Feminism and The Female Detective in Film

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Abstract: Nancy Drew, a feminist icon for almost a century, embodies the public idea of the female detective. However, the Nancy Drew we know today stands in stark contrast to the way she was originally written. While much has been said about how females are portrayed in film, this article specifically observes the female detective’s evolution throughout history as she was shaped by cultural norms and her exigence changed. First analyzing femme fatale in 1940s film noir, this article provides an in-depth discussion on how female detectives in film were seen as dangerous women that needed to be contained. Moving from the past to the present, it explains the current reinvention of the female detective into a character meant to empower rather than oppress. Afterwards, this article details how specific societal expectations have affected female detectives’ portrayals as mothers and ways current media seeks to disarm these stereotypes. Finally, it builds on these observations with a culmination of female detectives and friendship, illustrating that the female detective breaks not only female expectations of the past, but of the genre, as the character refuses to be defined.

Introduction

Many of us can relate to the phase in childhood when we're obsessed with one specific thing, whether it be a band, a video game, or hobby; mine was Nancy Drew. I read every one of Carolyn Keene's ghostwritten books that I could get my hands on and, by the end, I had read all 150. Yet, this childhood phase wasn't unique. Readers around the world have been captivated by these books, as proven by the fact that Nancy Drew has been a cultural presence for over 90 years with over 70 million copies sold, across four generations of women and multiple adaptations; from books to film and television to even video games (Lacy, 2018). Originally created as a female counterpart to Edward Stratemeyer's popular *Hardy Boys*, Nancy Drew of the 1930s stood in stark contrast to who we know Nancy Drew to be today, says mystery reviewer Deborah Lacy. This gun-toting, unruly earlier version was soon replaced by a "more demure" and innocent Nancy who was deemed more fit for the younger female audience, as explained in her article. Despite this change, notes Lacy, the famed female detective still served as a feminist inspiration for many of today's most powerful women including Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Sandra Day O'Connor (Lacy, 2018).

As we see with Drew, the conversation regarding the larger idea of the female detective has also centered around how these characters have been shaped by cultural norms, how femme fatale was used in 1940s film noir and, subsequently, how the female detective has been reinvented via their origin stories to serve as an inspiration to other women. For example, scholars have argued that the female detectives in film, at the same time as the first Nancy Drew books were being placed on the shelves, were depicted to audiences as dangerous women that needed to be contained. In addition, current film reviewers have highlighted that female detectives of the present empower women rather than oppress them. Furthermore, when we look at the female detective, we see these societal expectations have also affected how female detectives have been portrayed as mothers and as coworkers. This has led to debates on whether female detectives in films today are actually breaking these stereotypes of motherhood and friendship or perpetuating them. Just as Nancy Drew intrigued me as a kid, female detectives in films of the past and present intrigue me with their competing ideas of femininity and feminism in various films and television. Through sampling popular TV and film depicting the first female detectives as they weathered through the societal unrest of the 1940s and then transitioning to the popular detective films and television of today, I will provide a well-rounded investigation of over 12 movies/series and their unique interpretations of what it means to be a female detective. By analyzing female detectives in film from the 1940s and the present and asking how they each viewed feminism differently, this essay will examine how far Hollywood has come in portraying women as capable of being both daredevils and strong-willed, but also loving and light-hearted.

Femme Fatale: A Danger to Society

Something about Nancy Drew has captured readers' attention for almost a century. Perhaps, it's her determined independence introduced at a time when women were strongly encouraged to return to their "place" in the home after WWII, making such independence

dangerous. Or, her continuous reimaginings that keep us entertained as the various ghostwriters have written her at all different stages of her life, from a young 8-year-old learning the ropes of detecting to a college-aged experienced detective who is navigating life at age 19. Alternatively, maybe we can also find part of the answer to this incredibly long cultural presence in Drew's origin story. Meant to appeal to female audiences with the promise of adventure, just as the action-packed *Hardy Boys* series did for its school-aged male readers, Nancy Drew brings us to the question of what it means to be female in media. As she's transitioned from the classic roughness of the film noir era to a more socially acceptable detective who could serve as a role model for young girls, we are left wondering how Drew was constrained by societal expectations to be an innocent and pure young woman. Yet, even with these constraints, Drew, a revolutionary character for her time, still represented feminist ideas to many as she was witty in the face of danger and held her own in a predominantly male field.

However, in order to understand female detectives like Nancy Drew in the present, we must first look at their past in the context of the portrayal of female characters as a whole. Film noir, the birthplace of the detective, has had an interesting history with female characters, especially after the societal unrest following the ending of WWII (Hunt, 2020). In an effort to convince women to go back into the household, writer Kristin Hunt (2020) claims that the femme fatale character was used to invoke guilt and paranoia in women through negative portrayals. The femme fatale character is characterized as a woman who is independent and ambitious, yet uses her attractiveness to seduce and destroy the men who become involved with her, placing the man as the victim and the femme fatale as the villain. The femme fatale usually isn't the detective, but rather "the other woman" who tries to deceive the detective and is working on the side of criminals. Spreading the message that female ambition is dangerous, Hunt (2020) uses the film *The Postman Always Rings Twice,* to explain how the rhetors wanted female ambition to be feared as the femme fatale, Cora Smith, resorts to murder in order to inherit a diner, ensuring the financial security of her and her bum boyfriend. Likewise, she says the film, *Quicksand,* highlights the immorality of the femme fatale, Vera Novak, by juxtaposing her as selfish and uninterested in the male lead in comparison to the "good girl," Helen, whose only goal in life is to get married (Hunt, 2020). With *Quicksand* ending on Dan, the male lead, goes to jail because of his attempts to quickly achieve wealth in order to impress Vera, Hunt illustrates how the female audience is told that work destroys the home (Hunt, 2020).

Unlike the femme fatale characters of the time, the female detectives of the 1940s, building on the legacy of the rare female investigative leads of the 1930s, were independent without being villainous. Long-time scholar of detective films, Philippa Gates, explains that female detectives of the 1930s were "masculinized" as they filled the traditionally male-dominated leading roles, such an occurrence showcased in *Smart Blonde* (1937) where Torchy, an investigative reporter, leaps onto a train in a move reminiscent of a male action hero (Gates, 2009). With these women 'taking' roles usually played by males, this independence was soon seen as a challenge to men's "societally rightful" place in society, says Gates. Therefore, 1940s Hollywood saw the female detective as dangerous women that needed to be contained (Gates,

2009). In order to contain these women and return these roles to men, the era of, as she coins, "maratorious melodramas" was born. The female detectives in films of this era followed storylines in which the woman becomes the lead only temporarily in order to save her husband and 'restore order,' like the one of *Phantom Lady* (1944) where heroine Carol is forced to take on the role of investigative lead to save her husband Scott from death row and, ultimately, returns "to the prescribed social role of devoted and sacrificing wife" once he is freed.

Yet, while many acknowledge the prominence of the "maratorious melodrama" during this time, other scholars point to the existence of exceptions to the norm which contributed to the feminist movement. In her reviewed essay on 1940s film noirs, writer Malu Barroso argues there was a continued existence of women in noir who retained their dangerousness. Citing the film, *The Big Sleep* (1940), Barroso shows how the female detective, Vivian Sternwood, maintains her dangerousness with the help of a good-bad girl personality; allowing her to capitalize on the independence usually offered solely to the femme fatale and also having moral ambiguity, allowing her to avoid the villainous stereotype often attributed to such women, as Hunt described earlier. Barroso explains that this personality gave Sternwood the power to not only put her own interests first, unlike the "maratorious melodrama", as she hides her connection to a local gangster from her investigative partner, but also a heroine as she saves his life by helping him kill a hitman.

Similarly, we see Douglas Sirk's film *Lured* (1947) use this tactic to continue the feminist movement during this turbulent time in Hollywood's history. While we first assume that the female lead Sandra Carpenter, played by Lucille Ball, is a classic example of a femme fatale given she is a dancer who uses her looks to her advantage, we soon see that her character uses the femme fatale trope to be the heroine rather than the villain. Looking at a prominent scene from the film, Carpenter meets with formerly renowned designer, Charles Van Druten, undercover as a model after answering his ad in the newspaper, reminiscent of the ad that her fellow dancer and friend Lucy answered shortly before going missing. Using her looks and quick wits to convince Van Druten to hire her, as she improvises a fake backstory about being a broke model, Carpenter gives audiences a glimpse of the dangerousness of femme fatale while solidifying her role as the protagonist.

Through this guise of femme fatale, *Lured* also avoids becoming a "maratorious melodrama" even though Carpenter takes the traditionally male role of the lead investigator, a common driver behind these women being ushered into the home in the end. By pushing Carpenter into the role of detective in order to save her friend rather than a male love interest, *Lured,* successfully depicts Carpenter as a dangerous woman who doesn't need to be contained through proving her skills as a detective. After once again using her wits to gain information about the designer's unstable mental state from Van Druten's assistant, Carpenter isn't surprised when Van Druten draws the curtains to his "runway show," revealing not a lively audience of royals as promised, but, instead, an empty room filled with only folding chairs and a dog. Having learned earlier of Van Druten's unstable mental state after a competitor in Paris stole one of his designs effectively ending his career, Carpenter's value as a detective is showcased as she

shrewdly plays along allowing her to safely navigate the situation and come closer to solving the mystery.

However, *Lured* and films like it were few and far between during the 1940s, as Barroso previously stated, making their contributions to the female narrative especially significant due to their rarity. *Lured* highlights its unique feminist qualities for the era by giving Carpenter agency in the face of danger, just as *The Big Sleep* did with Sternwood when she saved her partner rather than the usual of him saving her. In the climax of the scene, the show's gramophone suddenly skips, tipping an already fragile Van Druten over the edge. Enraged, he locks his assistant in a closet before threatening Carpenter with a sword as he accuses her of working for his competitors. Suddenly, an unknown man can be spotted in one of the windows watching the commotion. Taking matters into her own hands, Carpenter bluffs to Van Druten, admitting to his accusations and naming the man in the window as her boss, the competitor Van Druten seeks. As Van Druten rushes outside to confront the man, Carpenter is not a damsel-in-distress waiting to be saved, but an agent in charge of herself as she takes action, using the opportunity to free his assistant and escape.

Reinventing the Female Detective

So, who won the battle of the female detective? Did Hollywood successfully contain these so-called dangerous women or did these secretly feminist films prevail? Well, to answer this question, we simply have to look at the present. The film *Enola Holmes* (2020), one of the most successful detective films in recent history with the biggest opening day of the year on Netflix and over 78 million views according to Business Insider (Clark, 2021), calls direct attention to societal expectations of women in the past and portrays Holmes, who unsurprisingly shares the detecting skills of her brother, Sherlock, as a stark outlier to this status quo. Set in Victorian England, Enola Homes puts into perspective how extensively the mainstream idea of the female detective has evolved. By contrasting the norms of 19th century England with Holmes' character and upbringing, the film shows how Holmes defies what is expected of her through scenes like one where she is sent to finishing school. Highlighting the emphasis on female obedience dominant in the Victorian Era, Holmes' individuality is stripped away through strict classes on ladylike behavior; amusingly including one on how to politely laugh. Unwilling to conform, Holmes stands still against the herd.

The novelty of women at the forefront of mystery film and television can be further emphasized by the unprecedented series *Jessica Jones*, in, perhaps, the most famous crime-solving/villain-slaying franchise of all-time garnering a total revenue of over $28 billion, Marvel (Anderson, 2023). *The Verge* writer Kwame Opam argues that *Jessica Jones* suggests a modern reinvention of the female detective into "women [who are] powerful, multi-faceted masters of their fate." Staying true to its noir inspiration, private-eye Jessica Jones carries many of the tropes of the genre, says Opam, with her traumatic past influencing her cynical, witty view of the present and her gravitation towards a stiff drink. However, despite dealing with the trauma of abuse and sexual assault, Jones, as Opam claims, commits herself to protecting those around her;

such as her close confidant Trish and lawyer friend Jeri, who always has a case. Demonstrating her point, the writer says Jones' commitment to protecting others after experiencing the trauma of her past is what makes the series successful because it "embraces pain as something women triumph over, without ever needing rescue."

Taking a different approach, other films introduce this new era of the female detective through mentorship instead of redemption from trauma. The recently released film, *Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery* (2020), is praised by CBR film reviewer Rebecca Radillo for putting female lead Helen Brand at the forefront as she is mentored by the quintessential detective genius Benoit Blanc. Quoting Blanc's warning to Brand during their first meeting, he says, he can "only solve her sister's murder and not get her justice for it." Radillo explains how this one line changes the film's entire exigence by passing the role of investigator onto Brand, signifying she is both ready and capable. Despite having never been a detective before, after mastering Blanc's training, Brand is able to achieve justice for her sister as she reveals the danger behind the murderer's newest business idea; effectively turning his friends against him and persuading them to confess their knowledge about the murder.

Similarly, Enola Holmes' origin story also follows this plot of mentorship and independence. Film reviewer, Victor Stiff, claims that Eudoria, Holmes' mother, chooses to raise her daughter away from the world to mentor her into a strong, independent woman. Wanting to shelter Holmes from societal pressures of the world, Eudoria decided to teach her daughter the skills to be whoever she wanted to be, says Stiff; through classes on history, martial arts, and physics. He states that it is this unique education that is Holmes' detective origin story, leading to her recalling her education throughout the film and aids in her sleuthing. Ahead of her time, Stiff exemplifies how Holmes uses the lessons from her mother to leverage society's preconceptions to her advantage through tricks like dressing as a widow to capitalize on people's discomfort to avoid being caught. By reimagining how the past should have been, *Enola Holmes*, Stiff declares, is a "coming-of-age tale" that portrays Eudoria as a "sane mind in a world gone mad", who teaches her daughter to be her own woman.

By breaking the status quo of the Victorian Era, *Enola Holmes* doesn't only showcase this evolution of the female detective, it also shows a shift from societal obedience to empowerment through reimagining the era. Holmes retains her power by acknowledging the oppressive norms and choosing to use them to her advantage. From an example earlier in the film, to hide from her brothers, Holmes conforms to the feminine dress of the time by wearing a corset which she uses to conceal her mother's fortune. Later on, Holmes and the audience both discover that the corset has "a true use" when it protects Holmes from being stabbed by an assailant. Even choosing to wear a full-length Victorian gown, Holmes is able to fight, outwit, and defeat her attacker. Shortly before Holmes escapes the finishing school, Sherlock also implores her to maintain her independence with surprising brotherly advice as he tells her "The choice is always yours. Whatever society may claim, they can't control you."

In fact, just as *Enola Holmes* serves as a commentary on female empowerment against expectations of the past, it also comments on the relationship between mothers and daughters; a

relationship that we will soon see is recurring in portrayals of the female detective. Throughout much of the film, Holmes' first-person perspective on her mother's lessons provides insight into the detective she is today. In a scene soon after her corset saves her from being stabbed, Holmes hides from her attacker and switches to first-person to explain to the audience her education as a child. Echoing her mother's fight lessons, we see Holmes use her training to defeat her attacker with both her combat skills and her wits as she pretends to drown in order to escape. Near the end of the film as she states herself to love-interest Tewkesbury, her mother never taught her the things "most well-bred ladies" learn. Rather, her mother taught her to watch, listen, and fight; all the things that make her a successful detective in the present.

Combating Crime and Kids: Detectives as Mothers

However, sometimes when the female detective is the mother herself, the expectations of motherhood are set impossibly high. Film and Television professor, Barbara Selznick, claims that the series *Broadchurch* approaches a juxtaposition between career and family by highlighting their incompatibility. The show follows Detective Ellie Miller who strives and is expected to be a perfect mother in addition to being a successful detective. Yet, Selznick describes how with a single line, Miller's idyllic life is thrown into chaos. The episode, revolving around the phrase "how could you not know?", reflects on this idea that women "should always *know*" everything about their family, especially mothers (Selznick). She explains that the phrase is used only twice in the episode at two pivotal points: once as Detective Miller questions a witness about failing to know her husband was abusing their daughter and again when Miller, in a moment of irony, is asked how she, herself, didn't know her own husband murdered their son's best friend (apparently, it's a pretty dark show). While Miller eventually solves the case, says Selznick, the damage was already done in showing that work takes mothers away from knowing about their families and protecting their children.

Not every series believes that motherhood and career are irreconcilable, though. In a scene from *NCIS Hawai'i,* we see the female lead, Special Agent Tenant, successfully and imperfectly balance work and family as she protects her son. Returning home from recently solving a case, Tenant surprises audiences by asking her son's girlfriend, Cassandra, who she previously disapproved of, to stay for a quick chat before she leaves. Suspenseful music indicates to viewers that while Tenant has expressed support for her son's relationship despite her inner discontentment, her true feelings are about to come out after overhearing a suspicious phone call that Cassandra made earlier. Yet, we are once again surprised as Tenant chooses to calmly question Cassandra about whether she is cheating in order to preserve her relationship with her son, highlighting the imperfections of the difficult parental balance between independence and protection. A stark contrast to *Broadchurch*, Tenant is able to be both ambitious in her career and in the know at home.

Still, other films believe that in order to truly be feminist, female detectives should not be portrayed as striking this incredibly difficult balance of being fully present for both their career and children. Looking at the 2018 film *Destroyer*, *The Guardian* writer Elena Lazic explains that

the lead, long-time detective Erin Bell, has the skills to protect her child, but ultimately fails to take care of them. In search of revenge for the killing of her partner and father to their daughter, Bell, says Lazic, is simply too hardened to emotionally connect with her child. In an example of how far Bell is willing to go for revenge, the writer describes a scene where Bell pulls a move reminiscent of the vigilante violence made popular by *Dirty Harry* as she starts "shooting at bank robbers, endangering everyone in the building." In a deviation from Hollywood's tendency to attribute such violence to female characters protecting their children, Lazic gives us the chilling insight that Bell doesn't act with her daughter's best interests in mind, but rather behaves simply because she wants to by quoting the detective's response when her methods are questioned, "Don't make excuses for what you want. It's weak."

Meanwhile, this is not the case for *NCIS Hawai'i*. As we saw previously, Tenant consciously acts with her son in mind. Instead of *NCIS Hawai'i* putting Tenant's skills as a detective and a parent at odds, they are used to complement each other. Similar to Erin's long career in *Destroyer*, Tenant's years of experience allows her tactfully interrogate Cassandra as she tells her about *spoozy*, a feeling she would get during her time as a CIA agent when she knew something just wasn't right about a case. This feeling, *spoozy*, was named after Tenant's first asset, a double-agent who was killed by a grenade being thrown through his bedroom window after his betrayal of both sides was discovered. Tenant's cryptic tone and deliberate movements as she slowly opens a bottle of wine while telling this story to Cassandra quickly clues both her and the audience into the fact that this backstory behind *spoozy* serves simply as a cover for Tenant to subtly tell Cassandra that she knows she has been keeping secrets.

Yet, the common friction between motherhood and career in film and TV is not surprising given Hollywood's expectations for women as mothers onscreen. As Jordan Trippeer points out in her article on the mother archetype, mothers in film are defined by what they give as well as their nurturing love and protection. At their best, mothers and their kids have loving, entertaining relationships as we see in *Gilmore Girls,* a dramedy on a single mother and her teenage daughter, which centers around this heartfelt relationship, illustrated by Trippeer. However, she specifies, at their worst, terrible mothers are villains as is the mother in the horror film *Mommy Dearest* who manipulates and abuses her adopted child. Sacrificing their time and putting their children first as we see *The Addams Family's* Morticia do when she vows to take care of one her children after they become ill, Trippeer says that the mother archetype represents a "collective understanding" that mothers will protect and love their children at all costs.

So, if society has long told us that good mothers are tender and peaceful, how is this reconciled with the crime and violence of the detective world? As you may have come to expect in this section, *NCIS Hawai'i* can offer us a valuable perspective. Once Cassandra finally cracks and admits to cheating on Tenant's son with another guy, we see Tenant is a complex character capable of filling the roles of detective and parent. As Cassandra explains that her fear of being left behind influenced her decision to cheat, Tenant reacts with compassion rather than coldness, displaying not only her love for her son in the form of protection but empathy for Cassandra. Combined with a sudden shift to sentimental music, the audience sees that Tenant's empathy and

wit make her a good mother without pushing for perfection. *NCIS Hawai'i* accepts the messiness of the complexities of being human and a detective by portraying Tenant as someone who doesn't need to always *know* to protect her kid.

Leaving the Lone Detective Behind: Complexity Through Buddy-Cop Comedies

Looking now at how female detectives are often portrayed in regards to other relationships in addition to motherhood, we see a similar pattern of societal expectations emerge, stifling their personalities and innate complexities. While film noir often portrayed female detectives as alone and socially cold, the current female detective has broken into the buddy-cop genre and is shown as a complex character who can operate in the serious world of crime-solving without losing her humor. Although Paul Feig's film *The Heat* has faced criticism for perpetuating some of the problematic tropes of buddy-cop films like violence and crude humor, *The Week* writer Monika Bartyzel argues that the film's copy-paste format as it simply substitutes men for women in a classic buddy-cop film is revolutionary because of that fact. By simply inverting gender roles, Bartyzel says *The Heat* shows that the buddy-cop film doesn't have to change based on gender, breaking our expectations of how male cops should behave together versus how female cops should behave together. Just as Feig's other box-office hit, *Bridesmaids*, defied Hollywood's assumptions on the prim-and-proper idea of bridesmaids by making their adventures filled with unexpected twists rare for female on-screen characters such as food poisoning, *The Heat*, notes Bartyzel, breaks this idea that women can't have the classic chaotic dynamic of the buddy-cop genre; by keeping its cavalier violence as McCarthy's and Bullock's character rack up a high kill count and perpetuate other tropes of such films without ever needing to justify their actions.

Likewise, the detective-comedy Brooklyn Nine-Nine emphasizes the fact that the detectives in Brooklyn's 99th precinct each have complex personalities that aren't determined by gender. Kat George in her *Decider* article claims that, as a comedy, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* creates an idealistic work world free from gender politics allowing the show to make brief statements on the real-world obstacles faced by women**.** For example, while George quotes one scene in which Detective Rosa comments to her partner Detective Santiago, "We work in a police force full of dudes, we have to have each other's backs," the show simply uses this to make a statement and then, in the spirit of a comedy, moves on. This brevity makes the female characters captivating to watch because they are able to be witty, complex characters without centering their personality around their gender due to the fact that, in *Brooklyn Nine-Nine,* their gender doesn't affect how they are treated in the precinct, says George. In another scene, George illuminates how the audience finds humor, instead, in the juxtaposition between the two male detectives "pining over unrequited love" and how quickly Detective Rosa moves on from her relationships.

This elimination of gender-defining personalities doesn't affect the detectives' skills either. With the help of the show's iconic tradition, the annual Halloween Heist, gender isn't a factor when the detectives put their detecting skills to the test in a high-stakes game of deception and genius. Each year, the precinct designates one item of choice to be the mark of the night and

whoever successfully steals and has possession of this item when the clock strikes midnight is dubbed the "greatest detective/genius." With the high stakes of year-long bragging rights on the line, the detectives pull out all the stops to "outwit, outplay, and outlast" their coworkers. Over the course of four years, the audience is left guessing who will win the next heist as each had different champions, two male detectives and two female detectives, showing that everyone has the skills to win.

In order to understand how the series accomplishes this though, we have to look at what *The Heat* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* have in common. When we do this, we see that they both use humor as a tool to seamlessly reinvent the female sleuth. In the case of *The Heat*, writer for *The Atlantic*, Ashley Fetters, notes how the film uses parody to break the gender tropes of the buddy-cop genre. Citing the fact that police women in films are "four times as likely as men to be rookies," Fetters describes how *The Heat* overcomes this through exaggerated scenes like one with Sandra Bullock's character single-handedly taking down dealers in a drug bust while her male colleagues "watch sheepishly." The dynamic duo of McCarthy's and Bullock's detectives also go beyond the common label limiting female cops to behind-the-scenes work, such as surveillance, as Fetters proves in one scene where the duo, parodying the usual violent interrogations done by male buddy cops, take on the active role of interrogation and intimidation by dangling a drug dealer over a balcony to attain the location a drug lord.

While *The Heat* uses comedy to parody gender tropes, the comedy series *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* takes a different approach with its humor by not limiting the detectives' tricks and dynamics with their coworkers to gender. Staying true to the nature of a sitcom, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* uses comedy to defy what is expected from male and female detectives on the show. While female detectives are usually portrayed as deceptive via femme fatale, in the Halloween Heists we see detectives of all genders don disguises, pick locks, and use manipulation to outwit each other. In fact, this pattern of using manipulation to mislead the other detectives becomes a common theme as, for example, we see detectives of both genders use the power of suggestion to trick their coworkers into doing what they want in scenes such as framing each other for flooding the precinct kitchen to influence who the detectives pick as their partner in that year's Heist.

But, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* furthers this idea in the fifth annual Halloween Heist with a plot twist that no one saw coming. Although the heist still had all the same shenanigans like Peralta hiring a group of actors dressed like "The Handmaid's Tale" characters to steal a safe, comedy is also utilized to break the relationship trope of the "maratorious melodrama." Instead of romance hindering the female detective's independence, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* introduces the plot twist of Peralta proposing to Detective Santiago with both characters maintaining their independence as it's a combination of their detecting skills that leads to the proposal. In the scene, Peralta switched that year's mark, a belt with the inscription "Greatest Human/Genuis/Detective Ever," for one asking Santiago to marry him. However, in order for Santiago to read the inscription, Peralta banked on the fact that Santiago would outsmart the precinct and win the heist. Rather than limiting Santiago's independence, it is her skills as a detective that allow the plot twist to be

possible and, metaphorically, states that the female detective never needed to go back into the home.

Conclusion

When publisher Edward Stratameyer first decided he wanted to create Nancy Drew, he wasn't particularly concerned with feminist ideals. Instead, he saw Nancy Drew as an opportunity to further fill his already full pockets of cash. I doubt he ever predicted the revolution he accidentally green-lighted. On the other hand, Drew's original ghostwriter Mildred Wirt may have been a bit more aware of the implications of what she was writing. She was opening the door for women to finally be unexpected. Even though her work was revised to fit culture's constraints, Wirt's strong-willed, daredevil Nancy Drew was echoed in the rare feminist films of the 40s and amplified in the reinvention of the female detective of recent history. The commitment to being unexpected is the motto of challenging the archetypes of female detectives as mothers and coworkers.

In less than 7 short years, Nancy Drew will have existed in the public sphere for 100 years. With that in mind, how far has Hollywood actually come in making the unexpected the status quo? Off to a rocky start, the femme fatale, used as a tool for social politics, began Hollywood's subduing of these unpredictable women. But, as times have changed, so too has the mainstream idea of the female detective. No longer constrained to the shallow perceptions of what a detective should be; whether that be stoic, dangerous, or incapable of having a life outside of work, the turn of the century has brought with it a fresh perspective on what it means to be female in media, which is that it is impossible to define the undefinable. Unique with every new iteration, the female detective is a character that refuses to be contained.

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