

The Sharpest Knives in the Drawer

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Abstract. Cooking is a gender marker. Just as the best chefs in the world are traditionally men, post-hard-boiled literary detectives such as Vázquez Montalban's Carvalho, or Robert B. Parker's Spenser are gourmet cooks, while George Pelecanos's sleuthing protagonists were as often as not brought up in short order Greek diners and know their way around a kitchen. Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins is quite capable of putting together a nutritious meal for his family, as is James Lee Burke's Dave Robicheaux. Sadly, in confirmation of the gender divide, the same cannot be said for women detectives. While Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski will reluctantly and with much griping put a simple meal on the table if absolutely forced to, Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone and Linda Barnes's Carlotta Carlyle would not be seen dead slaving over a hot stove and subsist mainly on takeaway pizzas and hamburgers. Indeed, Kinsey Millhone would probably have died of malnutrition halfway through the alphabet if it were not for her neighbour, Henry, a retired baker, who regularly supplies her with decent home-cooked meals.

Authors such as Vázquez Montalban and Robert B. Parker delight in providing recipes for their readers which are lovingly put together by their protagonists (especially in Spenser's case whose culinary prowess is consistently contrasted to his girlfriend's utter inability even to slice an onion), or by their male friends. In 1999 Vázquez Montalban published *Las recetas de Carvalho* which achieved such popularity it was reissued in 2004 by Planeta. It is not known whether any women detectives or their authors might claim as much.

Clearly something is afoot. The sharpest knives in the detectives' kitchen drawers are wielded by men, their traditional solitary nature ensuring the broth remains unspoiled and the villains well grilled. Overcompensation for gender stereotyping by both sides would seem an easy, half-baked explanation. Is it really that simple?

Key words: detective fiction; cookery; gender

“Cookery is become an art, a noble science: cooks are gentlemen.”

(Robert Burton, English Scholar and Vicar, 1577-1640, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*)

Among the many peculiarities attributable to the traditional hard-boiled detective is an apparent disinclination for cooking. Philip Marlowe, Mike Hammer or Lew Archer are far more likely to be found in a diner or bar than in a kitchen, indeed were it not for these convivial places of nourishment and drinking they would not only starve but also fail to meet the various villains, clients, contacts, stool pigeons and low-lives so necessary for the furtherment of their careers and the novels' plots.

Around about the 1970s a number of crime writers began to challenge the hard-boiled genre. In the novels of Robert B. Parker the sexism, racism and homophobia inherent to the detectives' composition is slowly deconstructed, Joseph Hansen provocatively created the gay detective Dave Branstetter, best-selling fictional women detectives returned to the scene after a long Miss Marple-less interregnum, and black detectives re-emerged from the long shadow cast by the great Chester Himes.

It is not just sexism, racism and homophobia which are challenged by these new writers but the model of masculinity itself that the hard-boiled detective represents. A model that can trace its roots back to the mythical medieval knight of courtly love and dragon slaying and beyond, and is shared by the gigantically influential figure of the cowboy and the Far West; indeed the hard-boiled detective and the cowboy merely differ in setting, the former being urban and the latter rural, even pastoral.

Such a model is familiar: the public domain belongs to the man, and the private to the woman – at least, if she is at all respectable. Housecare and the upbringing of children are alien to the hard-boiled detective, whose accommodation is almost always in the form of lonely dusty lodgings and whose food is obtained, I repeat, in diners and bars.

Consequently those writers who choose to challenge the genre will almost inevitably ensconce their male protagonists in the kitchen and, conversely, expel the women and send them out into the street. Men, of course, are irretrievably competitive and by bedecking them in an apron and placing them in front of the stove is merely to ensure that they will become obsessed with out-cooking everyone else, and before you know it the gourmet chef PI is born. The king of the culinary sleuths is undoubtedly Barcelona's own Pepe Carvalho, first created by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in 1970. Carvalho's association with food and its preparation culminated in 1989 with the publication of *Las recetas de Carvalho*, a compilation of recipes which, according to Vázquez Montalbán in the book's introduction, “are his [Carvalho's] and others', though when he appropriates recipes from elsewhere he customarily introduces some kind of modification” (Vázquez Montalbán 1989, 8. All translations of Vázquez Montalbán's work in this essay are by Bill Phillips). Vázquez Montalbán also, kindly, explains the significance of cooking both in relation to his novels and to civilisation as a whole. It is, he says:

a metaphor for culture. Eating means killing and swallowing a being which has been alive, whether animal or plant. If we directly devour the dead animal or the uprooted lettuce, one would say that we were savages. However, if we marinate the beast in order to later cook it with the aid of aromatic Provençal herbs and a

glass of *rancio* wine, then we have effected an exquisite cultural operation, equally based on brutality and death. Cooking is a metaphor for culture and its hypocritical content (Vázquez Montalbán 1989, 7).

Carvalho is both an artist and an obsessive when it comes to cooking and since food is so prevalent in the novels I shall limit myself to examples from only one: *Tatuaje* (Tattoo):

He cleaned the fish of bones and the prawns of their armour. He boiled the bones and the red armour in the company of an onion, a tomato, garlic, a small red pepper and a bunch of celery and leeks. The fish broth was essential for Pepe Carvalho's particular fish stew. While the broth was slowly boiling, Carvalho slowly fried tomato, onion and red pepper. When it was sufficiently thick he browned some potatoes. Then he threw the prawns in the pot, the monkfish and finally the hake. The fish coloured, they lost the water which had mixed with the fried tomato, onion and red pepper. Then Carvalho added a ladleful of strong fish broth. In ten minutes the fish stew was ready (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 20-21).

The fish stew was for Carvalho's consumption alone, eaten directly from the pot, and accompanied by the appropriate wine drunk from "a tall glass of fine crystal" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 21). As often as possible, though, Carvalho will cook for others, especially his girlfriend Charo, who works as a prostitute. For her, he prepares rice with cod, and as a starter, canapés: "[h]e chopped onion, gherkins and capers. He made a paste from the mixture with butter and spread it on some slices of black bread. He cut some slices of salmon and distributed them over the canapés" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 119). Charo is delighted and Carvalho detects "a certain erotic amiability" in her response and feels, in turn, his own "erotic tam tam" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 120), as he puts it, "[b]ut he coldly analysed the fatal consequences that awaited his rice casserole should the erotic action advance sufficiently to postpone supper. It would simply have to be speeded up" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 20-21).

Sadly, not everyone is as appreciative of good food as Charo. As he pursues his enquiries he meets Teresa Marsé, a spoilt member of the bourgeoisie dedicated to shopping. Inevitably such a woman is not to Carvalho's taste. On inviting her out to lunch she asks to be taken "somewhere where we can just eat anything" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 125), just anything being, precisely, what Carvalho "never wanted to eat" (Vázquez Montalbán 1986, 125). Indeed, Carvalho spends as much time complaining about bad food as he does cooking and eating gastronomic delicacies. Later in the novel he arranges to meet Charo and her friend la Andaluza (the Andalusian) in a restaurant in Sant Cugat, but he has his reservations about the chosen establishment:

The place's gastronomic specialities concerned him: bread with tomato, sausage and beans, barbecued meat, rabbit with all-i-oli. Within ten years more than ten thousand such establishments had sprung up in Catalonia with the intention of supplying their clientele with these marvels of simplified rural Catalan cooking. But at the moment of truth the bread with tomato, an imaginative wonder that transcends in simplicity and flavour pizza and tomato, was reduced to a dough of badly cooked flour, soggy, its sogginess increased by tinned tomato purée. And

as for the all-i-oli, made without the patience of the hand, and with the Frenchification, or Mallorcification of egg yolk, it was yellow enough to paint the temple. Carvalho caught himself in the act of giving a lecture to the open-mouthed ladies accompanying him on the gastronomic roots of humanity (Vázquez Montalban 1986, 133).

Later, once again in the company of Teresa Marsé, he launches a tirade against the eating habits of the bourgeoisie:

“I still haven’t overcome a distant respect for the Bourgeoisie, and I still believe they know how to live.”

“Who denies it?”

“Eighty nine percent of the bourgeoisie of this city have rehashed spinach and whitebait that bites its own tail for supper.”

“It’s healthy.”

“If they ate the spinach with sultanas and pinenuts and instead of whitebait a gilthead with herbs, wrapped in aluminium foil and baked in the oven, it would be an equally healthy supper, not much more expensive and more imaginative.”

“And the strangest thing is that you’re quite serious.”

“Totally. Sex and gastronomy are the two most serious things there are” (Vázquez Montalban 1986, 147).

And in both things Carvalho is transgressive. A proletarian gourmet chastising the middle classes for their culinary dullness, Vázquez Montalbán’s hero’s greatest triumph, from the point of view at least of deconstructing the hard-boiled genre, is to have a whore as a girlfriend and for that iconoclasm alone, Vázquez Montalbán surely deserves the crown as the greatest postmodern detective writer of the last forty years.

The Godwulf Manuscript, Robert B. Parker’s first Spenser novel, was published in 1973. It begins modestly enough with Spenser making himself “hash and eggs for supper” (Parker 1973, 23), but as the series progresses the cooking becomes ever more elaborate and Carvalho-esque. In *Crimson Joy*, published in 1988, Spenser is entertaining his girlfriend, the renowned psychotherapist Susan Silverman:

I came around the counter and put a small silver tray on the coffee table in front of her. There was beluga caviar on the tray and a small spoon and some Bremner wafers and six wedges of lemon.

“Yum yum,” Susan said. She moved the champagne glass away from her mouth and tipped her head up at me and I kissed her on the mouth.

“No French kissing,” I said. “It muddles the palate.”

Susan sipped another gram of champagne and looked at me without comment. I went back to the kitchen and began to pound a couple of boneless chicken thighs with a heavy knife ... I sprinkled some rosemary on the flattened chicken thighs and put them in olive oil and lemon juice to marinate [they converse].

The timer rang in my kitchen and I got up and went and took the rice out of the oven. I cracked the cover on the casserole so steam could escape, and shut off the oven and turned toward Susan across the counter.

“We are faced with a decision,” I said. “I can have supper on the table in ten minutes and we could eat heartily and then fall into bed. But knowing how, as

you age, you are inclined toward torpor after a meal, I was wondering how you wished to deal with the question of me jumping on your bones.”

... “What’s for supper?” she said.

“Grilled lemon and rosemary chicken, brown rice with pignolias, assorted fresh vegetables lightly steamed and dressed with Spenser’s famous honey-mustard splash, blue corn bread, and a bottle of Iron Horse Chardonnay” (Parker 1988, 10-15).

This scene is extraordinarily similar to the one enacted between Carvalho and Charo in *Tatuaje*, with the former’s canapés replaced by Spenser’s rather vulgar beluga caviar amounting to the only, insignificant, difference. Well, and the fact that Susan and Spenser choose not to eat first.

Although Carvalho and Spenser represent the very cream of fictional detective gastronomy, their male counterparts in crime novels are more than capable of keeping their end up in the kitchen too. James Lee Burke’s Louisiana detective, Dave Robicheaux (who is in fact, in most of the novels, a policeman rather than a private eye, though the distinction is blurred in many crime novels) is perhaps rather less willing than most to get his hands floury, but is still capable of helping his wife. In *Burning Angel*, from 1995 he and his wife “boiled crayfish in a big black pot on the kitched stove and shelled and ate them on the picnic table in the backyard with our adopted daughter, Alafair (Burke 1995, 23) and later on, again with his wife, “fixed deviled eggs and ham and onion sandwiches (Burke 1995, 346). In the same novel, and this time entirely on his own, he fixes “coffee and hot milk and bowls of grape nuts and blueberries” (Burke 1995 276) for his police partner, Helen Soileau; simple stuff perhaps, but undoubtedly beyond the abilities of Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe. In *Cadillac Jukebox*, from 1996, he has progressed to making his sandwiches on his own, mainly because his wife and daughter are not at home, and he “fixed a ham and onion sandwich and a glass of iced tea and heated a bowl of dirty rice” (Burke 1996, 261).

The novels of George Pelecanos, which are set in Washington and revolve around the unofficial investigations of Nick Stefanos and Dimitri Karras, are usually based on families of Greek Americans whose livelihood is obtained from running diners; they are, consequently, competent short order cooks. Walter Mosley’s Los Angeles based private detective Easy Rawlins, meanwhile, is a single father of two children who regularly supplies them with grits, eggs and bacon for breakfast (Mosley 1994, 10), or “hamburgers and an avocado salad with tomatoes, onion, and minced garlic for dinner” (Mosley 1994, 46). Somewhat more sophisticated than Robicheaux he can do Mexican too and, as has become traditional in the genre by now, we are given the recipe:

I put the tray of enchiladas in the refrigerator to keep until dinnertime. Then I chopped tomatoes, Bermuda onions, and a little green pepper together with ripe avocado to make a light relish-like salad. I laced it with lime and a touch of cayenne...

The rice I baked in a tomato sauce mixed with minced garlic and two hot peppers. I sprinkled in a handful of tiny dried shrimps to give my kids a treat (Mosley 1996, 138).

Such culinary competence on the part of male detectives is surely to be celebrated but there is, unfortunately, quite a serious downside. When women are portrayed cooking it is almost always done so with a sarcasm that can only be described as misogynistic.

One of the running jokes throughout Parker's Spenser novels is girlfriend Susan's utter hopelessness as a cook. Perhaps the most blatant example is to be found in *Pastime*. Susan has invited not just Spenser for lunch but their unofficially adopted now grown up son Paul and over the length of a chapter, as they converse, the incompetence of her cooking is exposed:

"Couscous," she said. "With chicken and vegetables."

"Sounds great," Paul said.

Susan cleared a space among the pans and put some chicken breasts down on the marble counter and began to cut them into cubes...

"Doesn't that tend to beat the hell out of the knife blade?" Paul said.

Susan looked at him as if he'd espoused pedophilia.

"No," said Paul quickly. "No, of course it doesn't."

I sipped my beer. Susan continued to hack up the chicken. She had her lower lip caught in her teeth, as she always did when she was concentrating...

Susan got the box of couscous open and dumped it in another bowl and added some water... She transferred the refreshed couscous from the bowl to a cook pot. Neither I nor Paul asked her why she had not refreshed it in the cook pot in the first place. She put the cook pot on the stove and put a lid on it and turned the flame on low (Parker 1991, 72-77).

Shortly after this the chapter ends, and we are not told if the food was eaten. Perhaps it never was, perhaps it was inedible. Anyway, at the beginning of the chapter we are told that "most of the time she had it delivered from The Harvest Express" (Parker 1991, 72). It is significant that Paul is present: although grown up Susan seems to believe that as a mother figure she has a duty to cook for her son despite the fact that all three of them know that Spenser, the father figure, is by far the more capable. In case there was any doubt in the reader's mind Parker lovingly spins out the pantomime for the length of an entire chapter in a blatant reaffirmation of the binary opposition represented by Spenser and Susan, man and woman, competent superhero and inadequate mother.

In *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned* by Walter Mosley, we are introduced to Socrates Fortlow, a black ex-convict who, like so many contemporary detective writers' detectives is not really a detective at all, but spends his time, unofficially, on precisely the same kind of cases that his more orthodox colleagues have traditionally pursued, such as looking for lost people, supporting friends or neighbours threatened with violence and even, on occasion, dealing with murderers. At the beginning of the book Socrates does his best to help a local tearaway whose incarcerated future is all too clearly mapped out. He does so by showing him how to cook and, as ever, the details of the cooking and its consumption (chicken, dirty rice and green beans) are lovingly detailed with the young boy working "under the older man's supervision" (Mosley 1997, 16). Despite his efforts Socrates remains pessimistic about the boy's future and finally asks him:

"Yo' momma cook at home, Darryl?"

"Sometimes. Not too much."

“You come over here anytime an’ I teach ya how to cook. We eat pretty good too” (Mosley 1997, 23).

The implication is clear: if Darryl’s mother had only cooked for him more regularly her boy would have stayed out of trouble.

Given the obsession of male crime writers for rice and chicken, and their frequent depiction of women as useless we might expect that female writers would redress the balance, but they do not. If there are any fictional women detectives created by women who enjoy cooking I do not know of them. Not one. Val McDermid is one of Britain’s most acclaimed crime writers and her work has been adapted for television under the title *Wire in the Blood*. The television series is about a male profiler called Tony Hill, but her novels mainly follow the adventures of Manchester based private eye Kate Brannigan who never cooks, not even badly, and eats either in restaurants or shares the Chinese takeaway meals ordered by her partner who lives, for reasons it is unnecessary to explain, in the house next door. In the light of Mosley’s and Parker’s association of maternity with cooking it might be sufficient to quote from *Clean Break*, in which she declares that she has “the maternal instincts of a liquorice allsort” (McDermid 1997, 29) but in fact there is one example of Brannigan at work in the kitchen, in the novel *Star Struck*. Taken by her client, a spoilt actress named Gloria Kendal, to her country home, Brannigan is ordered to grab a couple of ready meals from the freezer and “stick them in the microwave” (McDermid 1998, 26), a task which she carries out with aplomb, though is rather taken aback when, having eaten, she is ordered to put the dirty plates into the dishwasher.

Sara Paretsky’s PI, V.I. Warshawski, is something of an exception to the rule of non-cooking, and indeed, in *Killing Orders* we are told that “[c]hicken, garlic, mushrooms, and onions sauteed in olive oil then flamed with brandy made an easy attractive stew. The point is, perhaps, that Warshawski never willingly cooks if she can help it – in *Killing Orders* it is to provide supper for an over-worked friend – but in order to begin she must first clean up “the worst ravages in [her] living room and kitchen” (Paretsky 1986, 52). Furthermore, none of the loving details of the cooking process, so comprehensively provided by the men, are in evidence, the only qualities required of the dish being its easiness and appearance. Later on in the same novel her friend returns the favour and makes her soup: “[s]he put on lentils with carrots and onions and the rich smell filled the kitchen...” (Paretsky 1986, 90). It is hard to believe how such a combination might be termed ‘rich’. Carvalho would undoubtedly have added the requisite number of herbs, some salt and pepper, and perhaps a few fatty chunks of pungent chorizo, just for starters. Warshawski is clearly no gourmet.

At the same time as the Warshawski novels became popular, so did a number of other, similar novels about women detectives by women writers, and none of them like cooking. Linda Barnes’s Carlotta Carlyle is a typical example. On the very first page of *The Snake Tattoo* we are introduced to her eating habits: “I was eating dinner – leftover takeout pizza I’d revived with a can of anchovies” (Barnes 1989, 9). A friend turns up and she offers to share: “‘Pepperoni, too,’ he said, wrinkling his nose and shaking his head. ‘You must have technicolor nightmares’” (Barnes 1989, 11). Nonplussed, Carlotta continues eating on the grounds that “I never miss a meal if I can help it. Of course my definition of *meal* is loose” (Barnes 1989, 13).

But perhaps the best example of them all is Sue Grafton's detective Kinsey Millhone, protagonist of the alphabet detective series who subsists entirely on takeout junk food consumed at frequent intervals throughout the novels. In *R is for Ricochet* we find her "feasting on an olive-and-pimiento-cheese sandwich on wheat bread, cut in quarters, my third favourite sandwich in the whole wide world" (Grafton 2004, 2) and when, later in the novel, she is asked whether she can cook, she says "Peanut butter and pickle sandwiches" (Grafton 2004, 147). Grafton clearly has something of an axe to grind when it comes to food. Later on in *R is for Ricochet* we find Kinsey and her friend Reba at a drive in burger takeaway:

"I know it's only ten forty-five, but I wouldn't object to another QP with Cheese."

We ordered from the drive-through window, found a space in the parking lot, and ate in the car. We'd opted for two large cokes, two Quarter Pounders apiece, and a large order of fries, which we doused in ketchup and ate as fast as we could. I said, "I had a friend regained his health eating shit like this."

"I'm not surprised. I like how flat the pickles are, all mooshed in there. Pop's got a personal chef who's really great, but she's never been able to duplicate this. I can't figure it out, how they do it. Doesn't matter where you are, a QP with Cheese tastes exactly the same and so does everything else. Big Macs, fries."

"Nice to have something you can count on" (Grafton 2004, 88).

This paean to McDonalds is heavily satirical: it includes an attack on those who consider it to be unhealthy, praise for the industrial easy-to-eat pickles and gratitude for the predictability of the taste. Our society's gastronomic arbiters, among whom we might include Spenser, but especially Carvalho, are advocates of difference, of the regional, of freshness and unique flavour. Is Grafton poking fun at their pomposity? She certainly seems to take exception to the modern obsession with healthy eating. "For supper," she tells us, "I fixed myself a hot hard-boiled-egg sandwich slathered with mayo and heavy on the salt, vowing in a vague and insincere way to rectify my diet, which is woefully short of fruits, vegetables, fiber, grain, and nutrition of any sort" (Grafton 2004, 97). The advantage of being a fictional character is that you don't come out in spots, get fat, clog up your arteries and die of a coronary unless your author wishes you to, and so Kinsey can afford to eat as she chooses in deliberate defiance of the health fanatics and the epicures. Come breakfast she's back at McDonald's with Reba again:

We ordered from the take-out window and then sat in the parking lot with two enormous coffees and four Egg McMuffins with extra packets of salt. Like me, Reba ate like she was competing for the land speed record. "They don't call this fast food for nuttin'," she remarked, her mouth full. There were a scant few minutes when we sank into quiet, focused on our food (Grafton 2004, 242).

Again, there seems to be a satirical motive here for Grafton's insistence on fast food, particularly since the name Vázquez Montalbán is intimately connected to the Slow Food movement whose branch in Barcelona is, in fact, named after him. When breakfast rolls around again Kinsey reports that she:

crossed the motel parking lot to McDonald's, where I ordered three large coffees, three Ojs, three hash browns, and three Egg McMuffins to go. According to my calculations, Misty, Reba, and I – assuming we cleaned our plates – would each be supplied with 680 calories, 85 grams of carbohydrate, and 20 grams of fat. I amended my order, adding three cinnamon buns just to round things out (Grafton 2004, 343).

By this point in the novel it is difficult to take Kinsey's eating habits seriously. To pile on the irony, one of the regular characters in the alphabet novels, Kinsey's 87-year-old landlord Henry, is a retired baker who spends his time cooking and baking, and is effectively her only source of healthy, balanced meals. In *R is for Ricochet* Henry is preparing a meal for a lady friend:

While I watched, he opened the oven door and checked his crock of soldier beans bubbling away with molasses, mustard, and a chunk of salt pork. I could see two loaves of freshly baked bread resting on a rack on the counter. A chocolate layer cake sat in the middle of the kitchen table with a glass dome over it (Grafton 2004, 16-17).

Were a Martian anthropologist to base his researches on humanity solely on detective fiction of the last forty years it would have no alternative but to conclude that we were a dimorphous species consisting of one half which cooked and ate well, and another half which lived off of the junk food it picked up on the street. No doubt it would also conclude that the apparent superior physical size and strength of the average kitchen dweller was attributable to his better diet, a difference he might well use to his advantage by keeping the weaker sex outside where she belonged.

In reality, however, most cooking is done by women. According to the 1992 British Social Attitudes Survey "in 70 percent of households women prepare the evening meal, in 20 percent it is shared, while in 9 percent it is prepared by the man. There are few differences by class" (Dixey 1996, 38). And in a paper presented to the American Agricultural Economics Association Annual meeting, in 2006, its authors concluded that "women are estimated to spend more time in food preparation than men" (Mancino and Newman 2006, 13), though they did find that class, or income made some difference:

[t]he most pronounced gender difference is between men and women who are non-working and who fall into either the lower or middle income categories; these women are estimated to spend about 44 more minutes a day in food prep than men. The gender difference is least between men and women in higher income households; high income working women are estimated to spend about 22 more minutes in food preparation than high income working men (Mancino and Newman 2006, 13).

Nevertheless, they also found that "single adult women ... spent less time in food preparation than their married counterparts" (Mancino and Newman 2006, 13), which helps to explain, partly, our women detectives' absence from the kitchen. The fact remains, however, that the cookery habits of both male and female fictional detectives do not reflect reality. Perhaps, it might be argued, the male authors of male fictional detectives are anxious to make a contribution to gender politics by offering an

alternative, more politically acceptable, model of masculinity to the traditional misogynist version, though their depiction of non-cooking unnaturally non-maternal women would suggest otherwise. The women writers, meanwhile, anxious to show that women do not have to be chained to the kitchen stove, perhaps eschew all contact with the domestic sphere in a sad attempt to be just like men. However, I do not believe this to be the case. It should be noted that the gourmet detectives spend a great deal of time over the absorbing and satisfying creative process of cooking, but do not mention the washing up or, indeed, any other of the household chores. It is left to Val McDermid to show Kate Brannigan reluctantly putting the dirty plates into the dishwasher, and for Sara Paretsky to acknowledge that the kitchen must be cleaned and tidied before any cooking can be done. Cookery, for those who enjoy it, is an interesting hobby, a passion even. Washing up is not. Ever. Perhaps the women authors' familiarity with the full significance of housework is behind their reluctance to turn the kitchen into a gourmet's filthy, chaotic delight, while the male authors, it appears, lack any familiarity with the full consequences of their culinary enthusiasm.

Given that Vázquez Montalbán was cheerfully rotund, and Robert B. Parker's appearance in a cameo role in the film adaptation of his Parker novel *Small Vices* suggests that he suffers from problems of obesity, it is women who are under the most pressure to conform to prescribed models of beauty and size. Rachel Dixey, in the *British Food Journal*, argues that:

the widespread presence of obsession with food and not-eating, dieting and weight loss [...] typify the experience of many – perhaps the majority – of women in western industrialized countries. A large number of studies now show that dieting is a 'normal' eating style for women, if this means restricting the total amount eaten, avoiding certain types of food, and going without food for periods of time (Dixey 1996, 36).

Carlotta Carlyle, remember, says "I never miss a meal if I can help it" (Barnes 1989, 13). Kinsey Millhone, does not restrict the total amount eaten, nor does she avoid certain types of food such as carbohydrates, fats or salt. She consumes them all in excess and with gusto and in doing so is making a deliberate and specific political statement. There is, according to Dixey, "a widespread dissatisfaction with body shape and weight among women in western countries" (Dixey 1996, 36). This dissatisfaction does not seem to be shared by the men, though perhaps it should: Vázquez Montalbán died at the early age of 64 in 2003 from a heart attack.

Detectives and their cooking skills then, I would argue, remain divided on gender lines not in accordance to statistics, but in accordance to perceptions of male power and female beauty. Inevitably, such perceptions remain as disadvantageous to women as ever. When you next read of a woman eating a cheeseburger remember; she is not a sad degenerate, she is telling you, mouth stuffed with fibreless dough, just where you can stick your fancy book of recipes, your size 0 dress and your monthly gym subscription.

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