with a vast functional knowledge of a broad range of subjects and topics, as Kate Beckett has procured herself a cultured and well-read persona, so she can discuss economy concepts (‘Close Encounters of the Murderous Kind’ 3.9), acknowledge literary references (‘A Death in the Family’ 1.10), gain insights into the criminal’s motives by reading mystery novels (‘Flowers for Your Grave’ 1.1) or even know the basics of poker (‘Ghosts’ 1.8) and the fabric industry (‘The Mistress Always Spanks Twice’

2.16). Nevertheless, by no means does this make of Kate Beckett a flawless and perfect character. Like most people, she has her own insecurities and her own moments of uncertainty which make her question her identity, especially when it comes to particularly difficult cases, personal matters –concerning Castle or her Precinct family–, and her mom’s murder and consequent personal quest against Senator Bracken. It is with scenes like those that Beckett is fully explored and when audiences are given the opportunity to realise that she is a “believable character” because “she is everything ... she’s a little girl, she’s a tigress and she’s a warrior. She’s insecure and she’s indomitable” (Katic, 2012).

Conclusively, what *Castle* accomplishes with Det. Beckett is a female character succeeding in a world traditionally conceived as male –which refers to both, the workforce in general and the police force in particular– by taking previously established genre conventions and subverting them. Therefore, not only does the show portray a competent professional woman who asserts her authority through hard-work, it also accomplishes to re-explore the notion of police work as a conventional men’s world by attributing a leader role to the show’s main female protagonist – and from season 4 onwards, to a female Captain–, whose dedication ensures a highly competent and non-sexist workplace. Moreover, Beckett also challenges the professional women’s conventions about the ‘perils’ of devoting too much effort to work; the character’s professional ambitions are not dulled by dumb looks, a shallow and sacrificed personal life or job resentment. Instead, Kate Beckett fully embraces her work, her femininity and her independence –three of the elements which have been a source of controversy in the presentation of the professional woman in popular culture.

6.2 Kate Beckett: Detective, Romantic Heroine, Victim or All of the Above?

When it comes to the analysis of Katherine Beckett as a female role model, the thin line that separates the detective from a romantic heroine or a victim blurs perilously. A quick look into the character’s past and present already confirms two of the most stereotyped and widely used conventions for the presentation of female detectives in popular culture: (1) the show justifies the character’s presence in the workforce by the unsolved death of a beloved one –i.e. Beckett’s

mother– and (2) it settles the female character into a relationship with the charismatic and boyish male partner –i.e. Richard Castle. Still, the following paragraphs will be devoted to the scrutiny of these two elements, intrinsic to the detective’s persona, in order to determine whether in spite of them –or even because of them– Det. Kate Beckett manages to be a good female detective role model or not.

Johanna Beckett’s murder has undoubtedly shaped Kate Beckett’s character, and that is an indisputable fact that has pushed our protagonist into the police department when “under normal circumstances [she] should not be there” because she had “lots of better and more socially acceptable options”, as Castle argues when he first meets her, already perceiving the tormented aura surrounding Beckett (‘Flowers for Your Grave’ 1.1). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Beckett had not already planned big achievements as a female professional; at the time of her mother’s murder, she was a pre-law at Stanford University, on her way to becoming the first female Chief Justice (‘A Dance with Death’ 4.18). Therefore, it seems that either way, Kate Beckett was destined to big accomplishments. Yet, her mother’s murder was a decisive factor for Beckett to become an outstanding and remarkable detective, who exploits her traumatic experience to empathise with the victims better than anyone else in the precinct (‘Kill the Messenger’ 2.8) and to create solid “cases which would never fall apart in a court of law” (Katic, 2011). Also, because of her exceptionality as a detective, she even earns the respect of her worst enemy and her mother’s murderer, Senator William Bracken, who admits the following to her: “a part of me really admires you. Your moral certitude, fighting for what you believe in even knowing it’s going to destroy you” (‘Veritas’ 6.22).

Additionally, Kate Beckett is exposed to the perils of her work, which threaten her life on innumerable occasions, but since the lives of her male partners are endangered in the same way and repeatedly, this should not be an issue of female victimisation. Nevertheless, she is also open to the physical and psychological damage that investigating her mother’s murder will bring to her. Therefore, there are scenes in which the fragility and vulnerability of the detective is overtly emphasized, such as in ‘A Death in the Family’ (1.10), ‘Sucker Punch (2.13) or

‘Knockdown’ (3.13) –episodes dealing with her mother’s murder investigation– and more especially in ‘Knockout’ (3.24), ‘Rise’ (4.1) or ‘Kill Shot’ (4.9), which deal with Beckett being shot and its subsequent psychological injuries, which include a bout of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Nevertheless, as tormenting as they can be, these moments are decisive for Det. Beckett to become a stronger and braver character; “You think it’s a weakness?”, Det. Javier Esposito –who has also suffered from PTSD– tells her, “Make it a strength” (‘Kill Shot’ 4.9). Thus, this is exactly what she does. Kate Beckett turns her alleged weaknesses into strengths, which make her grow as a character, a person, and a detective. Interestingly enough, though her co-workers’/partners’ support is important for that growth, it will be through her own determination that she accomplishes what she wants.

Beckett’s relationship with Richard Castle does also contribute positively to her character development. Though initially presented as rather smug, boyish and too immersed in the story-telling world, Castle will evolve into the perfect partner for the detective. As we get to know him, his public persona little resembles his actual self, as he proves to be caring, loyal, and a complete “Mr. Mom” (‘Nanny McDead’ 2.2) and family man who finds comfort at home after a difficult case (‘Home Is Where the Heart Stops’ 1.7). In short, audiences find in Richard Castle all the conventions of the traditional stay-at-home female character and the counterpart to Det. Kate Beckett’s character. Unsurprisingly, their opposite personalities will be one of the reasons behind the characters’ mutual attraction –which starts as a partnership and results in a relationship. Nevertheless, and as happened in other representations of detective couples –e.g. *Remington Steele* or *Moonlighting*–, this partnership/relationship will not translate into the downfall of the female detective to a dependence relationship in which the male character becomes superior. Instead, both characters will benefit from their partner’s weaknesses and strengths. As Castle acknowledges in ‘47 Seconds’ (4.19), he has learnt from Beckett the relevance of the police department, which is “about doing something real; something that matters.”; and oppositely, Beckett has benefited from Castle’s light-heartedness and optimism throughout the years, “I have a hard job, Castle” she confides to him, “and having you around makes it a little more fun” (‘Sucker Punch’ 2.13).

Additionally, as has been already established, Kate Beckett is a woman with professional aspirations, but who has never closed up to the idea of love and a solid relationship; she is “a one and done type” (‘Nanny McDead’ 1.2) when it comes to marriage, and in a relationship she wishes for “someone that would be there for [her] and [she] could be there for him, and [they] could dive into it together” (‘Setup’ 3.16). Both things she confides to Castle and, unbeknownst to her –or knowing it deep down–, she was referring to him in both statements. Nevertheless, her personal and professional worlds collide when she is offered the job at Washington DC while she is in a relationship with Castle (‘Watershed’ 5.24). Undoubtedly, it is a hard decision and one that must be thoroughly considered, yet it becomes one of the greatest representations of *Castle*’s feminist agenda. “This is a modern woman’s story” Katic argues, “and I don’t want to send the message that a woman has to choose love over a career” (Stana Katic, 2013b). Thus, as explained before, Beckett does not give up her relationship and continues with her job, so the show challenges the convention that women should privilege their romantic pursuits to the detriment of their professional ambitions.

6.3 Kate Beckett vs. Nikki Heat: When ‘Reality’ Meets Fiction.

As seasons go by and the several narrative arcs develop, Richard Castle’s collaboration with the NYPD becomes naturalized; he is part of the 12th Precinct family and a great asset to the team. Nevertheless, if we look back into the first season, Castle’s premise for his stay at the Precinct is doing research for a new set of novels based on Det. Kate Beckett and audiences are reminded of Castle’s purpose when said novels –starring Det. Nikki Heat– are annually released and available for sale at bookshops. The novels are actually sold and signed by Richard Castle, which is a demonstration of how the show plays with the popularity of the character’s fictional persona while contributing to it by providing audiences with products to consume together with the show. These narratives –*Heat Wave* (2009), *Naked Heat* (2010), *Heat Rises* (2011), *Frozen Heat* (2012) and *Deadly Heat* (2013)– are practically Richard Castle’s ode to Det. Beckett, in which he explores the lives and thoughts of their alter ego characters: Jameson Rook, a

magazine journalist set to work alongside the NYPD Homicide Detective Nikki Heat, in order to do research for one of his articles on New York's Finest.

Given that they loosely follow the TV show's formula and its events, these novels become a great source for expanding the insights into Det. Beckett's character and, hence, the Nikki Heat series apparently falls easily into the feminist detective fiction categorization. In this sense, Richard Castle provides his readers with a thorough exploration of what he gets to see on a daily basis in Det. Beckett, and Nikki Heat becomes the perfect embodiment of a tough and professional female detective whose aim is to bring justice to people. Therefore, what we saw in *Castle* becomes the novels' chore and it becomes even more greatly examined and beautifully rendered in the written form, which offers the insights into the character's mind and behaviour not so accessible in the television formula. Consequently, in every other sentence readers can find authentic gems regarding Nikki Heat (Kate Beckett) and her remarkable professionalism and attitude in life. For instance, even though Heat's abilities have already been thoroughly demonstrated and acclaimed in the initial chapters of *Heat Wave* (2009), in its last chapters we can find this:

Any personal relief she felt about the end of this threat [her aggressor has been killed] was just that, personal. He was now in the category of crime victim and was owed justice like anyone else. One of Heat's talents for the job was her ability to put her own personal feelings in a box and be a professional ... she realized she was going to need a bigger box.
(Castle, 2009: 223)

At the same time, the fact that the novels lack visual support is also exploited and hence we find in the Nikki Heat series more explicit references to the character's physical attractiveness. This happens especially in the first novel –which, as the TV show's first season, has a more humorous and bantering tone– and it is mostly addressed in order to allow the female protagonist to reject men's objectification of attractive women and to challenge the assumption that women, especially if beautiful, should have aspirations outside the professional sphere. “I don't know how you can stand doing this” (Castle, 2009: 85), Rook tells Heat after witnessing

one of the suspect's behaviour towards her. Her response is completely outstanding and reflects how Heat is not willing to be subject to sexist conventions related to what she does:

You kidding? It's my job ... Is this the equivalent of 'what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this'? Because if it is I'll kick you in the balls to show you how not nice I can be.

I like my job. I do what I do and deal with the people I deal with. (Castle, 2009: 85)

Finally, the fact that these novels are basically a reproduction of Richard Castle's inner thoughts and fantasies not only serves to enhance the qualities of the detective, but also to explore their relationship. In this sense, the novels are much more direct in the representation of the characters' attraction –it is overtly addressed in the first novel–, and this creates a closer relationship between them in which Rook does and says everything that Richard Castle is not able to. The fact that Kate Beckett is such a strong and independent character becomes something that Richard Castle respects, so he knows that even though he will always support her, she fights her own battles. This is also an inherent trait in the Nikki Heat novels. However, in them Richard Castle gives Jameson Rook a more heroic role; for instance, in *Heat Rises* (2011) it is Jameson who catches the bullet that was supposed to kill Det. Heat, which is the opposite of what we find in the show. In the end, even though the novels celebrate Heat's professionalism, they can somehow be read as a fantasy of male empowerment, which is the opposite we find in the TV show, more concerned with the creation of an outstanding female detective that becomes a positive role model of professional femininity women can identify with.

7. Conclusions.

Representations of female detective characters in particular and professional women in general in literature and the media have been demonstrated to advocate for the representation of women as (1) subjected to patriarchal values, (2) prone to victimization and sexualisation, and (3) doomed to retreatism or a return to domestic and family environments. Therefore, professional women's place in popular culture seems to be uncertain and they are constantly forced to confront a choice between work and family, professionalism and domesticity. This is particularly emphasised in detective fiction, which does not only place women in a working environment, but positions them in a traditionally male dominated workplace, thus creating more tensions between feminism and femininity and the attempt to reconcile the disruption of gender roles while remaining faithful to the essence of the genre. The result of this conflict is that female detectives are still subject to victimization and/or downgraded to romantic heroine roles, which diminishes the characters' independence and professionalism and brings them a step closer to domestic retreatism.

Oppositely, the analysis of *Castle* and of Kate Beckett's character demonstrates how it is possible to reconcile previous tensions in the creation of a strong and independent professional female detective. While the show seemingly relies on two of the most overused stereotypes for the justification of the detective in the workplace –a death in the family and the potential of a relationship–, it subverts and exploits them for the character's benefit and development. Therefore, audiences find in Det. Kate Beckett a female character who puts her flaws and her strengths to use, which results in the creation of a professional woman whose hard work and ambition is not punished, but admired and encouraged instead. Additionally, the show and the character attempt to redefine the prevailing tension between the professional woman's work life and personal life, which have been commonly presented as irreconcilable. In this sense, Kate Beckett's relationship with her male partner does not act as a means to dull the character into a simple dependence relationship. Instead, the relationship is used as a way of (1) exploring how both characters can learn from each other without a need to constrain the female character in a

domestic environment; and (2) proving how a personal life within the work environment does not always entail the downfall and stagnation of the woman protagonist, whose career advancement remains ensured. Arguably, this may clash with Kate Beckett's rendition in the novels as Nikki Heat, which can be read as a representation of Richard Castle's fantasies. Still, Nikki Heat's professionalism and strength as an ambitious female detective character and as a woman are the traits which are thoroughly celebrated in the novels.

Conclusively, *Castle* can be argued to be a show that portrays a presumably good role model for professional women and which takes most of the postfeminist arguments and subverts them to create a strong character. Nevertheless, given the changeability of television and the fact that the series remains unfinished, Kate Beckett's character can still undergo a transformation into a more traditional persona. Consequently, while Kate Beckett's role as a challenging feminist role model will, I hope, most likely prevail, it could still be subject to question depending on how the show further exploits Beckett's imminent marriage and her career advancement. Meanwhile, and for the time being, Kate Beckett remains an engaging character that proves that women do not need to sacrifice their career in order to have fulfilling personal lives. Thus, she is an exhilarating fantasy of female empowerment who has a satisfactory relationship with an understanding man and who, additionally, is not rendered as threatening and dangerous; that is, unless it involves being threatening and dangerous to those who break the law or imperil her life or the life of those she loves.

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