Start with one serving of fingertips severed during a rather unfortunate version of Miller time.

Blend in a blinding hangover buttressed by a British beer.

Add the roar of a Harley drowning out the raspy hacking of a heavy smoker. Simmer until cynical, edgy and acerbic.

Then garnish with a loaded gun, an attitude and a leather-jacketed protagonist.

Voilà! That's the recipe for the archetypal hard-boiled detective, except in this case the hard-boiled sleuth wears a bra and answers to the name Jane Yeats.

With the publication of her first novel, *Sudden Blow* in 1998, Toronto author Liz Brady did something both old and new in the hard-boiled detective arena -- she managed to stay true to the tenets of the traditional hard-boiled school, while simultaneously turning it on its head by introducing arguably the most hard-boiled heroine to date.

Over the years, the parameters for hard-boiled fiction have changed, the definitions broadened and the characterizations and settings have been updated, but certain truths and certain characteristics remain. The detective may now have a family and a partner, he may smoke less or not at all, he may swig from a recyclable water bottle instead of reaching for the fifth of scotch in his desk drawer. And, nowadays, he may in fact be a she.

Marcia Muller's *Sharon McConne* series paved the way for women's entry into the sphere of hard-boiled fiction. Others, notably Sue Grafton's *Kinsey Millhone*, Sara Paretsky's *V.I. Warhawski* and Linda Barnes' *Carlotta Carlyle* soon joined the ranks of women writing in the hard-boiled tradition. These women authors have made significant and abundant contributions over the years. Women have defiantly staked out their turf in this genre, but in many cases, it has been peripheral, with a caveat or -- with all due respect -- more soft boiled than hard. While some women have paralleled the genre, and others have borrowed heavily from it, few have ever captured its essence as flawlessly as Liz Brady has.

However, Brady's character Jane Yeats identifies more readily with Robert B. Parker's *Spenser* or Lawrence Block's *Matt Scudder* than with the often heralded first lady of hard-boiled, Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone. In fact, one can easily trace the hard-boiled family tree and see Jane's ancestral connections to Chandler and Hammett, as well as the
hereditary links between Jane and Spenser, Scudder and even newcomer Elvis Cole.

The roots of the hard-boiled genealogy may be traced back to the "pulp mags" of the late 1920s. This innovative new voice in fiction emerged during the years bracketed by the First World War and the Depression, as well as a world steeped in the underground distilleries of prohibition, the ushering in of assembly line production and women's first foray to the voting booth. In the early days of hard-boiled fiction, the genre had a name and resided on a distinct branch on fiction's family tree, but the genetic code of early hard-boiled fiction had yet to be unraveled. Captain Joseph T. Shaw, editor of the pulp magazine Black Mask, could be considered fiction's Watson and Crick for his role in decoding the hard-boiled DNA. In 1928 Captain Shaw specified the following parameters for the hard-boiled stories he sought for publication in Black Mask:

*We do not care for purely scientific detective stories which lack action, and we are prejudiced by experience against the psychological story which is not very rugged and intense in its treatment and subject matter. We avoid the old formula type of so-called detective story, as well as the gruesome, the unnatural or supernatural. We stress plausibility in all details, and we wish swift movement and action.*

A decade and a half later, one of the premiere, and to this day premier, contributors to the genre gave rise to a more concrete definition of the hard-boiled school. Raymond Chandler elaborated on Shaw's early criteria for this nascent branch of fiction in his 1944 essay "The Simple Art of Murder":

*Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.... He must be a complete man and a common man, yet an unusual man. He must be...a man of honor. He is neither a eunuch nor a satyr. I think he might seduce a duchess, and I'm quite certain he would not spoil a virgin. If he is a man of honor in one thing, he's that in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man, and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him.*

In mystery fiction, as with other genres and literary styles, growth and changes have taken place in recent years. As Larry Landrun states "one of the most striking aspects of detective and mystery novels has been the expansion of cultural perspectives informing crime fiction" (16). A number of socio-economic and cultural factors, such as AIDS, globalization, environmental awareness, and 9/11 have impacted both the characters and the plots in contemporary storytelling.

However, in hard-boiled fiction, everything old is new again. The hard-boiled genre, conceived in the speakeasies of the Roaring Twenties, peaked during its debut, then lulled in mid-century; was overshadowed by the cold war and a spate of espionage thrillers in the Sixties, and was in essence reborn in the Eighties. It was at this time, hot on the (no longer high) heels of the women's movement, that female writers and heroines began to stake their claim -- however tentatively at first -- in detective fiction. As the hard-boiled arena has been both renovated and innovated, the packaging may have changed but the contents - the intrinsic, instinctive makeup of a hard-boiled sleuth - have been preserved. While the boundaries are occasionally teased and they are, at times, elastic, the general genetic map today remains as it was in the days of hard-boiled masters Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett.

Contemporary fictioneer Lawrence Block has authored several mystery series, including the Matthew Scudder and Bernie Rhodenbarr novels, as well as several books for aspiring writers, plus short stories, critiques and miscellaneous nonfiction. In 1993, the designation "Grand Master" was bestowed upon Block by the Mystery Writers of America. It is fitting, then, that his essay "My Life in Crime" is the opening piece in The Fine Art of Murder: The Mystery Reader's Indispensable Companion. The subtitle of his essay is "A personal overview of American mystery fiction," and in this essay, Block outlines the sub-categories and classifications within mystery fiction as he sees them. He states that:

*The world of crime fiction gets... cleft in twain. Mysteries are divided into two categories: the tough, gritty, mean-streets, in-your-face kind, which is labeled hard-boiled, and the gentle, effete, British-country-house body-in-the-library sort, which is called cozy.*

*Stereotypically, the hard-boiled mystery is American. It features, and is very likely narrated by, a private detective, a hard-drinking, soft-hearted cynic... It is sour and downbeat and
Block traces the origins of hard-boiled to its birth “in the detective pulps after the turn of the century” and he recognizes that “in the pulp magazines another tradition was born. Crude, violent, rough edged, cynical, often anti-authoritarian, pulp crime fiction spoke in a new voice that caught much of the spirit of post-World War One America.”

As Block reflects on "a life in crime," he acknowledges the legacy of the hard-boiled progenitors. He recognizes that the magazine Black Mask "forged hard-boiled fiction into something honest and vigorous" (14) and that two of the magazine's early contributors, Chandler and Hammett were the early standard bearers of the hard-boiled oeuvre. Block notes that Raymond Chandler "talked of taking murder out of the English drawing room and putting it in the streets where it belonged" -- a pithy thumbnail descriptor of early hard-boiled fiction. Block also acknowledges the legacy and influence of author Dashiell Hammett. In his brief assessment of Hammett’s impact on the hard-boiled genre, Block states that:

Hammett's greatness is far more than a matter of being able to write knowledgeably of crime and criminals. Both his literary style and his artistic vision cast an unsparing light on Prohibition era America. In sentences that were flat and uninflected and remarkably non-judgmental, he did much the same thing Hemingway did. I would argue that he did it better.

Author Jon L. Breen, another contributor to The Fine Art of Murder offers an overview of "Private Eye Mysteries" in his introduction to that section of the compendium. Like Block, Breen notes that "the Black Mask characters rose from a different tradition: not of the cerebral detective story... but of the more action-oriented adventures of the dime novels". Breen acknowledges the conventions of early private eye fiction, noting the:

Urban atmosphere, the tough slang, the P.I. code of honor, the snappy repartee, the colorful villains, the contrast of low life and high society, plenty of physical action... and vivid violence, gallows humour, picturesque prose (including similes)... Breen then briefly discusses the influence of Chandler, whose "colorful, picturesque, simile-strewn prose became the most imitated style in the genre and remains so today".

Another contribution by Breen to The Fine Art of Murder is his introduction to the section on "Hard-boiled Mysteries." Breen begins this essay with a reference to the rather unfavorable definition of hard-boiled fiction found in Benét's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature (1991). Benét's definition of hard-boiled refers to "a type of detective or crime story in which an air of realism is generated through laconic and often vulgar dialogue, depiction of cruelty and bloodshed at close range and use of generally seamy environments". This definition, though unflattering, echoes the criteria outlined in earlier specifications and does indeed highlight the distinguishing features of hard-boiled fiction, both then and now. The rawness of the definition is ironically apropos, given that it is itself written in the unadorned manner of that which it is defining.

Ian Ousby, author of The Crime and Mystery Book: A Reader's Companion discusses hard-boiled fiction at length. His examination begins with early installments of the hard-boiled genre, and then chronicles its lifespan, from the days of yore to the present. Like others, he refers to the pulp roots and states:

From such cheap and fertile origins sprang the work first of Hammett, then a decade later of Raymond Chandler, and then of Ross Macdonald, the three writers whose work established the hard-boiled school and the legion of imitators and followers who still flourish today.

As with Benét, the parameters are clearly but unflatteringly stated: cheap and fertile would do little to appeal to the uninitiated. However, the raw wording is once again reflective of the genre itself. It would be at cross-purposes to use florid, lyrical vocabulary to describe a genre born on the wrong side of the tracks and reared in the feral underbelly of society. Ousby also states that "being tough is a matter of attitude, not muscles and guns, the despised tools on which the detective's opponents usually rely." Jane Yeats's matter-of-fact fortitude is indicated early on; in Sudden Blow she understates her tenacity and temerity when she comments "I didn't have my life threatened. I merely had the shit beaten out of me".

Toughness and raw, pared-down characters and styles seem to be uniformly present within hard-boiled fiction, but those characteristics alone do not identify or define hard-boiled
fiction. Many of the genre's hallmarks have to do with the characters' attributes and conduct, both of which are, or have in recent years become, malleable and elastic. One feature, however, is stoically present in all hard-boiled fiction, whether classic or contemporary. Eclipsing habits and foibles as hard-boiled imperatives is the "moral code" or "code of honour." The private eye may drink or not, he may have a family or not, but the one inviolable tenet of the prototypical hard-boiled detective is the ever present, often unique and occasionally contradictory moral compass. Chandler stated this moral compass may permit the spoiling of a duchess, but commands respect for a virgin; in doing so Chandler defined by omission the unfailing amorphous internal value system that guides a hard-boiled sleuth in all matters.

Over the years, regardless of whatever changes have been wrought within the genre, two contemporary masters, Robert B. Parker and Lawrence Block, and even relative newcomer Robert Crais, have maintained the basic tenets of the tradition. Their success and recurring presence on bestseller lists testify to the timelessness of the genre. Perhaps this success owes a debt to the alluring and intoxicating stories peopled by characters who both mirror and expose a value system revered for its tenacity and envied for its certitude. Robert B. Parker has not only contributed significantly to the genre, he has also analyzed it in depth and has helped to define contemporary hard-boiled fiction. In an essay published in the late 1970's, on the cusp of Parker's blockbuster success with the Spenser series, he discusses the nebulous guiding principles of the hard-boiled detective:

It took Chandler to point out that the hard-boiled hero was not concerned with economics. He was concerned with honor.... What they do, as opposed to what they say, is honorable. The hard-boiled hero is aware that honor has no definition.... He knows there are things a man does and things he doesn't do, and it is not usually very hard to decide which is which. It is often wearisome to choose. The fact that such men elect to be honorable in a dishonorable world makes them heroic. As in most fundamental things that humans care for, honor is indefinable, but easily recognized.... He is not of the people; he is alone. His adventures are solitary statements. His commitment is to a private moral code without which no other code makes any sense to him. He regularly reaffirms the code on behalf of people who don't have one.... He is the last gentleman, and to remain that he must often fight. Sometimes he must kill.

In "Robert B. Parker: A Code and a Quest," David Corbett praises the ways in which Robert B. Parker has contributed to the hard-boiled tradition. Corbett says:

If Bob Parker doesn't respect the genre, nobody does. He wasn't trying to make it something else, something "better," he was seeing it for what it was and showed us all something we may not have recognized before. There was an impressive history here, a tradition. One we could learn from, and which could inspire us if we let it.

He's never insulted our intelligence. He's been honest. He's been funny. He knows how to keep the action clean and taut, so we keep turning pages.

Tom Jenkins further lauds modern masters in his article "... If The Day Got Any Better, My Cat Would Die". While the piece is primarily about a new hard-boiled author, Robert Crais, Jenkins links Crais's character Elvis Cole to the modern hard-boiled standard bearer: Parker's Spenser. Jenkins offers some high praise to Crais by lodging him into the same echelon as widely acknowledged masters:

Carrying forward the hard-boiled detective genre developed by Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald, and currently embellished by Robert B. Parker, the craftsmanship reached by Robert Crais... is perhaps unsurpassed by his illustrious predecessors. Elvis Cole -- like Spenser -- puts his sense of moral honor before everything, and he does it with humour and sometimes detachment, the same way he keeps his cat alive.

Liz Brady's character Jane Yeats exemplifies the characteristics itemized in the consistently complicated definitions of the hard-boiled sleuth. Beginning with some of the criteria specified in Captain Shaw's 1928 edict, Liz Brady's Jane Yeats series does indeed consist of rugged stories with plausible details and swift movement. Verisimilitude permeates each novel right from its first pages. In Sudden Blow (1998), the first of the tseries, Jane's living space is described in unashamed detail. Jane's narrative refers to "a noxiously full ashtray" (Sudden Blow 10) and a refrigerator inventory including "elderly dairy products... romaine as wilted as me... and some distinctly fuzzy blueberries".

Palpability is the platform on which to showcase a second hard-boiled attribute. Lawrence Block's criteria for hard-boiled fiction bluntly includes hard drinking, and very early on Jane
is shown to have a more than unhealthy affinity for several pints of dark British ales. Jane's debut shows her at her worst, as her narrative claims "To understated the diagnosis, you could say I was hungover" (Sudden Blow 9). As she handles a visit from an unexpected guest, while simultaneously coping with the spiteful aftermath of over-imbibing, Jane reflects that last night "I must have been pissed as a newt."

Like Sudden Blow, the second book in the Jane series, Bad Date (2001), also begins with a candid description of Jane's over-indulgence in alcohol. Jane has just woken up with another hangover of epic proportions after another night of hard drinking. Jane's narrative in the first two paragraphs states:

Had I not been pole-axed by debauchery, I might have dialed 911 and saved Tina's life. A less bibulous person might label my profound slumber a 'blackout.' My conscience settled on prolonged narcolepsy."

It is in this fragile state that Jane learns of her neighbour's murder. Jane doesn't however simply hear of the death third-hand; the victim's body happens to be in Jane's own garden. In addition to fitting the hard-drinking criteria, the opening of this novel also meets Shaw's requirements for rugged stories, plausible details and swift movement. The body is discovered on the second page of the novel, and is described by Jane as:

The corpse looked no more terrifying than a Modigliani nude in serious distress.... Tina Paglia appeared to have been dumped like so much garbage. Just yesterday her big bleached hair, bold makeup, sprayed on miniskirt and fuck-me stiletto heels had advertised her in-no-way-respectable but in your face vulgarity.... Her limbs were flung out in the careless abandon of a nude sunbather, crushing the huge hosta on which she'd landed. A slug slithered into a nostril. A few stray maple leaves were held in the pool of congealing blood around her throat.

As well, Jane's hard-drinking ways set the tone early on in the third novel See Jane Run (2004). Chapter three begins:

Wet, bloodied and shivering, I came to consciousness. A manic percussionist was beating on the walls of my skull. I seemed to be lying facedown on a concrete bed.... Someone must have followed me from the bar and attacked me in a dark laneway.... What bar? And why had I ventured down a laneway.... I recovered consciousness.... I pushed the words past my furred tongue and cracked lips.

In this novel Jane's downward spiral takes her as close as she's ever been to rock bottom. Some new developments and new information about her fiancé's murder six years ago force Jane to - once and for all - come to terms with his death and her emotions. Jane recognizes that her reconciliation with the past is long overdue; she also recognizes that the on-deck days of reckoning cannot be steeped in an alcoholic blur. As she finally prepares not just to face Pete's death, but also to answer questions about it, Jane goes on the wagon.

The road to sobriety is not easy but emotional stakes and investment dominate Jane's modus operandi. She refers to the early days of her newly found sobriety as "boot camp" and says she "felt as fragile as fossilized furry mammoth scat." Jane's best friend Silver essentially hosts a one-woman intervention and arranges for Jane to spend some time getting sober while getting back to nature:

Manitoulin [Island] is where you get to go instead of the rehab clinic I should have booked you into last week.... Miles away from any beer store or nicotine dispenser. Close to another friend of mine who will ensure that you don't relapse.... Just the place to plow... through your... reading list -- without falling off the wagon (See Jane Run).

The cast of supporting characters in Jane's life, well aware of her fondness for alcohol, are generally surprised at her new clean-living self. At Sweet Dreams, a country and western bar owed by Jane's mother Etta, eyebrows are subtly raised when Jane chooses fruit juice over barley and hops. Jane's hard drinking ways are as well known to her neighbourhood haunts as they are at Sweet Dreams. Jane's erstwhile soggy reputation precedes her at a local establishment when the waitress greets and seats her:

"Pint of Smithwick's right?"

This was embarrassing, training the neighbourhood bars to my new sobriety.
"No, large cranberry and orange juice please."

She recovered from dumbstruck and scurried away (See Jane Run).

Social responsibility and evolving attitudes towards alcohol indicate that the hard drinking ways of the hard-boiled sleuths from yesteryear may or may not have modern day counterparts. However, in Jane's case, her battle with the bottle puts her on the bar stool next to Grand Master Lawrence Block's Matthew Scudder. In the first few novels of Block's series, Scudder's drinking is out of control. In the encyclopedic tome *Mystery and Suspense Writers: The Literature of Crime, Detection and Espionage*, Charles Ardai contributes an overview of Block's writing career and summarizes each of Block's series characters. In his discussion of hard-boiled hero Matthew Scudder, Ardai briefly refers to a pivotal event in Scudder's life, after which "Scudder embarks on several years of drinking bourbon with his coffee." Scudder wrestles with sobriety, rejecting it at first, but by mid-series is regularly attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Like Scudder, Jane's initial tango with temperance is tenuous. However strong Jane's motivations are, the desire to drink is still deliciously tempting:

Before I'd unlocked my purple front door I was scheming payback time. Longing, white-knuckled longing for a beer. Forget the Smithwick's, Guinness, Murphy's, Harp, Boddington's, Kilkenny, Newcastle Brown -- even a can of domestic would suffice. I settled instead for pouring a pint of cranberry juice spiked with soda water (which momentarily gave the illusion of a thin head) into my favourite, forsaken mug (See Jane Run).

As it is with Jane, sobriety is an ongoing struggle for Scudder, and his sober self fondly recognizes the demulcent effects of liquid amber comfort: "Whiskey... dimmed the lights and lowered the volume and rounded the corners" (Eight Million Ways to Die).

Clean living may keep certain demons at bay, but the absence of the alcoholic stupor that left Jane emotionally shipwrecked effectively removes her previously unrealized raw focus from dry-dock. Jane's primary motivation in becoming sober is to have the presence of mind to track down and kill the man who murdered her fiancé Pete. It is debatable whether alcohol was a catalyst or a symptom during Jane's denial-based emotional hiatus; but it is inarguable that sobriety is both an impetus and a tool in her calculated move toward vigilantism. In this, Jane is again very similar to Matthew Scudder, of whom Ardai says:

*It is as if exercising restraint over his appetite for alcohol frees an even more unsavory appetite within Scudder (in A Ticket to the Boneyard) the appetite for blood: "Something was rising within me... I felt it building in my body... I wanted to kill him. I wanted to pound his face into the pavement.*

In *See Jane Run*, Jane, albeit slightly less bloodthirstily than Scudder, is every bit as dispassionate in her quest for justice as Scudder is in Block's series. In the narrative, Jane reflects:

*The now familiar quandary resurfaced: to shoot or not to shoot. I was definitely motoring down the road toward my goal: confrontation with the monster who killed my lover.... As far as I could guage, I calmly intended to kill that person, whoever he was.... I had divided into two people. One Jane Yeats was coldly and methodically proceeding toward the moment when she would execute her lover's killer. The other Jane Yeats was standing by, appalled and derisive -- What? You're going to do what? Get real.*

Blindingly cold yet calm rage envelops Jane when she confronts Hunter, the man who killed her lover Pete:

*With my gun pointing precisely midway between his nipples, I stepped farther into the huge room.... However much my bravado seemed to amuse the man, it did have the effect of immobilizing him... . My gun, now fixed on his nuts, had the effect of deflating his penis... .*

[Hunter said] "Let me guess what you're thinking: this place needs a woman's touch."

*I shot out the calla lily.... I hissed in a tone as cold as the décor, "Make no mistake: I am in no mood for frivolity."... By way of punctuation, I shot out the coffee table.... I felt good as he nodded. Power over a bad guy is not corrupting; it's a stoner.... My trigger finger was twitching.*

Jane's willingness to kill in order to see her own brand of justice prevail is similar to the moral codes of hard-boiled heroes Spenser and Scudder. The moral inventory of Robert B.
Parker's Spenser is complicatedly simple. In "Reflections in a Private Eye," W. Russel Gray refers to Spenser's brand of situational ethics. In an update of Chandler's chased duchess and chaste virgin, Gray compiles a rapid fire list of evidence to illustrate the circuitous directions mapped out on Spenser's moral compass. Among the number of seemingly contradictory actions or decisions by Spenser are that he kills a blackmailing crime boss in order to save a sports career and a marriage; he blackmails a father into supporting the 'effete' dreams of his son; he kidnaps a neglected son from an uncaring and self-absorbed mother; he kills to protect the family stability of a reformed hooker; he relocates a teenaged streetwalker to an upscale bordello; and finally he blackmails a heroin dealer into funding a church. Hard-boiled Spenser may occasionally reflect on or examine his motivations in meting out his brand of no-frills justice, but he does so without entertaining doubts. He has long ago reconciled the conflict his version of right may have with those of traditional legal systems.

Matthew Scudder's seemingly contradictory moral code gives him the leeway to have a committed relationship with a former call girl to whom he is unfailingly emotionally faithful, even though he periodically physically strays. However, Scudder's ethical elasticity is not limited to his personal life; professionally, he adjusts his code and alters courses of action in order to do whatever is conscientious in a given situation. Scudder is not a killer, but he has killed, and he makes no judgments about best friend and career criminal Mick Ballou, a butcher whose occupation is ham-handedly metaphorical. Like Spenser, Scudder is a former police officer, whose conflicts with regimented, hierarchical, bureaucracy-laden power structures indicate his tour of duty in blue was never destined to be long-lived. Authoritarian allergies notwithstanding, Scudder's malleable morality was evident even during his days in uniform. In Scudder's narrative on police corruption and bribery, he says:

*When someone put money in your hand, you closed your fingers around it and put it in your pocket... I never took drug or homicide money, but I certainly grabbed all the clean graft that came my way and a certain amount that wouldn't have stood a white glove inspection -- Like a Lamb to the Slaughter*

Although he has at times killed, Scudder's sense of right and wrong will not allow him to directly bring about the death of the serial killer in *A Long Line of Dead Men*. Scudder will, however - with the help of the other interested parties - participate in an essentially ad-hoc, law-into-own-hands justice committee. The group collectively orchestrates and implements a form of punishment in which suicide -- with a readily available selection of lethal accoutrements -- is, or will eventually be, the preferred course of action for the guilty party.

Moral codes and anti-authoritarian attitudes colour the relationships between hard-boiled dicks and the boys in blue. The relationships between them are dynamic, and range from antagonistic to amiable as warranted by a given situation. There is often a grudging recognition of the usefulness of each other's roles and range of action; however, in general the hard-boiled dick operates in a manner that is indicative of his contempt of the officedom represented by the badge. While Spenser and Scudder renounce the shield on a personal level, Jane invites confrontation by publicly condemning the police when she writes a book exposing police corruption. In *Bad Date*, Jane's hitherto caustic relationship with the police sets the precedent for her interaction with them when they cordon off her property as a crime scene. Her attitude towards men in uniform leads to her silent prayer requesting the mettle to withstand the anticipated hostilities:

*Courageous St. Dympna, in your kindness help me to imitate your example in all matters relating to the police, and gain for me fortitude to bear with the misfortunes I meet at their hands and at those of other assholes, and strength to overcome my weakness in wanting to strangle them all. Amen.*

While many sleuths have friends and allies on the force, these relationships are with exceptional - perhaps even slightly tarnished - officers who morally and legally facilitate - by turns willingly and unwittingly - in negotiating murky moral grounds. It is not that the hard-boiled dick sees himself as outside the rule of law, but as parallel to it, and in general the hard-boiled sleuth has the utilitarian conviction that his brand of justice will result in the greater good. Members of the legal community are simply one of many means to the end.

Jenny Elizabeth Blade examines the life and times of Kinsey Millhone in her essay "**Grafton's Progression from the Hard-Boiled Tradition.**" Blade claims:

*Kinsey clearly demonstrates all the behaviors inherent in the traditional private eye. She is financially independent... she is an urban dweller... she carries a gun... and often conducts meetings over drinks.... Kinsey exhibits another traditional private-eye behavior when she*
However, this is merely window dressing; if that were all it took to be hard-boiled, then many cozies, police procedurals and thrillers would fall under the hard-boiled banner as well. For one thing, financial independence is not necessarily tantamount to the hard-boiled tradition. As Parker states "the hard-boiled hero is not concerned with economics," and in Chandler’s edict, the hard-boiled dick is “relatively poor.” It would be more accurate to say that freedom of choice in taking on clients eclipses monetary concerns, although the decision to accept a particular case or not may indeed rest solely on financial incentives. The point is that the usually self-employed hard-boiled detective never takes on a case solely because he has to or because an authoritarian figure deems he must. While money may at times be the motivator, the absence of the potential for financial gain does not immediately preclude a detective's involvement in a case, even during those times when paying clients have been few and far between. The code of honour not surprisingly trumps dollars, and the freedom to choose to become involved or not are the ultimate determiners. In contrast with Kinsey's financial independence, Jane is more closely aligned to the hard-boiled sleuth's bare bones with no strings attached tax bracket. As she says in Bad Date, "To my credit, I refused my publisher's offer of an advance sufficient to maintain my poverty-line lifestyle for six months."

Further deconstructing Blade’s contention of Kinsey's status in the hard-boiled domain is the mention of her carrying a gun. The gun is not an ever-present accessory in the hard-boiled wardrobe, being -- as Ousby states - a “despised tool on which the...opponents... rely.” Additionally, while conducting meetings over drinks is quite common, the potent potable of choice is rarely white wine, and the client meeting is often simply a handy excuse, as, in the hard-boiled world, it is always five o’clock somewhere. Finally, sanitized, salubrious Santa Ana lacks L.A.’s smog, New York’s crowds, Boston's stratified social classes, Chicago’s mob, New Orleans’s hedonism and Toronto’s diversity. While Kinsey’s world is not a bucolic rural village, it falls short of the expected seedy city setting.

Although she has a value system that guides her actions, Kinsey falls short in the moral code criterion as well. Unlike the truly hard-boiled, Kinsey operates almost exclusively on the good side of the law, whereas hard-boiled heroes unhesitatingly and of necessity cross legal lines. As Blade notes:

She [Kinsey] is incorruptible and carefully follows her own moral code. In D is for Deadbeat, she says "I pay my bills on time, obey most laws, and I feel that other people should do likewise... out of courtesy, if nothing else. I'm a purist when it comes to justice, but I'll lie at the drop of a hat."

However, this internal compass never quite points to hard-boiled's true north. Being a "purist" when it comes to justice inserts too narrowly defined limits on the sleuth's scope of action. The periodic shifts in situationally based honour and organic ethics need to be free of boundaries in order to evolve as warranted. Finally, Kinsey’s relationship with and attitude toward official legal systems deems that she is at best peripheral to the hard-boiled tradition. Blade acknowledges Kinsey's unwillingness to ignore inconvenient laws or to scoff derisively at law enforcement agencies, noting that, "unlike the traditional hard-boiled detective, her code encompasses respect for the police whom she deems competent... . Furthermore, at the end of every novel, Kinsey turns the criminals over to the police." There is one exception to Kinsey's usually certain position on the morality flowchart, and that is in K is for Killer. In this, the eleventh novel of the series, Kinsey takes -- for the first time - the law into her own hands, and instantly feels she has made the wrong choice. She questions where her breach of morality might take her, "Having strayed into the shadows, can I find my way back?."

Kinsey recognizes that there are rules in place and philosophically respects them even though she may occasionally and with reluctance bend them. In this, Kinsey differs from Spenser, Scudder and Jane, who do not automatically accept the legitimacy of societal rules, and view laws as valid only when they coincide with the outcome prescribed by the hard-boiled code of honour. As Blade discusses in her essay:

Kinsey violates her moral code by overriding the authority of the police. Kinsey states in her report that she has crossed over to the dark side by violating her personal code, bypassing the justice of law enforcement she once believed in for "private vengeance."

In assessing behaviors and ethics, it is easy to recognize that Jane shares roots with Spenser and Scudder, but has little in common with Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone. Unlike Kinsey, but very much on par with Scudder and Spenser, Jane Yeats has a moral compass...
Like Spenser, Jane's hard-boiled ethics are situationally based, hence she has a peer group and a network that includes members of all levels of the social strata and she will fraternize with characters of dubious report as needed. In Bad Date the more than casual bond Jane has with a homeless man named Repeat is revealed by her actions and reactions after his untimely demise. The recognition of individual worth is as great a motivator as compassion is when it comes to the planning of Repeat's funeral. Repeat is but one of the many marginalized members of the societal fringe with whom Jane comfortably interacts. In See Jane Run, Jane limbos further down the social food chain when she enlists help from bikers and ex-cons in her quest to avenge Pete's death. Good guys and bad guys are not so readily defined in Jane's world, and her moral code parallels Scudder's, about which Ardai says it is "fine to be friends with the dishonest, but one must never be dishonest with one's friends."

Bad Date brings about a series of circumstances in which Jane must reassess previously unexamined facets of her own moral inventory. Her initial contempt of the concept of commercial sex tests the limits of her friendship with best friend Silver, whose resume -- heretofore unbeknownst to Jane -- includes a stint working in the sex trade. As well, the murder of Tina, a neighbourhood hooker whose remains are unceremoniously dumped in Jane's yard, leads to Jane's involuntary enlistment in the investigations into the deaths or disappearances of several prostitutes. In order to be able to effectively delve into the wretched fates of these women, Jane must first situate prostitution, social circumstances and basic human rights on her own value continuum. By recognizing the positions of and relationships among a series of seemingly contradictory ethical precepts, Jane is ultimately able to recalibrate her moral compass.

Kinsey is much more rigid in her value systems and moral code. As Larry Landrun says "hard-boiled stories tended to look at the political, economic, and social structure from the bottom up". Even the briefest survey of hard-boiled fiction illustrates the ease and confidence with which the detective negotiates different worlds, or as Chandler stated in his hard-boiled dictum, "he is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character or he would not know his job." This is as true of Spenser and Scudder as it is of Jane. Bottom feeder perspectives inform the pages of the hard-boiled mystery, frequently as characters central to the crime, although often the sleuth's inner circle includes those whom society's upper echelons would cheerfully enroll in remedial finishing school. Supporting characters who are a bit rough around the edges, and have shady pasts or unwholesome presents/presence are part of the seamy tapestry of hard-boiled fiction, and characters like TJ, Elaine, Hawk, Joe Broz, Filthy Few Walter and Ferret contribute to the sour, gritty, in-your-face setting and mood inherent to hard-boiled fiction. Kinsey's circle, small as it is, is too rigidly hygienic to truly fit the hard-boiled tradition. Garrulous and gritty tavern owning Rosie, and kind and gentle crossword loving, bread baking Henry do not have enough dents in their stainless steel integrity to ever threaten to tarnish Kinsey's shining armour. Along with the moral code, another feature resonates within the pages of hard-boiled fiction, a feature more stylistic than behavioral, but as necessary to the hard-boiled tradition as are moral codes, sordid settings, violent action, realistic detail and swift pacing. Snappy repartee, blunt dialogue and what W. Russel Gray "uncondescendingly calls blue-collar poetry" abound in hard-boiled fiction and stylistically Liz Brady's Jane series stands shoulder to shoulder with her hard-boiled male counterparts. The Benét definition of hard-boiled fiction calls for vulgar dialogue and Jane can talk trash with the best of them, whether conversationally or with in-character similes. On page sixteen of Sudden Blow, Jane has her first encounter with the woman who ultimately hires her. Battling a debilitating hangover, Jane makes a perfunctory attempt at being a respectable host, and is not displeased when her client "uttered a profanity before I did, a conversational first." Neither easily shocked nor offended by the absence of eloquence among those she encounters, Jane's propensity for unpretentious parlance peppers what she says to or about others as well as of herself. Her dearth of decorum is demonstrated when Jane frankly describes herself as having the "heart of a biker, soul of a slut."

The requisite no-frills prose, gallows humour, and pithy dialogue, as dictated by the authors
of the hard-boiled manifesto, are Brady's forte, and if hard-boiled fiction includes "blue collar poetry," then Brady is poet laureate. *Sudden Blow* is loaded with the straight-up similes, undiluted dialogue and double-distilled descriptions organic to the hard-boiled milieu. Jane's investigation into the wrongdoings of the upper-crust lead her to say:

"Clumps of G.O.D.'s criminality were clinging to me, stubborn as dog shit between the grooves of my Reeboks... I was on to a transgression that smelled worse than a barbecued sardine."

Jane does not censor her voice to suit her audience, using equally salty turns of phrase with her mother as with those she meets during investigations. Under the pretense of enrolling her nonexistent daughter in horseback riding lessons, Jane visits a stable and effortlessly offends the matron of the riding academy:

"Do you ride Mrs. van der Feld [Jane Yeats]?," she enquired as she led me to the front door.

"Oh yes," I smiled. "A Harley-Davidson. She doesn't eat much and she never farts."

Visibly unimpressed, the dear lady shook my hand like it was a dead carp.

Jane's mother Etta, variously referred to by Jane as "the Happy Hooker," a "Mark Rothko study in ebony [from the neck down], a "bar-stool philosopher" is treated to the same tart tongue as are others:

"What's up, doll?[" said Etta.

"Nothing's up, Etta, not the Dow Jones, not the sun, not even Mick Jagger's pecker. Certainly not me."

Jane's finely honed coarseness gives her the freedom to bluntly discuss any and all things sexual, something Kinsey would coyly gloss over, as in the brief description she gives of her love life in *C is for Corpse*, "between escapades, I'm celibate, which I don't think is any big deal. After two unsuccessful marriages, I find myself keeping my guard up, along with my underpants".

Jane, on the other hand, is quite frank and casually mentions "I donated my virginity to a good cause when Michael Jackson was a black man" in *Bad Date*. In *Sudden Blow*, she unabashedly assesses the talent at a male strip club "... he slithered out of the shirt, bumping and grinding like he was dead set on mating with a recalcitrant moose... The pouch of his g-string strained so vigorously I thought maybe a small animal was trapped inside".

In addition to behaviors, moral codes and style, another feature is frequently associated with the hard-boiled sleuth. The traditional dick was a "lonely man" according to Chandler, and Parker stated that the hard-boiled hero "is not of the people; he is alone. His adventures are solitary statements." While this loner mentality was certainly true of the early hard-boiled sleuths, in contemporary hard-boiled fiction, aloof isolation is no longer an imperative. Perhaps the loner mentality should now be recognized as firm independence and autonomy but without complete isolation from the world around him. Modern day hard-boiled sleuths are unselfconsciously human, and today's heroes participate in all the requisite models of socialization.

On one level, there is the family tree, the roots of which shape the hard-boiled hero; on another level are romantic and platonic adult relationships central to the sleuth's life. As Lewis D. Moore states in "Lies and Deceit: The Family in the Hard-Boiled Detective Novel":

*Whether because of post-sixties societal changes, the advent of feminism, or the problematic shift of the hard-boiled detective novel towards elements of the novel of manners and morals, marital and love relationships have assumed increasing importance.*

Just as life most often begins in a family setting, so the hard-boiled detective novel, with a seeming inevitability, opens out from this dominant and dynamic social structure. The genre derives its most powerful tensions and conflicts from this basic source of human interactions, which both sustains and is sustained by the enveloping social world.

A past, with a position in a nuclear family, a childhood, siblings and parents -- none of these were present in early hard-boiled fiction, and by their absence, served to define the initial models of the hard-boiled detective. As the genre has grown and changed, this
element too has been modified to meet the demands of modern audiences. Moore succinctly assesses the changes that have been wrought over time:

The transitional period in the hard-boiled detective novel witnesses the tentative introduction of the detective's family. Except for occasional references to family members, earlier hard-boiled detectives have no distinct pasts, no three-dimensional image of growth and development, of nurturing resulting in who they are as adults. This withheld past of course objectifies them in ways that clarify the hard-boiled detective in his early stages, setting him apart from other private detectives.... In the modern period, the families of both the detectives and their clients become important focuses.

From her debut, Jane has a healthy relationship with her mother Etta and has a solid, cherished friendship with best pal Silver. Unlike the lone wolves of the past, modern hard-boiled heroes have ties with friends and families, although they may not necessarily have much of a past. Spenser's upbringing remains a mystery and readers know nothing about his parents, save their absence. However, Spenser's present includes a tight circle of proxy family members, including right-hand-man Hawk and surrogate son Paul Giacomin. The most striking contrast between Spenser and his forbears is his unabashed love and deep commitment for Susan Silverman, a relationship that set him apart early on from the solitary Continental Op from years ago.

Scudder also has ties to the present and links to the past, and the inclusion of these details make Scudder more accessible and more human. Although we see very little of them, Scudder's past includes an ex-wife and two (now adult) children. Scudder's present includes a loving relationship with Elaine, a definite fondness for TJ, an adopted family via members of the AA community, and he is shown to have the ability to care for and become involved in the lives of others. In A Long Line of Dead Men, Scudder makes an emotional investment in helping another man achieve sobriety. Scudder's involvement in this and the ensuing betrayal by the man he tried to help reveal a vulnerability in Scudder that traditional hard-boiled detectives did not have.

The very existence of the relationships in which Spenser and Scudder open themselves emotionally is significant. As Moore stated, the modern day hard-boiled novel includes relationships and the image of the isolated loner is a thing of the past. Jane, like Spenser and Scudder, has cherished bonds with those in her circle. Furthermore, Brady heightens things by giving roots to Jane's biological family tree, and by showing her capacity to have a loving romantic adult relationship, albeit one that ended before the series begins.

Kinsey on the other hand is almost coldly aloof. Readers do know a bit about her of her past: deceased parents and the late Aunt Gin; as well there are references to not one but two failed marriages. These details are not intended to evoke sympathy, they do not necessarily serve to endear Kinsey to the reader, nor do they illustrate willing emotional availability. Instead, this affection deficit serves to deepen the waters around her island of isolation. She is zealously independent and at best reluctantly accepts the entry of others into her life. There are but brief mentions of a love interest, Rick Dietz, in a couple of the novels, and a few very offhand mentions of sexual partners. However, there is no kindred spirit, right-hand man, best friend à la Hawk (Spenser), Pike (Elvis Cole) or Silver (Jane Yeats). As for an adopted or surrogate family, it takes until the sixth novel in the series for Kinsey to mellow enough to allow the relationship with Henry Pitts to become anything more than landlord-tenant. As Blade notes, "At the end of F is for Fugitive! Kinsey resolves to enjoy him for the time they have left because he is "the closest thing to a father" she has. Jane then, unlike Kinsey, but on par with Spenser and Scudder, is man enough to recognize and welcome emotional needs regardless of the potential exposure to vulnerability.

Thus, the hard-boiled tradition never had a female standard bearer until Jane Yeats roared in on her Harley. Liz Brady entered the male dominated forum, turned it on its head and emerged if not primus inter pares, then -- alongside Parker and Block -- equal among firsts.

WORKS CITED


**NOTE:** Originally intended for a more scholarly audience, this piece included a tsunami of individual footnotes and the appropriate references. For purposes of brevity, I’ve deleted them, but believe me, Jill has done her homework, citing sources left and right.

Essay respectfully submitted by Jill Edmondson, April 2012. Jill is the author of the *Sasha Jackson* mysteries. She lives in Toronto.