

Women Detectives in Detective Fiction: A Formula Analysis on *Dublin Murder Squad Series*

Alya Khoirunnisa Fadhilla*, Ida Rochani Adi
English Department, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: alyakf29@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the formulation of two women detectives in Tana French's work, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway, in the *Dublin Murder Squad Series* by exploring the hard-boiled fiction conventions which underlie the formulation of Tana French's two female detectives. The objective of this study is to determine how French innovates the hard-boiled fiction conventions in the formation of her women detective characters, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway. By employing formula analysis as theorized by John G. Cawelti (1976), this study shows that French innovates the hard-boiled formula in four aspects. First, French expanded the concept of marginality from economic class to gender and race. The second innovation is the substitution of the hard-boiled convention which emphasizes on masculine toughness with resistance to patriarchal control. Third, French re-established the relationship between the detective and the character femme fatale. Their similarity of female experiences and perspective with the femme fatale makes these women detectives not only reveal the femme fatale as a murderer, but also the motives and scenarios behind their acts. Finally, French also innovates the antithetical nature of the hard-boiled detective's presentation by offering a 'feminine' path to justice. These observations show that French's innovations on hard-boiled conventions on her women detectives are the extensions of the women investigators in the antecedent feminist revisions of the hard-boiled stories which are heavily influenced by the second-wave feminist values. However, Tana French also inserts her own commentary on the new variants of female character shaped by the new post-feminist discourse which separates her women detectives from those in the antecedent feminist hard-boiled revision series.

Keywords: *detective stories, formula, genre, hard-boiled, women detectives.*

INTRODUCTION

Dublin Murder Squad Series is a series of detective stories taking place in twenty-first century Dublin, Ireland. The fact that the series comprises female detectives shows how far the progression of female portrayal in the genre. It is observed that the development of detective fiction goes toward

openness to more women authors writing female protagonists. This is in line with John Cawelti's theory (1997), suggesting that detective fiction possesses a subversive element. The manifestation of this element is the exploration into issues among minority groups coherent with the modern trend of democracy (pp. 6-8). He theorizes that due to this reason, detective fiction is more than a mere

entertainment; one day this element will form the canonicity of the genre.

If traced from the history of the genre's development, there has been coherency between the genre and the social context at large. In its earliest form, detective fiction is known as a "movement from man to man" (Reddy, 2003, p. 191) due to the heavy element of Victorian masculinity and the prevalence of male authors. As female authors started to emerge, this convention shifted. Echoing the first wave feminist message, early female authors, especially those in the Golden Age, created their female sleuths as breaking down gender roles by solving crimes the way classic detective would do it (Gavin, 2010, p. 261). However, as the interwar years saw an increasing number of hard-boiled fictions flooding the market with a new character called '*femme fatale*', feminist renditions to the hypermasculine conventions of this genre started to flourish. In the 1980s, known as the heyday of feminist crime writing, variants of feminist interpretation of hard-boiled conventions were booming to the point that Glenwood Iron called it as a tradition on its own (Gavin, 2010, p. 265). This tradition was coincided with the birth of the second-wave feminism and became the foundation of independent female investigator models in the subsequent years.

Decades after this trend, female protagonists have varied as feminist discourses have found new strands, and detective fiction is now endowed with new sub-genres. Amidst this rapid production of the genre's innovations, Tana French, an Irish American, published her detective series *Dublin Murder Squad Series* comprising of six novels: *In the Woods* (2007), *The Likeness* (2008), *Faithful Place* (2010), *Broken Harbor* (2012), *The Secret Place* (2014), and *The Trespasser* (2016). These series follow the stories of several detectives who worked in the Irish Police Department in solving murder cases whilst also resolving their psychological trauma. Following the big trend of Domestic Noir in the genre's current market, *Dublin Murder Squad Series* incorporates several elements of the antecedent feminist innovations on the hard-boiled formula. The new feminist discourse influences the formulation of its female detectives. These female detectives appear in four novels: *In the Woods* (2007), *The Likeness* (2008), *The Secret Place* (2014), and *The Trespasser*

(2016). Looking at how recent these novels have been published, it is intriguing to use Tana French's female detectives as a checkpoint of female detective's portrayal in the detective genre. To achieve that, this paper examines these characters from a formula analysis perspective using the hard-boiled formula as the basis to seek for the innovations of her female detective's characterizations. Thus, by also looking at external social influences, this study on Tana French's women detectives proves the inseparable component between the genre and the modern democracy trend. (John. G. Cawelti, 1997, p. 13). To achieve such goal, this paper addresses two questions:

1. To what extent does Tana French incorporate the formula of hard-boiled detective fiction into her female detectives, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway, in the Dublin Murder Squad Series?
2. How does Tana French innovate the hard-boiled detective fiction formula in constructing her two female detectives, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway, in the Dublin Murder Squad Series concerning the developed feminist discourse?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considerable studies have been conducted on Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad Series from various perspectives. These studies focus mainly on Dublin Murder Squad Series as contemporary crime fiction. One study by Joyce (2018) analyzes a new sub-genre in crime fiction called the 'Domestic Noir'. It was argued that, as a contemporary sub-genre, Domestic Noir combines various elements of the mid-twentieth thrillers along with the archetypal noirs, such as the distinctive female protagonists who are both victims and perpetrators, the relevance of domesticity as the murder stage and so forth.

Another study by Johnson (2018) covers several key points regarding Tana French's female detectives. In general, this research explains how the Anglo-Irish gothic influences the novel in creating the domestic space and how each of her female detectives experiences confusion of self, leading to hallucinations (Johnson, 2018, pp. 221-236). The subtopic entitled 'Self Hallucination' explains the hallucination elements of the Irish Suburban Gothic

and Domestic Noir sub-genre whose archetypal elements are incorporated into the Tana French's series. This part covers how Cassie Maddox experienced confusion with her identity as she identified with the gender-specific lore ignited by being the victim, Lexie Madison, during her undercover mission in *The Likeness* (2009). Consequently, it forced her to develop a coping mechanism in a form of hallucination to stay professional during the process of crime-solving (p. 235). The same pattern also occurs in *The Trespasser* (2016) as Antoinette Conway identified the similarity between her and Aislinn Murray, the victim who, like Antoinette Conway, had no father figure in her life. This undergraduate thesis, focuses more on the hard-boiled detective tropes appear in the two female detectives as opposed to how these characters constitute a new sub-genre. However, Johnson's essay is valuable in understanding the series in relation to the twenty-first century trend of crime fiction writing which is encapsulated in the new sub-genre Domestic Noir.

The second study is an article written by Fionnuala Dillane under the title *Breaking Memory Modes: Anne Enright's and Tana French's Silent Interruptions*. This article covers how characters in three selected novels portray tropes which attempt to break the silence of their oppression. One of these novels is *In the Woods* (2006) and *The Likeness* (2011) as this study focuses on the character Cassie. This article pointed out several key points about how certain violence evokes a genderspecific fears, and Tana French knows how to play with it in order to get the desired emotional response from her readers (Dillane, Fionnuala, 2017, p. 160). This part fills the void of the previous essay by focusing on the relationship between gender and gender-specific traumatic experience. However, there is still room to elaborate how such phenomenon affect the formation of the two women detectives in relation to its position as a rendition of the hard-boiled detective tropes.

The third study is an essay by Shirley Peterson in the book "The Contemporary Irish Detective Novel". The essay, entitled "Voicing the Unspeakable: Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad", covers how traumatic expressions conveyed the impact of the Irish Celtic Tiger in Ireland. According to Peterson (2016), Cassie Maddox experiences

"alienation and disorientation" and she becomes the "victim herself of traumas involving the tragic loss of her parents, an attempted sexual assault, and a stabbing" (p. 113). This essay is useful as a basis to understand how Cassie's and Antoinette's traumatic expression parallels the Irish historical context at large. However, this undergraduate thesis focuses more on how these two women detectives' parallel with the hard-boiled detective formula and how they reconstruct or deviate from the conventions.

Fourth, an honor thesis by Jillian Slezek under the title *The Eternal Rehearsal: Judith Butler's Gender Performativity in Wilkie Collins, Sarah Waters, and Tana French*. As the title suggests, Jillian explores how Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity is presented through selected characters: Anne Catherick and Laura Glyde, Sue Trinder and Maud Lily, Nan King, and Cassie Maddox. The thesis suggests that French comments on the formation of women's persona as "impersonated, crafted, and controlled" (Slezek, 2018, p. 31). In *In the Woods* (2006), French depicts the instances of gender performances which are often mistaken by the patriarchal understanding as natural and initiating gendered inferiority. French goes to the extent of presenting the artificiality of gender performance through Lexie Madison. She suggests that when gender performance is consciously executed, social restrictions are not automatically dismissed and the barricade between oneself and performances becomes blurred. As Cassie associates herself too closely with the Lexie persona, French highlights Judith Butler's argument that beneath the performance, gender identity is an abstract construction. There is no true self, just a series of performances. This paper is valuable to see the link between Cassie Maddox and Judith Butler's theory on gender performativity and the fluidity of identity. However, the present researcher intends to study Cassie Maddox's performative acts from a different approach—genre analysis—with the purpose of seeing how Cassie relates to the pre-existing hard-boiled detective formula. Not only Cassie Maddox, this research also intends to study Antoinette Conway, another female detective in the series, using the same approach.

Although considerable studies have been devoted to Dublin Murder Squad Series from multiple points of view—from the perspective of the

sub-genre, the Irish historical context, and theory of gender performance—rather less attention has been paid to the hard-boiled formula constituting the formation of French’s women detectives, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway in the series. Similar to these studies, this study also examines the two women detectives in Dublin Murder Squad Series. However, this study analyses these characters using formula analysis with the purpose of determining the extent to which Tana French employs and renovates the hard-boiled detective formula through her female detectives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study applies formula analysis to explore the formulation of Tana French’s female detectives. In doing so, this paper utilizes theories on the study of popular stories as proposed by John G Cawelti (1976) in his book *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Genre*. However, first and foremost, it is crucial to recognize the definition of the term popular literature itself before diving into the theory itself. According to Ida Rochani Adi (2011), the term ‘popular literature’ functions to differentiate a specific type of literature that is deemed as lower in quality from its cannon counterparts (p. 20). This classification occurs due to the formula in the work’s presentation, themes, and other elements. According to Cawelti (1976), by exploring popular literature using the formula analysis methodology, one treats formulaic stories as “artistic constructions created for the purpose of enjoyment and pleasure” (p. 2). By recognizing the ‘collective artistic behavior’ of formulaic stories, researchers are able to explore the mutualistic relationship between formulaic stories and culture.

In analyzing formulaic stories, it is essential to understand three key terms in the study of popular stories: archetype, formula, and genre. Archetype refers to universal stories which appeal to a massive audience beyond cultural boundaries (Cawelti, 1976, p. 6). The formula is “a combination or synthesis of a number of specific cultural conventions with a more universal story form or archetype” (p. 5). A genre then is conceived when a formulaic pattern remains to exist through a long period of time in a way that is consolidated as a genre by the creators and audience

(p. 8). Hence, a genre in popular literature was “subject to a constant process of change and adaptation. Because different audiences will use a genre in different ways at different times, its boundaries can never be rigidly defined, and at the same time, it is susceptible to extensive subdivision [*sic*]” (Maltby, 1995, as cited in Adi, 2011, p. 197).

One of the well-known genres in popular literature is detective stories. The birth of the classical detective fiction formula marks the evolution of the cultural mythology of crime. Set by figures such as Edgar Allan Poe and Conan Doyle, classical detective fiction revolves around “the detective’s investigation and solution of the crime” (Cawelti, 1976, p. 81). This formula presents four essential characters: the detective, the criminal, the victim, and the people involved in the crime. One of the most significant elements in the formula is the characterization of the detective, which highly emphasizes “the [detective’s] poetic brilliance and ratiocinative powers” (p. 101). The victim and the criminal lack emotional depth to avoid overshadowing the detective’s deduction in the story. The birth of classical detective fiction sets the fundamental aspects of the preceding detective genres with the inventions of innovations by crime authors. One of the results of this innovation is the birth of a new genre called ‘hard-boiled detective stories.’

The formula of hard-boiled detective stories was manufactured in the 1920s and 1930s by the pulp magazine *Black Mask* writers and Dashiell Hammett. This genre presents crimes in an urban setting with a detective who relentlessly seeks justice which overshadows the solution to the crime. The ending of the story is, more often than not is, a manifestation of the “intimidation and temptation of the hero” (Cawelti, 1976, p. 142). Hence, in comparison to the classical form, the hard-boiled detective stories may seem more personal yet violent. One of the significant innovations by this genre is the character *femme fatale*, who adds to the theme of seduction in the genre. This genre’s formula is fundamental to extract the formulation of Tana French’s women detectives as it is the foundation of independent female investigators years after the birth of this new genre. With the progression of progressive values among western society, there have been multiple attempts to infuse liberal ideologies into the

conventions. As suggested by Peeper in *The "Hard-boiled" Genre* (2010):

Meanwhile, if the question of what happens when a genre that has traditionally been the preserve of straight, white male writers is appropriated by non-white, female, and gay writers has been addressed elsewhere...it simply remains for me to reiterate that hard-boiled writing's flexibility and elasticity allow for such appropriation—so long as its structuring tension is kept alive (p. 15).

The hard-boiled stories feminist revision, which occurred decades after the genre's popularity is, stemmed from the development of feminist critique. According to Elaine Showalter (1979). Feminist criticism refers to the examination of how women have been represented or omitted, from male-authored texts" (as cited in Gamble, 2006, p. 200). In understanding feminist criticism, it is essential to define patriarchy which, according to Chris Wedon, refers to

(...) power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference (as cited in Hodgson-Wright, 1998, p. 3).

The progress of feminist criticism is usually in line with feminist movements. Generally, the feminist movements are divided into three waves. The first wave emphasizes women's rights for education, child custody, employment, and suffragettes (Sanders, 2006, pp. 14-25). Second-wave feminism emphasizes "[voicing] (in Friedan's terms, to *name [sic]*) women's immediate and subjective experience and to formulate a political agenda and vision" (Thornham, 2006, p. 27). The third-wave feminism focuses on acknowledging diversity among women based on race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and others, and the reintroduction of sexual liberties (Snyder-Hall, 2010, pp. 258-259). The contemporary feminist current is less cohesive than its predecessor. Moreover, the birth of post-feminism uses consumerism in the discourse (Thornham, 2006, p. 42). Other important feminist terms in feminist

criticism are sexism and sexual harassment, which indicate the power dynamic between the patriarchal society and women's rights. These key terms are used to describe the relation between feminist issues and their influence in Tana French's formulation of her women detectives throughout the history of detective fiction. Feminist detective fiction has seen its rapid growth in recent years, thanks to the development of feminist movements in the western world. One of the most influential movements to the progression of feminist detective fiction is the second-wave feminist movement which begets the heyday of feminist crime writing in the 1980s. Ever since female investigators have continued to flourish in a manner that reflects the social context at large.

METHODS

This research paper is a qualitative inquiry of the *Dublin Murder Squad Series* through identifying the central issue in the field, which, in this case, is the formulation of Tana French's women detectives. The research will be conducted through close reading of the selected novels as well as other literary sources such as books, journal and online articles relevant to the formula analysis.

The data will be collected through library research, meaning that the data obtained in the research will be heavily based on the information found in the literary sources. The data are divided into two categories: primary and secondary. The primary data of this paper is the text within the selected novels in the *Dublin Murder Squad Series* by Tana French. These selected works are *In the Woods* (2007), *The Likeness* (2008), *The Secret Place* (2014), and *The Trespasser* (2016). All the texts in relation to Tana French's women detectives, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway, will be extracted to be classified based on formula categories. The secondary data of the research will be obtained from supplementary literary sources such as books, book sections, journal articles, newspaper articles, and online sources relevant to the formula analysis of these Tana French's women detectives.

The supplementary reading in relation to popular literature, such as, John Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories*

as Art and Popular Culture (1976), the development of detective stories formula and women detectives function to enrich the analysis on Tana French's approach to innovating the hard-boiled formula. In analyzing the data, this paper uses the inductive approach to analyze the primary data of the research using the study of formulaic stories obtained from the secondary data of the research. After the primary and the secondary data are collected, the analysis will be divided into subtopics that examine different categorizations of Tana French's innovations onto her female detectives. Last but not least, the conclusion based on these findings will be formed at the end of this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis shows that Tana French innovates the hard-boiled formula in four aspects. Each of these formulae are known as the hypermasculine elements of the hard-boiled stories which French innovates to fit into the characterization of her female detectives.

Moving away from the Conventional Marginality

The first innovation occurs by moving away from the conventional marginality of the hard-boiled stories. This innovation is achieved through redefining the meaning of marginality in hard-boiled detective stories. If the conventional hard-boiled detective is marginal in its class aspect through the portrayal of his office and his acquaintances, Tana French's women detectives are marginal, not in terms of class, but in terms of gender and race. In the conventional hard-boiled stories, the detective's marginal aspect is presented through the contrast between her lower-middle-class origin and the affluence of the elite class with whom he worked as a detective. In Tana French's series, her female detectives were proven as not fitting into these concepts. Cassie Maddox is described as living in Sandymount during the Celtic Tiger Wave, an area known for its middle to the upper-class community with a rising house price due to the Irish economic boom. Antoinette Conway, on the other hand, despite coming from a lower-middle-class, aspired to climb out of this situation. Her Dublin inner-city background describes the poverty

she grew up in and motivated her to join the Irish Police Department.

As neither of her female detectives was marginal in the way a hard-boiled detective is, it is observed that French substitutes this sense of marginality with gender and race, but more specifically on gender. This marginality is portrayed through the dominance of male detectives in the Murder Squad, who continuously harass and discriminate against these two female detectives. Cassie Maddox was the fourth woman ever working in the Murder Squad, demanding her prove her competence despite the disseminating rumors regarding her admittance into the Murder Squad. The exact portrayal is also applied to Antoinette Conway, who suffers worse. The fact that she was the only woman working in the Murder Squad, as well as a biracial person, made it difficult for her to operate effectively like her male peers. The constant verbal, mental and physical harassment she receives makes her even more aggressive than Cassie Maddox regarding sexism.

However, albeit different in meaning, Tana French's redefinition of marginality serves the same function as the hard-boiled detective's marginality. If the hard-boiled marginality protects his moral integrity and makes him the perfect men to expose the corruption of the affluent society, the marginality of Tana French's female detectives allow them to expose details regarding female victims which the other male detectives often overlook, hence they becomes the perfect women to expose the crimes involving patriarchal violence on women. For Cassie Maddox, the fact that she shared the same female experience with the victim in *In the Woods* (2006), Katy Devlin, allows her to process the oddness of her motive coming to the crime scene. In *The Likeness* (2007), Cassie's similar experience with the victim, Lexie Madison, was the reason why she figured out the motive behind her betrayal to the Whitehorn residence; a pregnancy and a burden of two souls. It is something that seemed inexplicable to the other male detectives without psychological understanding.

Antoinette Conway also used her psychological similarities with the victim in *The Trespasser* (2016), Aislinn Murray, to determine her motive to enact her transformation, which led to her

own downfall. Both Aislinn and Antoinette lost their fathers allowing Antoinette to connect the dots between the evidence she found in the Police Department and the crime scene, something that her male detective partner, Stephen Moran, was unable to do due to a lack of understanding of Aislinn's grief.

It is evident by now that French inclines to present gender marginality instead of racial marginality, even on her biracial character, Antoinette Conway. It is a classic mistake by many white feminist crime authors. Cassie represents the shift of marginality from class to gender prevalent among white feminist authors in the 1980s, which coincided with the second-wave feminist movement. Like these authors, French's portrayal of Cassie Maddox revolves around "on middle-class white consciousness" (p. 205). Antoinette Conway's portrayal resembles the expansion to racial marginality with the surge of black crime writers in the 1990s (Reddy, 2003, p. 202). However, many white feminist authors who attempt to present inclusive characterizations lack of exploration into racial struggles which in consequence creating women of color as a biological rather than a cultural fact" (Reddy, 2003, p. 205). The same pattern occurs with the portrayal of Antoinette Conway, as French was reluctant to define her race and even avoided the subject by making her race ambiguous. Thus, marginality in French's portrayal of her female detective inclines toward gender as a form of repetition of the same mistake of the antecedent white feminist mistake with a middle-class white consciousness.

Substituting Masculine Toughness with a Resistance Against Patriarchal Control

The second innovation is French's substitution of masculine toughness with resistance against patriarchal control. To create a tough female detective, it is inevitable to subvert the masculine definition of toughness in the hard-boiled detective stories. In the conventional formula, a hard-boiled detective carries the lower-middle-class toughness into his investigation, which manifests in his "crudeness, aggressive violence, and alienation from the respectable morality of society" (Cawelti, 1976, p. 61). In Tana French's series, her women detectives carry the toughness from resisting the patriarchal

control within the Murder Squad, which also manifests in crudeness, aggressivity, and alienation, but with a different execution. In *The Likeness* (2008), Cassie expresses sardonic comments toward implicit sexist comments. She refused to be silenced by her male peers and even her boyfriends by constantly asserting her agency during the investigation. One example is when she was not permitted to be involved in Lexie Madison's case by her boyfriend, her detective partner.

"[This] girl was going around wearing my fucking face... Specific cases aren't the point... The point is, for all we know I could be involved up to my tits already... You're treating me like your girlfriend, Sam... I'm not your girl-friend, not when it comes to this kind of thing. I'm just another detective" (French, 2008, pp. 49-50).

Conway's toughness is even more aggressive than Cassie's. On the one hand, she is very satirical with any comments which aim to contain her in her submission, such as her refusal to be backed up by Breslin. On the other hand, she was unhesitant to retaliate to sexual harassment by her male peers in the Murder Squad. Even in one case, she took the matter into her own hand by breaking the wrist of the harasser.

Consequently, like the hard-boiled detective, these female detectives carry on this toughness onto the crime scenes. Cassie Maddox was willing to sacrifice herself to confront a psychopath who killed her own sister in *In the Woods* (2006) as the other male detectives were unqualified to do so, breaking the stereotype that a woman is incompetent to deal with murder cases. In *The Likeness* (2008), her toughness allows her to bring justice to Lexie Madison's case by retaliating against all external power that aimed to retract her from the mission.

Conway's toughness also manifests during the investigation by fighting her way through two senior detectives who attempted to direct her into arresting an innocent person. She had to deal with a corrupted detective and his enablers, who were practically almost everyone in the Murder Squad, to give justice to the victim, Aislinn Murray. Her toughness against blackmails and harassment from the male members of the Murder Squad was what made McCann's arrest possible.

However, this subversion is unprecedented as the previous female investigators, especially those created in the 1980s feminist crime writing, were fighting against the notion that “detecting is no job for a woman” (Gavin, 2010, p. 265). With the rise of second-wave feminism, many of these feminist writers attempt to break down patriarchal ideals of womanhood by exploring gender boundaries in justice systems.

The result of this is the masculinization of many female investigators in the 1980s compared to their Golden Age counterparts, as is the case here with Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway. The sardonic and crude nature of these female detectives resonates with the same attitude of the feminist detective characters, such as, Paretsky’s V.I. and Grafton’s Kinsey. French’s emphasis on toughness as a resistance against patriarchal control in the Murder Squad in her twenty-first detective fiction highlights the relevancy of sexual harassments issue amidst the backlash against feminism regarding their female victimization. Her series suggests that she inclines to portray women’s confrontation with sexual harassment as a manifestation of toughness instead of feminism which echoes the same feminist message of the feminist series in the 1980s hard-boiled feminist revision tradition.

Redefining the Detective's Relationship with Femme Fatale

The third innovation is French’s redefinition of the detective’s relationship with the *femme fatale*. There are two *femme fatale* characters in the selected works of *Dublin Murder Squad Series*. The first *femme fatale* character is Rosalind Devlin in *In the Woods* (2006) who met with Cassie Maddox during the act. She was a psychopathic sister who killed her own little sister out of jealousy. The second *femme fatale* character is Aislinn Murray, whom Antoinette Conway met after her downfall. In *The Trespasser* (2016), she was both the villain and the victim. First and foremost, French innovates these female betrayers from their conventional characterization by updating them into the beauties that the audience recognizes in modern times.

‘God, she did. She basically stopped eating, and she started going to the gym every day. Once she got thin enough that she was satisfied—too

thin, if you ask me, but whatever—she went to an *image* consultant and got shown what clothes to buy and how to put on makeup and what color to dye her hair. She came out looking like she’d been cloned in some creepy factory off the M50 ... (French, 2016, p. 360).

French showcases how these *femme fatales* employ modern femininity to act as *femme fatale* by describing a total makeover from head to toe. This *femme fatale* does not necessarily use sexual temptations to act on their manipulative behavior. However, they sure fabricate stories in a way that makes them seem more advanced than the original *femme fatale* as they deceive the male detectives and the readers. Therefore, French follows the trend in Domestic Noir novels in which

there is a new paradigm at work. Female gender anxieties are being explored, and female characters are more likely to be released from the prescriptive madonna/whore dichotomy and presented as just as flawed and morally ambivalent as the males (Redhead, 2018, p. 117).

One example of this trend is Megan Abbott’s *Dare Me* (2004). The *femme fatale* characters reenact the post-feminist ideal of feminine success. However, this idea is presented as a double-edged sword that leads to the female protagonists’ destructions.

“flawless performance [...] inscrutability and lack of visible emotion”... beautiful, in control of her taut, healthy body, skilled, professional, with a perfect, doll-like 4-year-old daughter and a handsome husband who works long hours in finance to provide her with all the expensive furnishings she could ask for....she personifies the post-feminist discourse of self-surveillance, self-improvement, and what McRobbie has labelled the “makeover paradigm” in which women’s lives can be improved if they transform and become more successful versions of themselves. (Redhead, 2018, p. 121)

However, French’s mode of describing the post-feminist idea of female protagonists is through her female detectives, which stems from her innovation to the hard-boiled formula. If the hard-boiled detective’s relationship with the *femme fatale* was destructive, these women detectives were

positioned as commentators to the *femme fatale* characters who act as performers between a hero and a tempter. French's female detectives expose the superficiality of these *femme fatale* characters who are essentially the embodiment of post-feminist ideas. In these novels, the *femme fatale* characters were not portrayed as the 1920s extraordinary beauty; however, these *femme fatale* characters were a Victorian doll-like little lady and a generic western Barbie. Using the third-wave theory of gender performance by Judith Butler, it can be deduced that French highlights the prescribed femininity of this *femme fatale* through the narration of her female detectives.

Tana French then illustrates how this prescribed femininity leads to these *femme fatale* characters' downfall, whereas her female detectives end happily. Thus, with the contrast between her *femme fatale* characters' endings and the female detectives', it can be deduced that Tana French's incline to the second wave feminist outlook to female protagonists rather than the newer and bigger in influence post-feminist discourse.

Reconfiguring Antithetical Stereotypes: Between Brutality and Sentimentality

The fourth innovation is French's reconfiguration of the hard-boiled detective's antithetical nature: sentimentality and brutality. Her revision to the nature of hard-boiled brutality stems from the masculine projection in the meaning of this violence itself. In the conventional hard-boiled stories, the brutal mode of investigation which the hard-boiled detective enacts was justified by the rebellious nature of the hard-boiled hero against the corrupt society (Cawelti, 1976, p. 61). The higher sentiment directed at the victim compared to its classical predecessor makes the brutal confrontation between the detective and the criminal seem necessary to achieve justice (p. 147). With the element of physical assaults in the hard-boiled stories, aggression becomes one of the main features of a hard-boiled detective.

In Tana French's *Dublin Murder Squad Series*, French redefines the necessity of violence in the investigation even though her female detectives receive the same assaults from the people in her surroundings. However, this redefinition does

not decrease the element of violence in the stories. Cassie Maddox, for instance, is portrayed as trained and experienced in dealing with violence, as represented by her doing target practice as escapism. Antoinette Conway also would not hesitate to point her gun at a stalker to protect herself, fully knowing how unexpected her action would be.

He wasn't expecting the gun. I wasn't expecting him. I was ready for anything from a serial killer to one of our own, but not for this guy (French, 2016, p. 312).

However, when dealing with cases, these guns were treated as a second option. Cassie Maddox, in both cases in *In the Woods* (2006) and *The Likeness* (2007), hesitated to use guns to resolve the crime until that one event in *The Likeness* (2007) in which she had to fire her gun as the suspect, Daniel, was also pointing her gun at her. However, if in hard-boiled stories, such violent confrontation would be celebrated. However, French also innovates the formula of sentimentality of the detective by accompanying her action as an executor with guilt. French expands the detectives' sentimentality not only directed toward the victim but also toward the criminal and other parties involved in the case. Therefore, instead of an ending where the detectives' triumph against the criminal, Cassie's ending in *The Likeness* (2007) is filled with guilt as she gave mercy to the rest of the Whitehorn House out of sentimental connections with the residents.

There's so little mercy in this world. Lexie sliced straight through everyone who got between her and the door, people she had laughed with, worked with, lain down with. Daniel, who loved her like his blood, sat beside her and watched her die, sooner than allow a siege on his spellbound castle. Frank took me by the shoulders and steered me straight into something that he knew could eat me alive. Whitethorn House let me into its secret chambers and healed my wounds, and in exchange I set my careful charges and I blew it to smithereens (French, 2008, p. 443).

The same innovation also occurs with Antoinette Conway in *The Trespasser* (2016). Instead of using violence, she tried to appeal Lucy, who had hidden a major clue to the investigation, with a sense

of female solidarity. By exploring the similar female sentimentality between her and Lucy, Antoinette was able to progress her investigation to the arrest of McCann.

By shifting the meaning of brutality and violence, French offers an alternative path to achieve justice. French does not necessarily tone down the violent aspect in the story; however, she offers a different perspective to treat violence in detective fiction. She showcases a 'feminine' way to resolve criminal cases in detective fiction without diminishing the gruesome aspect of the original hard-boiled stories.

Her innovations, however, were not revolutionary. The reconfiguration of the meaning of violence has been voiced by the precedent crime feminist authors such as Paretzky. By showcasing how a female protagonist operates violently within a patriarchal setting, authors such as Paretzky challenge gender boundaries in detective fiction while reexamining the meaning of violence. Resonating the same feminist message, both French's women detectives also contemplated the meaning of violence. By detaching the masculine fantasy from the representation of violence in hard-boiled stories, French highlights the glorification of brutality in the hard-boiled formula.

The exploration of the detective's sentimentality is perhaps an influence of the domestic noir's trend. As suggested by Patricia Catoira (2018), the success of this trend has "revitalized the genre by doing away with the lone-wolf hero and street violence, favoring instead emotional and psychological aggression among people who know each other" (p. 262). French seems to incorporate this element by exploring the psychological similarities between the female detectives and the victims as well as the criminals. However, in her novels, French also presents the dilemma between this psychological aspect and the demand for professionalism as a detective. This collision highlights the challenges to innovate the hard-boiled masculine formula with the development of feminist value in creating a female detective.

CONCLUSION

The findings show that Tana French innovates the hard-boiled formula in four aspects. The first aspect is the meaning of marginality in the hard-boiled formula by shifting the meaning from class to gender. It is achieved through the portrayal of Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway as the only women working in the Murder Squad. Their gender marginality allows them to solve cases that include female victims. French also includes racial marginality in her description of Antoinette Conway. However, her lack of exploration into the topic makes her portrayal only a biological fact.

The second innovation occurs in the redefinition of the hard-boiled detective's toughness. This innovation results from shifting the marginality of the detective, which also changes the origin of the detective's toughness; from a lower-middle-class toughness to a toughness stemmed from the detectives' experience with gender discrimination. Hence, French substitute this the hard-boiled toughness with a resistance against the patriarchal control. Hence, if the hard-boiled detective's toughness is directed against external assaults, usually from the criminals, in Tana French's series, the toughness of the women detectives was directed toward the patriarchal control in the Murder Squad.

Even though the types of toughness between the hard-boiled detective and the women detectives are different, the authoritarian verbal style, crudeness, and aggressivity remain present. Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway were as sardonic as a hard-boiled detective. However, their satirical comments were directed toward sexist comments and jokes. They were also equally aggressive, like a hard-boiled detective. However, it is directed toward sexual harassment. Thus, French showcases how women detectives can be equally tough without having to employ the masculine definition of toughness in hard-boiled stories.

The third innovation is French's innovation to the relationship between the femme fatale and the detective. If in the original stories the relationship is

destructive; the detective triumphs against the femme fatale, in Tana French's series, the relationship between the detective and the femme fatale changes between a commentator and a performer. The fact that the femme fatale characters are based on the post-feminist portrayal of female protagonist, Tana French's female detectives act as a commentary to this new discourse which enhances her consistency with the second-wave feminist ideology.

The fourth innovation is the renovation of the hard-boiled detective's antithetical nature: brutality and sentimentality. In Tana French's series, the relationship between brutality and sentimentality is redefined: sentimentality is no longer a justification to enact violence. Instead, using violence as a mode of investigation is avoided by Tana French's women detectives. They treat their guns not as the primary option to deal with witnesses and criminals. At the same time, the sentimentality of the detective is explored through descriptions of psychological exploration. The result of this is the element of guilt, mercy, and female solidarity in the process of solving crimes.

These innovations show that French's portrayal of her women detectives is an extension of the female investigator model during the heyday of feminist revision of the hard-boiled detective formula. By observing the close similarities between French's women detectives and several female investigators in those feminist crime series, it is understandable that there is a heavy element of the second-wave feminist ideologies in the presentation of French's female detectives, Cassie Maddox and Antoinette Conway, which is in contrast with the flourishing female protagonists based on the newer feminist discourse such as post-feminism.

However, at the same time, Tana French also acknowledges this new feminist and post-feminist discourse in her novels as represented by the character femme fatale. However, the contrast between her female detectives and these femme fatale characters only suggests her commentary on the superficiality of the post-feminist protagonist model. However, this comparison differentiates her women detectives from the antecedent female investigators from the feminist revisions of the hard-boiled formula.

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