O Is for Outlaw Short Guide

O Is for Outlaw by Sue Grafton

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Characters

Characterization in hard-boiled detective fiction is typically not overly developed, as the emphasis is on investigation into events rather than character analysis.

The genre requires a detective (in this case Millhone), and a criminal (Bethel), and other characters are encountered mostly as conduits for information. O Is for Outlaw possesses a rare character, however, in the form of Magruder. The discovery of his behavior and values is at least as important, if not more, than the discovery of the criminal.

The character of the detective is part of the genre's constitution, and its foundations go back to the nineteenth century and Edgar Allan Poe's tale, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1852) in which Dupin makes his appearance. Along with Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes, first appearing in 1888, Dupin demonstrates the utility of rationalism in the face of the inexplicable. The first female detective created by a woman writer is also of this period. Anna Katherine Green's That Affair Next Door (1897) introduced the amateur aristocrat detective Miss Amelia Butterworth, the template for the infamous Miss Marple, created by Agatha Christie in 1930. Both of these detectives are extensions of the stereotype of the nosey woman since, being amateur, they have no legitimate business in the mystery, although they are far from gossips, keeping their findings to themselves until the appropriate evidence has been gathered. Both women are asexual spinsters, thereby posing no threat to the male police detectives working on the case and also posing no threat to the concept that a woman cannot be both intelligent and sexy at the same time.

What is known as the "hard-boiled" detective is characterized by an intensely masculine personality, often physically violent in the line of duty and with an attitude to women that is filled with mistrust (and this is frequently founded due to the negative portrayal of women in the hard-boiled genre) and contempt. This character is sexually active, without the aloofness of his antecedent nineteenth-century detective, and he possesses a rough charm. Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade is a founding archetype of this character, appearing in The Maltese Falcon (1930). The hard-boiled detective, a professional private investigator, is a hero figure at odds with mainstream society.

An Unsuitable Job for a Woman, by P. D. James (1972), in which Cordelia Gray is introduced, makes clear by its title the conflicts that occur when a female is placed in the role of professional detective. This is complicated further when women characters, such as Millhone, are placed in the role of the hard-boiled detective, for they cannot take on the "macho" attitude to violence and to women without looking ridiculous and neither ought they to. The fact that female characters do not sit comfortably in the role without altering it exposes its masculinist presumptions. Millhone, incarnated in A Is for Alibi in 1983, is not alone in straddling this field, however. Sara Paretsky began her series of V.I. Warshawski novels in 1982 with Indemnity Only and Warshawski is perhaps the character who comes closest to Millhone in contemporary women's hardboiled detective fiction.

Differences that the female character brings to the role are largely related to attitudes to violence and sex. The female hard-boiled detective does not engage as much in violence as her male counterpart, withdrawing from conflict situations if she can, rather than embracing them as does her male counterpart, which results in gritty realistic fight descriptions. Millhone's only close encounter with violence in this novel is when she is faced with Bethel's gun at the novel's climactic action scene. Here she runs away rather than challenge him. Additionally, she does not always carry her gun, another characteristic of the female detective. For women the gun does not hold the same phallic power as for the male detective and it might be just as easily taken out of her hands and turned on her, something which does not appear to be a consideration for the male detective (Grafton, in a discussion on the Barnes & Noble Web site, has provided an elementary reason for Millhone not carrying her gun often in that the author gets tired of the "gun nuts" informing her that she has the details wrong).

With regard to sex, here we have a female character who is both sexual and intelligent, but her attitude to sex is not exploitative as is the male hard-boiled detective's attitude.

In O is for Outlaw, Millhone's sexual activity is portrayed as occurring in the past although she devours junk food with the same relish as she devours sex: I steered with one hand while I munched with the other, all the time moaning with pleasure. It's pitiful to have a life in which junk food is awarded the same high status as sex. Then again,I tend to get a lot more of the one than I do of the other.

This is far from the spinsterly nature of Miss Marple for, although Millhone's sexuality is currently latent, it definitely exists.

In previous novels in the series, the character does engage in sexual acts and in this novel, she believes Eric Hightower to be flirting with her in one instance. This concept of sexuality is important as it helps to break down the dichotomy between spinster, as detective, or femme fatale, as villain, which were really the only options available to female characters in hard-boiled male-centered stories in which female desire was coded as dangerous.

Millhone's position as first-person narrator encourages the reader to empathize with her and view characters and events from her perspective and this must be borne in mind when considering the other characters. The villain of O Is for Outlaw, Mark Bethel, shares with many of his predecessors in the hard-boiled genre the fact that he is a wealthy, powerful man. Along with the femme fatale, this is one of the most common stereotypes of the villain in this genre. A lawyer who advised Magruder at the time of his manslaughter accusation, Bethel's duplicity comes to the fore as he is discovered to have been involved in this crime and in others. He is presently running for public office and is the epitome of the surface and reality divide thematic of the novel.

In contrast to the detective's noble lower middle class status, money and power are seen to hide corruption.

Carlin Duffy is another character caught up in criminal behavior. His criminality is depicted as lesser than Bethel's in part because of his openness about it and in part because of his social position. Duffy is poor, homeless apart from a shed, and his crimes are seen as minor infringements by himself, and to an extent by Millhone, and, by extension, the reader as we are enticed into her outlook by virtue of her being the narrator.

However, Duffy breaks his own rule of non-serious crime when he kills Bethel.

Although the law is not allowed the opportunity to put Bethel to trial, Duffy's executing his own form of justice raises serious questions about the nature of justice and about penalties given murderers. Because we have empathized with Duffy through Millhone earlier in the novel, our opinion of his behavior is skewed when he kills his own brother's murderer. Although by no means justifying his behavior, the novel does not dictate the reader's response.

Duffy's character is removed from the stereotypical "low-life" criminal by virtue of the degree of empathy he is shown in the novel.

The ghost of Millhone's past, Mickey Magruder, is fittingly comatose for the duration of the novel, never appearing as a tangible character in the present. As such, he represents a kind of a spiritual journey for Millhone, enabling her to grow as a character. Fans of the alphabet novels and of Millhone have never been treated to the story of her first ex-husband until now and, along with the detective herself, have excavated this spectre and laid him (literally, courtesy of his death at the novel's close) to rest. It is the function of this character rather than his nature that makes Magruder stand out in this novel and the tradition of the genre. For, the character is basically another hard-boiled detective, complete with the attitude to women and to violence attendant upon that role. However, as Millhone's ex-husband, his presence personalizes the story beyond the expectations of the genre. Henry, Millhone's elderly neighbor and landlord, functions as a friend and allows a more emotive side of Millhone to be explored as he encourages her to face her emotions in relation to Magruder.

The remaining cast of characters consists primarily of cogs in the machinery moving toward the discovery of the villain. Two barmaids (a suitable job for a woman?) are represented in the forms of Dixie and Thea.

Dixie in the 1970s is the picture of the effervescent barmaid, with a "bawdy selfassurance", in her mid-twenties, "rail thin", long auburn hair, plucked eyebrows, false eyelashes and she "was usually braless under her T-shirt, and she wore miniskirts so short she could hardly sit down." Dixie is a stereotype here, down to the fact that she is cheating on her husband, and is the type of character encountered in masculinist hardboiled narratives. However, we also encounter her in 1986 and discover that she is still married to her husband and still having an affair with the same man. This redeems Dixie somewhat in that she is at least duplicitously faithful. As a forty year old, Dixie is still "glamorous", in her skintight jeans and spike-booted heels. The fact that she wears no make-up makes her "features more delicate." Seeing Dixie's transformation across

two decades softens, like the lack of make-up, the stereotypical features of her character to give her a little more depth. The other barmaid, Thea, also proves to be unfaithful although useful to Millhone's investigation. There are no successful women professionals represented in the novel, apart from Millhone herself, and in this respect the novel fails to break away from the stereotypical portrayal of women.

Requisites of the genre, police officers are represented by Detectives Claas and Aldo, with whom Millhone finds herself in an antagonistic relationship at first but with whom she then colludes in the entrapment of Bethel. Her relationship with the detectives is therefore as is expected of the genre.

Other characters that Millhone encounters are either friends of her ex-husband's, Eric Hightower and Shack, for example, or the sons of the veterans, Tim Littenburg and Scott Shackleford, the latter pair of whom are involved in a credit card scam, or are incidental informers, as are Magruder's neighbor and Dixie's manservant, for example. Not much development is given these characters and they are noteworthy mostly only in relation to the plot.

Social Concerns

An Unsuitable Genre for a Feminist?" is the title of Cora Kaplan's article in Women's Review discussing women writing detective fiction (1986). The question is a valid one, for the drive of detective fiction, the genre to which O Is for Outlaw belongs, is toward a goal that upholds the law and maintains or restores social order, and sees that justice is done. Subsequently, the detective novel tends toward a conservative ending in support of the status quo. Since this status quo favors the masculine, how, indeed, might women make use of the genre without perpetuating the patriarchal ideologies that underlie it?

Into the generic framework Sue Grafton inserts her central protagonist, Kinsey Millhone, a thirty-six-year-old female private investigator. But, can a woman's presence in what is conventionally thought of as a man's role, both in life and in literature, make any difference? Although Millhone's character stems more from the hard-boiled detective genre rather than overtly feminist concerns, her very presence raises some issues of social import. It may be argued that women are accustomed, like the lone hero of detective fiction, to being on the margins of society. For centuries their voices have not been heard, their skills have not been developed or valued, and their identities have been viewed as "other" to the mainstream male identities around which western social existence is structured. While contemporary conditions for women have greatly improved, it is plain that equality has, as yet, not been achieved.

As a single (twice-divorced) working woman in what is traditionally conceived of as a man's role, the character of Kinsey Millhone raises awareness of the choices available to women in society of the mid- 1980s, the time at which this novel is set. The character is a marked example of a woman adopting a masculine-identified role and succeeding at it, although Grafton is quick to inform the reader that the character is "lacking" in what are conventionally conceived of as "feminine" traits by the fact that she possesses one multipurpose dress which can be scrunched into the bottom of a bag without too much damage, she lives for the most part in jeans, and, in an earlier novel in the series, she states that she has never understood the concept of accessories. In social terms, therefore, Millhone in some respects also exists on the margins of conservative expectations of "womanly" behavior—and it is important to remember that these are simply conservative ex pectations—and her position thereby questions society's conception of womanliness itself, exposing it to be something of a masquerade. Although not depicted as overly organized, Millhone shares some traits of the image of the successful businesswoman of the 1980s, the latter characterized by her rather masculine shoulder-padded business suit. The novel thus reflects on debates which are relevant today: how a woman can negotiate the world of work which is predominantly male-oriented. However, the degree to which Millhone might be held up as a feminist role model is questionable as she conforms mostly to the stereotypical male detective role and, if a woman can only succeed if she masquerades as a man, this does not forward the value of women as a social group.

The novel's movement between past and present provides opportunities for reflection on the ambivalent degree of change in the status of women in society. The present of O is for Outlaw is 1986 but the novel is also concerned with uncovering events which occurred some fifteen years before this, in 1971. In one instance, the first-person narrator, Millhone, recalls living through the Women's Liberation Movement in her twenties, a time when she used to "barhop" in order to pick up men: What Women's Liberation "liberated" was our attitude to sex. Where we once used sex for barter, now we gave it away. I marvel at the prostitutes we must have put out of business, doling out sexual "favors" in the name of personal freedom.

What were we thinking?

Millhone's characteristically sardonic tone is, shortly after this reflection, applied to her overhearing, in the present of the novel, a woman in the ladies' room of a bar vomiting to the accompaniment of encouragement by her friend: I could hear two women in the adjoining stall, one barfing up her dinner while the other offered encouraging comments.

"That's fine. Don't force it. You're doing great. It'll come." If I'd even heard of it in my day, I'd have assumed Bulimia was the capital of some newly formed Baltic state.

The women emerge from the cubicle, "both of them thin as snakes": The barfer pulled out a prepasted toothbrush and began to scrub. In five years the stomach acid would eat through her tooth enamel, if she didn't drop dead first.

Millhone's despondency at the status of women in society is made clear here, although her comments on bulimia are somewhat discomforting. The freedom that the women of the eighties might ostensibly have gained from the feminist movement of the preceding decade continues to be curtailed by societal expectations for which they put their health at risk. The novel thus questions the progression of women's positions and offers little that is positive for women who accept conventional representations of themselves, that is to be actively sexual in the seventies or to be thin in the eighties. Presently, Millhone is something of an outsider as far as women are concerned also, yet this, it is implied, is one of the reasons she is successful at her job.

While the position of women is founded upon societal inequalities, suggested by the incident in the restroom, the novel's depiction of unseemly or corrupt behavior is that it is a matter of individual conscience. Many of the characters in the novel are discovered to be having extramarital affairs, and at the heart of Millhone's ex-husband's shooting is a further tale of adultery and the fathering of a child outside of marriage during the Vietnam War. This, in turn, gives rise to the discovery of attempted concealment of corruption in a person running for public office. These extramarital entanglements and the sins of a public figure split apart the correlation between what is seen on the surface and what is occurring below the social mechanisms, the stuff of which detective fiction is made. Although the adulteries are treated as relatively minor infringements of society's codes, the public figure is ousted at the novel's finale and this canker of society's fate lies in an unlawful modern-day equivalent of the guillotine, restoring order to society once more.

Techniques

As befits its genre, O Is for Outlaw is plotdriven toward a definitive ending and its tone of voice characterized by a wry sense of humor or sarcasm. The narrative also presents characters, events and action in great detail, sharing this aspect with the nineteenth-century realist novel, alongside which the genre grew. The style suits the focalization through the detective, who is a character from whom no minute detail escapes and the reader is closely aligned with the detective in this observatory and analytical role through the almost mathematically precise descriptions. Although characters are not given much depth generally, they are usually subject to close physical scrutiny of the narrator's eye which effects a sense of judging by appearances and again aligns the reader closely with the detective's perspective, as in this description on first meeting Mr. Rich: His face was a big ruddy square, his sunburn extending into the V of his opencollared denim work shirt. He wore his dark hair combed straight back, and I could see the indentation at his temples where he'd removed the baseball cap now sitting on the table next to him. He had a wide nose, drooping upper lids, and bags under his eyes. I could see the scattering of whiskers he'd missed during his morning shave. His shoulders were beefy and his forearms looked thick where he had his sleeves rolled up.

No character, however minor—and Mr. Rich never appears in the narrative again—escapes this ever-watchful eye of the detective, which makes the detective all-seeing if not quite all-knowing. However, the same detail is proffered to describe the most insignificant events so that Millhone's rising from bed, getting dressed and getting breakfast can take up a page or more of narrative.

This technique of following Millhone's moves very closely further aligns the reader with her perspective and adds to a sense of real time, for no moment in the day, or night, is unaccounted for. Correlative to this is the amount of dialogue in the novel.

Whenever Millhone gathers information from an informant the conversation is generally presented as direct speech, giving the impression of immediacy and that the reader is encountering the information simultaneously with Millhone. All of these techniques are componential to the hard-boiled detective genre.

Themes

This quotation from early in the novel sets the scene for one of its central concerns: Our recollection of the past is not simply distorted by our faulty perception of events remembered but skewed by those forgotten. The memory is like orbiting twin stars, one visible, one dark, the trajectory of what's evident forever affected by the gravity of what's concealed.

O Is for Outlaw handles the concept of distorted memories primarily through the personal story of Millhone. The mystery in which she is engaged pertains to her personal history and requires a reappraisal of the behavior of her first ex-husband, whom she discovers she judged wrongly. What she reveals in her investigation of his shooting reverses what she had thought about him: now she finds he was "guilty of infidelity, innocent of manslaughter." Such a reappraisal touches upon the novel's concern with the dislocation between appearances and reality. Millhone had judged her ex-husband, Mickey Magruder, upon circumstantial evidence when he was accused of manslaughter. The fact that he had been a cop who "chafed at the limitations set by policy and, on a broader level, at legal restrictions he felt interfered with his effectiveness", and that he had asked Millhone to provide him with an alibi for some crucial hours for which he could not account, made her leave him. Millhone has lived with the version of the past that she created, and her misjudgement, for fifteen years.

Echoing this plot-centric revision of the past, the effects of the Vietnam War on its participants reverberates throughout the novel, mostly in the form of physical damage. The character in whose death Magruder was implicated was a veteran, with a metal plate in his head as a result of the war. This contributes, ultimately, to his death in the year following its end. Living with a physical reminder of the war is also central to another character's life—Eric Hightower, who lost both legs. He presently runs a successful business manufacturing equipment for people with disabilities. Interestingly, it is Hightower's disability, which can be seen, that is integrated into society successfully while that which cannot be seen, the victim Benny Quintero's, is excised, a reversal that rehearses the surface/ reality dichotomy running through detective fiction as a genre. This dichotomy is made much more explicit between Hightower and Mark Bethel, the Vietnam veteran whose sins during the War and subsequent to it are exposed during the course of the novel.

As an open and visible totem of the past, Hightower is embraced by society, but Bethel and his secrets are not. Bethel does not suffer from a physical handicap as a result of the War and his corruption is represented as an individual matter, not resulting from any social factors. His character is the epitome of the split between surface and reality, for he presents himself as the upright figure running for public office, concerned, in fact, with obtaining a fair deal for Vietnam veterans, while his actions attempt to conceal his own dishonorable behavior. In its representation of the veterans, the novel does not question the involvement of the United States in Vietnam—the subject of contemporary debate—but upholds the conservative version of events of the past.

The version of the past that Millhone had created for herself on a personal level, how ever, is overturned by her discoveries. As she gradually realizes the error of her judgement, she becomes concerned that she set right that misjudgement by finding the person who shot Magruder, reinforcing the sense of justice and personal integrity which courses through the central protagonist: "if I'd been an unwitting accomplice to his [Magruder's] downfall, I needed to own up to it and get square with him." This sense of attaining justice on a personal level is intertwined with the overarching concerns of the detective novel genre, and finds its literalization in the final scene where the perpetrator is brought to an end in a rather Biblical "eye for an eye" fashion. In this sense, forms of justice and its very nature come under scrutiny. For, one way the novel does question conservative values is in the violent and unlawful manner with which the criminal, Bethel, is dispatched by another criminal, Marlin Duffy, with whom Millhone has displayed some empathy, sharing a few beers with him on one occasion: Often I identified with guys like him. As crude as he was with his racist comments, his tortured grammar, and his attitude toward crime, I understood his yearning.

How liberating it was when you defied authority, flaunted convention, ignoring ordinary standards of moral decency. I knew my own ambivalence.

At the end of the novel, Duffy avenges the death of his brother by killing Bethel, saving Millhone from danger. Although Duffy is imprisoned, his previous description of spells in jail is recalled: "with its volleyball, indoor tawlits [sic], and color television sets." Compared to Duffy's existence outside of jail, currently living in a shed in a garden center with no basic facilities, these conditions are fine. Additionally, he has described jail as "kind of like a timeout till I get my head on straight." The implication is that Bethel was the worse of these two criminals and that imprisonment might have been too good for him. Importantly, Duffy, in contrast to Bethel, has never attempted to conceal what he is. This is evident in an early conversation with Millhone: "Okay, so maybe sometimes I do something bad, but it's nothing terrible."

"You never killed anyone."

"That's right. I never robbed nobody.

Never used a gun . . . except the once. I never done drugs, I never messed with women didn't want to mess with me, and I never laid a hand on any kids. Plus I never done a single day of federal time.

It's all city and county, mostly ninety-day horseshit. Criminal recklessness."

Duffy, therefore, lives by his own rules, which he considers never seriously harm anyone and it is this "outlaw" quality with which Millhone can empathize, as her response to Duffy here demonstrates: "It's fun breakin' rules. Makes you feel free," he tells her. She replies by saying "I can relate to that." Millhone relates her tendency to break small rules to Duffy in the following: I was split down the middle, my good angel sitting on one shoulder, Lucifer perched on the other. Duffy's struggle was the same, and while he leaned in one direction, I usually leaned in the other, searching for justice in the heart of

anarchy. This was the bottom line as far as I was concerned: If the bad guys don't play by the rules, why should the good guys have to?

While justice is found in the heart of anarchy in Duffy's murder of his brother's killer, the question is raised as to who is the "outlaw" of the title. For there are many characters who exist outside of the law in varying degrees. Magruder and Millhone inhabit a space of occasional transgressions of the law, whereas Duffy does this in a more serious manner and Bethel, the most outwardly upright of these characters is shown to be the most inwardly corrupt.

Justice, likewise, is seen to exist in degrees.

Adaptations

O is for Outlaw is available as an audio book in both abridged and unabridged versions (on both tape and CD) read by Judy Kaye (Random House Audiobooks). Kaye, who has also read all of the preceding alphabet books on tape, has received much praise from fans as the voice of Millhone and Grafton states that she is "crazy about her" (http://www.barnesandnoble.com).

Key Questions

The enduring popularity of the detective novel in its variant forms is a testament to the cathartic comfort it brings in a perceived unstable and shifting world in which values and morals seem to be declining.

The sense of maintaining society's standards is just as relevant today as it was in the nineteenth century and the detective remains the hero who returns the chaos to order. While O Is for Outlaw does not portray justice and criminality as clearcut, it does offer closure at its end, in contrast to the trend in recent fiction toward the open ending which replicates society's uncertainties. As far as feminism is concerned, Grafton's alphabet novels are problematic, for although their feisty, witty, sexy and intelligent hero might prove an admirable role model in some respects, her deployment as exorcist of corrupt individuals conceals the corrupt mechanics of patriarchal society as a whole.

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the hard-boiled detective genre from a feminist perspective?

2. To what extent is Kinsey Millhone a good role model for women?

3. Does the novel's representation of justice seem fair or might it be seen to promote anarchy? Can anarchic behavior ever be justified?

4. How relevant is the character of the hard-boiled detective to contemporary society?

5. Examine the ways in which the novel's theme of concealment is represented and consider how the surface/reality dichotomy permeates contemporary life.

6. Discuss whether examining the darker side of life, the murders and crimes in this novel, for instance, can enlighten our awareness of our individual values and those of society. Does this novel challenge, or make you rethink, your own values?

7. To what extent are the minor characters stereotypes?

8. Millhone learns that she needs to reappraise the version of events she has created and lived with for fifteen years.

Consider the notion of history as a collection of stories. Might the versions of these stories with which you are familiar have been colored by who told, or is telling, them? Are the official versions necessarily correct? How can we determine what happened in the past and why is it important?

Literary Precedents

The history of the genre is, to a large extent, the history of the detective's character, detailed earlier in this essay. Early detective novels combined elements of the Gothic, that which could not be explained, with crime stories, both popularized in the eighteenth century. By the end of the nineteenth century, schema were in place for the writing of detective fiction, as an article by S. S. Van Dine published in 1929 entitled "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" attests. In 1930 Dorothy Sayers founded The Detection Club, which set up rules for "fair play" in detective fiction. Many of the characteristics of the early fiction are recognizable in O Is for Outlaw, such as the emphasis on observation and the powers of rationalism, identification of a criminal, and a solution based on information within the fiction.

The genre has always been popular with women writers, perhaps initially because it offered them a freedom from writing novels of manners or romance. Women writers have contributed greatly to the genre's development, and Grafton continues in the tradition of pushing its boundaries. In particular, women contributed enormously to the "Golden Age" of detective fiction, the 1920s and 1930s when the genre reached the heights of popularity. Writers from this period include Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Margery Allingham. More recent precursors of Grafton's work include the fiction of P. D. James and Ruth Rendell, both of whom began writing in the 1960s.

Grafton's contemporaries who attempt to negotiate feminism with detection include Amanda Cross, who utilizes a female academic as amateur detective, and Sara Paretsky, Katherine V. Forrest and Mary Wings, whose works feature female private investigators.

Interestingly, Grafton sets her novels in the 1980s, when the detective has little more in terms of resources than her 1930s predecessors. The 1980s is the period immediately prior to the advent of the Internet and e-mail, which would make much of the footwork of the detective obsolete. This raises the question of whether the hardboiled detective can survive into the twenty-first century without revisions of the role.

Related Titles

Graf ton, like many detective fiction writers, builds her novels around a series character, to whom she refers as her alter-ego.

Grafton intends to take Kinsey Millhone all the way through the alphabet, producing a novel a year, although the timescale of the novels means that Millhone does not age synchronically with her author. O Is for Outlaw is a departure from its predecessors in that so much of the focus is on a matter very close to Millhone personally. Speaking in a forum on the Barnes & Noble Web site, the author, when asked why she has left it until now to reveal details concerning Magruder, lays the cause at the feet of her character: "the cranky Ms. Millhone rules the roost around here." In this same discussion, Grafton states that she is not consciously altering or developing the character of Millhone as the series progresses.

Indeed, as integral as the fact that there is a murder in every novel, Millhone's presence is the element of constancy in Grafton's fresh plots, maintaining her wit, her intellect and her little black dress throughout them all.

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