Equality in Crime Fiction

A Modern, Female Literary Detective in Christopher Brookmyre's *A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil*
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Bibliography
1 Introduction

For a long time now the genre of crime fiction has been popular with readers all over the world. One reason for this can be that death (murder being usually the crime committed) is a subject that fascinates people because it will at some point happen to all of us. The reader might also crave some excitement that they do not experience in their own lives and reading a crime novel can be a safe way of experiencing it. The puzzle element might also be a reason to why this genre is so popular; one can look at reading a crime novel as a race between the reader and the author, where the reader tries to figure out what happened and who did what before everything is revealed by the author.

A typical protagonist in a crime novel is a police officer or a private detective, very often male, a lone hero who has everything against him but alone wins over the system and people working against him. Sherlock Holmes created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Inspector Rebus by Ian Rankin, Sam Spade (from *The Maltese Falcon*) by Dashiell Hammet, and Inspector Barnaby (from *Midsummer Murders*) by Caroline Graham are some of the most liked, well-known and most typical literary detectives; they are all male.

When it comes to women, female characters in crime novels were, in the beginning, only there to be rescued from danger by the male detective, to be a victim, or a helper to the villain. When there have been female detectives, most of them have been in the style of Miss Marple, from the novels and short stories about Jane Marple by Agatha Christie, who had to fight to be heard by the police and was not taken seriously before she had proven herself to be of use. This type of female detectives have been solving crimes by staying in the background, listening to secret conversations and playing the part of dotty old women, who people can say anything to since they probably will not remember it anyway. The writers' approach has thus perpetuated inequality: female and male detectives have been portrayed very differently from each other in crime fiction literature. But in the last decades this has changed and women can now be the heroes and solve crimes as men have for centuries, that is by using their intelligence and not having to hide it.
A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil by Christopher Brookmyre is a crime novel where the reader gets to follow Detective Superintendent Karen Gillespie investigate a crime. Karen Gillespie is a woman in a male dominated workplace, but she is not treated any differently than her male colleagues. In fact she is arguably one of these new female detectives proving that gender has nothing to do with their abilities to perform professionally and thereby I find her to be a very modern female hero.

My aim with this essay is to explore Brookmyre's novel from a feminist point of view, with focus on the character of Karen Gillespie, and to examine whether the author has indeed created a female hero, a woman people can look up to, who performs well and gets the criminals sent to prison, in Detective Superintendent Karen Gillespie.

2 Feminist Perspective

In Literature and Feminism Pam Morris summarizes what feminism is to her. She states that feminism is a political concept based on two central premises “that gender differences is the foundation of a structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematical social injustice and that the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but it is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences” (1). That is to say that the fact that women are not treated equally to men is not because they are biologically weaker but because human culture, generally speaking, has always been male-dominated, which has entailed that men have been perceived to be the stronger sex.

In The Second Sex from 1949 Simone de Beauvoir, one of the most important forerunners to modern feminism, argued that “one is not born a woman, one becomes one” (quoted in Morris 14). She claimed that the female inferiority was not something natural, but rather a human construct. De Beauvoir pointed out that “the term ‘man’ is always positive, standing for the norm, for humanity in general; ‘woman’ is the secondary term, what is ‘other’ to the norm, and so ‘woman’ does not have a positive meaning in its own right, but is defined in relation to ‘man’- as what man is not” (Morris
If “man” then is strong, rational, and virile, “woman” is frail, emotional, and yielding.

“Because men persistently see women as other, de Beauvoir argues, ‘Woman’ as represented by men has a double and deceptive image [...] He projects upon her what he desires and what he fears, what he loves and what he hates” (quoted in Morris 14-15).

When it comes to the portrayal of women in detective fiction, it has most often been stereotypical--women have been presented as a bad influence on the male hero, or as a victim that the hero has had to rescue. Speaking about literature in general, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that women “are depicted either as monsters or angels in the male literary tradition. They are often objects of fear” (quoted in Ryan 132). There have been many examples of the monster (the stepmother in Cinderella, the witch in Hansel and Gretel and Lady Macbeth), while there is no shortage of examples of the angel either (Cordelia in King Lear, Aurora in Sleeping Beauty and Jane Marple in Christie's Miss Marple) (Morris 16).

Moreover, the rules for how to behave have been always different for the two sexes, even in literature. Male characters have been allowed to be heroic and brave, while women have had to know their place and be obedient. If a man fought back, it was considered to be his privilege, but if a woman fought at all, she was deemed insane and usually was punished at the end of the story (Morris 32).

In my analysis of the novel, I will examine whether the way women have been portrayed, as either the whore or the virgin, the angel or the monster, is applicable on Karen Gillespie. I will also explore whether there are any indications that Brookmyre, being a male author, or his male characters in the novel, might be projecting any fears or desires on this female detective character, or whether she is treated independently of her gender. De Beauvoir's idea about how one becomes a woman is also of relevance here, because while Karen Gillespie is identified as a woman as soon as the reader have read her name, her character “becomes” a woman primarily in the eyes of the society she lives in.

Moreover, two of Lisa Tuttle's defined goals of feminist criticism are of interest for me in
my examination of the novel, and these concern “resisting sexism in literature” and “[increasing] awareness of the sexual politics of language and style” (Tuttle 184). I find it important to determine whether Brookmyre tries to resist sexism in his novel by not making Karen Gillespie into a stereotype, and whether the sexual politics in the author's language indicate a feminist stance.

Concerning more specifically language, I will also use the report of UNESCO's neutral language project, *Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language*, from 1999. The project informs on how “language does not merely reflect the way we think: it also shapes our thinking” (UNESCO 4), adding that if people constantly use expressions which suggest that women are inferior to men, as police woman here, that presumption of inferiority becomes part of their mindset. As a result, representations of women as inferior are widespread, and pointing them out is often a challenge.

3 History of Crime Fiction

In *Murder by the Book*, Sally Munt states that Julian Symons has crowned Edgar Allan Poe the “undisputed father” of detective stories. Poe is said to be inspired by the real life detective Eugène François Vidocq and it is believed that he based his own detective C. Auguste Dupin, who first appeared in *Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, loosely on Vidocq. Dupin is the first fictional detective and Poe created him as a man “of supreme intellect and arrogance” (Munt 2). When in 1891 Arthur Conan Doyle wrote about Sherlock Holmes, the archetype of the male, intelligent and brave detective took form. Holmes indeed became a representation of the “Nietzschean superior man” (Munt 2). Doyle himself said that he felt that his readers needed “a man immune from ordinary human weaknesses and passions” (Munt 2). This can probably explain why Holmes rarely has any female companions and instead is always accompanied by his friend and ally Watson.

The Sherlock Holmes type of inspectors were very popular in Britain. At the same time in America another type of detective fiction was gaining more ground, namely the hard-boiled detective story, which involved more action, violence, and colloquialism, than the class-bound British stories did. The main character of these stories is the private eye who worked outside of the
social order and who has his own moral purpose. He is often described as “tough, stoic, honest, loyal to his own values, fighting a lone battle against urban chaos, a contemporary crusader/knight” (Munt 3). This type of character can still be found in many novels and films, as for example John McClane in the *Die Hard* franchise, who has to confront a small army of “bad guys” on his own because of his honesty, moral values and toughness, and in the end emerges as the lone hero.

Considering this stereotypical male protagonist, Munt states that “the overriding principle of the hero is that he is modeled on either an idealized self-projection or a respected friend of the author, who then becomes an icon of humanity: Man.” In contrast, Munt points out, “women, if appearing at all, do not act, they react to primary characters- men” (4).

Many crime writers have been male, therefore it may not be so strange that most of their detectives were male as well, but there are plenty of female crime writers as well and there have been for a long while. The first known crime novel written by a female author is, according to Linda Semple, *The Dead Letter* by Seeley Register from 1866. Semple reported that she had also found 400 other female writers since between that time and the 1950's (Munt 5).

Similarly, even though the male detectives have been more prominent, the female detective is a not a new element in literature; but those who have existed are not as well-known or well-read as their male counterparts. The first female detective characters were created in the second part of the 19th century. Critics disagree on who exactly was the first, but it was either Anne Rodway in Wilkie Collin's *Queen of Hearts* from 1856 or Mrs Paschal, assumed to have been created by W S Hayward, who first appeared in the short story collection *Revelations of a Lady Detective* in 1861.

Moreover, in *Gypsy Rose, the Female Detective* from 1898, by Old Sleuth (real name Harlan Halsey), the detective is a woman. However, even the opening sentence of the novel confirms that a female detective was not accepted by everyone: “Lawyer Henry Selpho opines: I did not ask for a woman to be sent to me, I want a detective” (quoted in Munt 4).

But even when women are the main characters, the novels are usually filled with stereotypes, as for example “the refined white-haired spinster and the enthusiastic and naive young
virgin” (Munt 7). The use of these two character types may have been utilized to make the novels more appealing to male readers, who might have felt threatened by women who are powerful and strong. Moreover, the spinster and virgin have almost always had the help of a man and never really got all the credit for solving the crimes themselves. Both types of characters being virginal and clever, but also relying on men to help them, these female figures were never entirely self sufficient (Munt 6).

**Women in Crime Fiction**

If the father of detective stories is Edgar Allan Poe, then Rosemary Herbert crowns Anna Katharine Green the “mother of the detective novel” (Herbert 88). Her first novel, *The Leavenworth Case: A Lawyer's Story* from 1878 was a bestseller for decades and established the “criminal romance.” Green also pioneered the “spinster sleuth” (detective) in her character Miss Amelia Butterworth, a forerunner for Agatha Cristie's Miss Marple. Green additionally wrote about a “debutant sleuth,” Violet Strange, who moves in the upper classes of society, and her novels about Violet Strange led other writers to write about professional women detectives, such as Patricia Wentworth's Miss Maud. In total Green wrote thirty-six detective novels and some readers were so surprised that these were written by a woman that they “suggested the author might be a male using a pseudonym” (Herbert 89).

As mentioned above, in the beginning of the history of crime fiction the female characters in the stories were most likely victims or accomplices to the criminal. Then, the women who were on the “right side” and helped solve the crime were never alone; they always had a man to rely on. Generally, there were two common types of female detectives, the “spinster sleuth” and the “professional woman detective.” The first is an older woman who “relies more on intuition, social observation and coincidence than on evidence and logic” (Herbert 82), and the second is a woman who actually gets paid to do detective work, but she always has to work with, or for, the police, who is in turn almost always represented by a man. However, even if they are dependent on men, the
female detectives usually challenge the prevailing roles of women in society: they are superb thinkers in contexts where it was generally assumed that women lacked intellectual capacity, they are fearless in facing physical danger, they demonstrate imaginative resourcefulness, they legitimate intellectual life for women after being married, and are not hampered by raising children.

The years between 1920 and 1937 are sometimes called the Golden Age of female crime writers. In 1920 Agatha Christie had her first novel published and in 1937 the last novel by Dorothy L Sayers was published. Christie rejected the typical male hero with her two most famous characters, Miss Marple and Hercule Poirot. Miss Marple is a “refined white-haired spinster” (Munt 7), but she is still the hero of the stories and is always relied upon to help the police officers, who are always male, to solve the crime. At the same time, Christie's other famous character, Hercule Poirot, is not a typical male hero; he is more of a parody of the male hero. He is quite feminine and is also described as “narcissistic, emotive, feline, eccentric, obsessed with the domestic” (Munt 8). Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple were in fact Christie's way of trying to kill the preconception that only very masculine men can solve crime and that women always have to be rescued by the male hero (Munt 8).

During the 1960's and 70's several feminist crime writers emerged, including the two “British New Wave Queens of Crime” (Horsley 253), P. D. James and Ruth Rendell. Rendell's and James' discontent with mid-century Britain and America can be traced in their representations of female characters “who either resist or remain trapped within oppressive domestic circumstances” (Horsley 253). At the same time, Rendell and James wrote during a period that saw the development of the Women's Liberation Movement and “they repeatedly turned to themes that echo the concerns of the liberal feminism of the 1960's and 70's” (Horsley 253). Lately these feminist crime writers have been accused by other feminists to be too concerned with the domestic aspect of their characters' life. Their style of writing has been called “mothering feminism,” because the true site of crisis in these novels is always within the family.

Still, Rendell's *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* is her first novel to feature Cordelia Grey
and is thought to be the first of the “feminist counter-revolution,” as it was the “first novel by a woman author featuring a 'counter traditional' professional female private investigator” (Horsley 254). Rendell is one of the first authors who disrupt masculine authority and expose gender stereotyping. Her character Grey is one of the first female detectives who works on her own and is not reliant on male assistance. Furthermore, as Horsley notes, the novel's title implies that it “foregrounds the relationship between gender and genre, underscoring the fact that in conventional crime fiction, as in conventional society, the work of the professional investigator is not seen as belonging within the sphere of proper and acceptable female occupations” (Horsley 254).

Throughout the 1980’s “the mothering detective” was not as popular as the new type of hard-boiled female investigator. The “female dick is intended to undermine the essentialized masculine norms of hard-boiled fiction” (Horsley 262). This is a new type of female detectives that are as masculine as their male predecessors and performed as well as any man. However, the “chick-dick” has caused controversy amongst feminist critics, as some find the “chick-dick” to be too much like the male detectives and not enough like a real woman. Because she is so closely modeled on the male detective, they argue that the “chick-dick” becomes more like a transvestite than a woman. The question that emerged in this contexts is: “How far can a female character carry such a role before she simply becomes the male private eye of whom she is a parody” (Horsley 262)?

While in the past crime novels used to be written about male detectives, nowadays there are almost as many popular literary female detectives, and they are not as confined in stereotypical gender roles as they used to be. Crime Fiction has evolved greatly since 1841 and it now has many different subgenres, as the puzzle mystery, the hardboiled detective fiction, and the police procedure. Gunilla Alvá quotes Carolyn Heilburn who claims that “it is the woman detective writers with woman detectives who have brought about the greatest change in crime fiction, with a move toward androgyny and away from the stereotypical sex roles” (quoted in Alvá 2). Androgyny namely helped the female writers to release their female heroes from the gender roles they had
always been placed in before. The rise of the feminist detective novel, starting in the 1980's, has diverted the genre from being conservative, with sometimes sexist gender roles and marginal female characters, to representing a feminist ideology with a woman hero at its center. Alvå also quotes Sabine Vanacker who notes that "writers like Patricia Cornwell have created feminist detectives using those conventional characteristics of the crime genre they see as empowering and liberating for women at the same time as they signal awareness of antifeminist aspects and try to undermine these" (quoted in Alvå 16). The female detectives who started to appear in detective novels in the 1980's represent several liberal feminist issues, one of the most important being independence: the female detective is not only independent at her job but also in her relationship with other people (Munt 47).

Since, as shown above, for the greatest part during the development of detective fiction the typical hero used to be a lone man, if *A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil* was written a few decades ago, it is most likely that the hero of this story would have been the character of Martin Jackson. He is a lawyer who, like the victim and the criminals, went to school with Karen Gillespie and is asked by one of the criminals for help. His role in the novel, however, is secondary, as Karen Gillespie allows him to investigate on his own, but only if he shares his information with her, and his contribution is that thanks to him the reader is informed about some of the details of the crime that are left out from the police investigation. He is not in the story to be the hero and to save Karen Gillespie, or even to be of much use to her (since she acquires the same information as he from investigating the crime, and from her own deductions), but he is there to give another perspective.

At the same time, following the developments in what might be viewed as contemporary feminist detective fiction, Brookmyre's main character Detective Superintendent Karen Gillespie in the novel is a female detective who arguably is neither a “spinster sleuth,” a “debutant sleuth,” a “mothering detective,” nor a “chick-dick.” Instead, her character is a police officer who happens to be a woman. Brookmyre describes her as a strong, smart, and well-educated woman, who does not get treated any differently than her male colleagues.
In my analysis of *A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil* I plan to examine whether Karen Gillespie can be called a modern female hero; somebody “of distinguished courage or ability,” or who is by other people regarded as “a model or an ideal” (dictionary.com).

### 4 Detective Superintendent Karen Gillespie

*A Tale Etched in Blood and Hard Black Pencil* starts with two criminals trying to get rid of the bodies of two murdered people. The reader is introduced to Detective Superintendent Karen Gillespie on page four of the novel, when she arrives at the crime scene, where the two criminals have tried to burn the bodies, to no success. Karen Gillespie talks to the forensic team, looks around and tries to get a notion of what has happened. Brookmyre neither feminizes nor makes Karen Gillespie more masculine through a description of her appearance or her personality, but instead proceeds with telling the story about a police officer who is at the scene to solve a crime. The fact that Karen Gillespie is referred to by the gender neutral term police officer, and not the gender specific police woman, is one of the ways in which Brookmyre tries to resist sexism in his novel and to shed light on antifeminist aspects of our society, much like UNESCO's language project suggests. As he uses the gender neutral term for Karen Gillespie, the reader thinks of her as just a member of the police force and not a female one in particular. The author then does not show any prejudice against Karen Gillespie being a female police officer: instead he takes the chance to insert a critical commentary on the fact that it is still not always easy being a woman in certain professional fields.

Yet, although, Brookmyre has tried to move away from stereotypical gender roles (Alvå 2) in describing Karen Gillespie, her character is still not always gender neutral. One passage in which her character is marked as female is when she and one of her male colleagues are at a hospital to question a suspect and she has asked one of the nurses whether they can use their fax-machine to receive some important information. When the information is faxed to them, the nurse who receives it asks the male officer if he is Detective Superintendent Gillespie, but Karen Gillespie tells her that
she is and is thereafter handed the papers (Brookmyre 197). This incident clearly shows how most people assume that men are always of higher rank than women, especially in male-dominated work places, as the police force. There are more places in the novel where Karen Gillespie is marked as female, like when she is first introduced:

“-Detective Superintendent Gillespie, looking the picture of elegance
and poise as ever.

- Aye, you'd better get that in before I see the bodies. I tend not to be so
elegant when I'm poised over a lavvy bowl. I always know I'm in for a treat
when I spot you Forensic boys walking about wearing face-masks” (Brookmyre 4).

The way Karen Gillespie is addressed shows how she is feminised, but it is also an example of the sexual politics of language and style that Tuttle speaks about: the other character says that Karen Gillespie looks elegant, which is something two men would most likely never call each other. Also in the way that she calls the forensic team, “you Forensic boys” she takes on her role as a woman. The exchange moreover illustrates a case where Karen Gillespie might “become a” woman (in her social context and in the minds of the reader), which could be linked to de Beauvoir's idea that women become women by how they are treated and how they treat the people around them; Karen Gillespie obviously interacts with the men around her in a way that a man would not. Brookmyre evokes critically sexual politics in language and style further when Karen Gillespie talks to Martin Jackson at the police station, for the first time since they were in school together, and after the usual greetings to each other he jokingly confesses: “I always liked you in uniform. Shame you're in plain clothes” (Brookmyre 128). Even though this is mostly a joke about their school-days, it makes it very apparent that she is a woman, since a man would rarely make this kind of sexual reference so openly when speaking to another man. Brookmyre uses a lot of humor and irony in his novel, to tackle the gender related power dynamics, a subject that can be sensitive, and thus succeeds in keeping a lighter tone throughout the novel. The exchange between Karen Gillespie and Martin Jackson could have been offensive to some people, but he defuses the situation by presenting it as a
comic note.

But even though Brookmyre keeps the tone light, he also tries to highlight the fact that there are still some difficulties that are more common for women than men, especially in certain male-dominated workplaces. As for example when Karen Gillespie talks to Martin Jackson, her old classmate, who is now a lawyer representing one of the men accused of the crime and he asks her. “What about you? Are you married?” while he also searches for commonplace codes about her marital status hinting at the same time on how these can be manipulated: “He glances at her left hand; there's no ring, but you never know, especially with women in male-dominated professions” (Brookmyre 128).

Since the character of Karen Gillespie is created by a male author, one could expect her to represent all that he desires, fears, love and hate, at least according to Simone de Beauvoir, who states that when women are portrayed by men they have a double and deceptive image (Morris 14). But in my view Brookmyre does not give any indications that might be interpreted as evidence of him hating, loving, desiring, or fearing Karen Gillespie. In fact I find that her character is treated as any male detective would. Even though some information is given to the reader about her personal life, as for example that she is divorced, the focus is rather placed on her solving the crime.

Then, because Brookmyre writes about Karen Gillespie as he would about any detective, he does not put her into any of the traditional literary roles reserved for women detectives in crime fiction. She is not a “dotty old woman,” who blends into the background to be able to overhear everyone else's conversations, nor is she a “professional woman detective” who has to work with a male colleague for people to take her seriously. She is a police officer and is taken seriously by people because of her high rank in the police force. What is more, she cannot be characterized as a “mothering detective,” whose crisis always mostly concerns her own family; in fact the reader is never told much about her private life during her adult years, (though plenty of information is given about her childhood through flashbacks), except enough to make her human and complex—not a stylized figure. Furthermore, she cannot be categorized as a “chick-dick” either, as she is not
described as being masculine, as they are, chick-dick sometimes being called “a male detective in drag” (Horsley 262). Nor is Karen Gillespie a parody of the male detectives that have been so common in crime literature. Instead she simply is a female detective who has a job to do and proceeds to do it. Obviously she must be professional at her job, promoted as she is to Detective Superintendent.

While the norm in the male literary tradition, according to Gilbert and Gubar, is to describe women as either an angel or a monster (Ryan 132), Brookmyre does not portray Karen Gillespie as either. She is rather a mix of the two: she is neither a monster who tries to corrupt the male characters of the novel, she only tries to investigate the murders and prosecute the ones that are responsible for it. Nor is she an angel who is quiet and meek and lets the men do all the work. She is a capable police officer, who preforms well and co-operates with the people in her team, and she is never portrayed as week or virginal. Instead she remains solid and when even she talks about the corpses with the chief forensic investigator, she asks him whether they where burned by using the term “crispy critters” (Brookmyre 5), an expression which shows rather a bold and comfortable side of her, as she tries to distance herself from an awful incident by using humor. And when she goes to arrest a man for violent assault, she is clearly self confident:

“She walks up to the door and rings the bell. 'What are you grinnig about?' Tom asks. 'It's moments like this that keep me doing this job,' she replies. Boma comes to the door in his stocking soles, Y-fronts and a Celtic top. 'The fuck yous want noo?' he snarls. 'To arrest you,' Karen says. For the attempted murder of Robert Turner” (Brookmyre 395).

Here she shows no fear, only delight, to be arresting a violent criminal as a part of doing her duty.

Another claim that Gilbert and Gubar make is that women are often “objects of fear” in literature (quoted in Ryan 132), which is not the case with Karen Gillespie. If she is feared by some of the criminals, that is because she is known to be very good at interrogating people and “reading” them: “If you're ready, if you’re focused, you can see a lot in that first glance. You can see fear […] And if you read it fast enough, you can evaluate every word from then on in light of this”
Throughout literature women have commonly been depicted as weaker, more prone to hysteria and letting their feelings get in their way more often than men, while men are mostly described as being calm, resourceful, stable and analytical (Morris 8). In Karen Gillespie, Brookmyre shows that women can perform well, even when they might be in some way personally involved in the matter. The detective is competent enough to set her feelings aside and start working on her task. When she finds out that she knows one of the victims, all she needs is a few seconds to compose herself and then goes back to work. “-DS Gillespie, are you alright? She nods, swallows. Okay, yeah, this was always a possibility. [...] -Sure. -You knew him? -Not for a long time, but we were at school together” (Brookmyre 11). Karen Gillespie is then portrayed as a capable person who can separate her personal from her professional life and achieve results.

According to Munt, it has not been unusual for the hero of the typical crime novel to be modeled on a friend of the author or the author themselves, and thereby the hero becomes an icon of humanity (Munt 4). Munt means that most heroes in literature, and especially in detective fiction, are men, because they have been created by men and were modeled on glorified versions of men. But in Brookmyre's novel the hero is a woman, who, unlike the women Munt writes about, who only react to men and never act on their own, is self sufficient and does not crave for a man's attention or help. She is also independent in her work and in her social relationships (Munt 47).

Karen Gillespie is in my view an admirable competent woman in a male-dominated workplace. She is strong; she must have worked hard to have reached a so high rank in her career, she is capable, independent and brave, qualities which are arguably heroic.

5 Conclusion

The fictional character of Karen Gillespie is a female police officer who very much resembles a real person. Her way of working is, in my opinion, based closely on the way a non-fictional police
officer works, which makes her more believable.

Brookmyre does not in general treat Karen Gillespie as a woman, yet, has not made her completely androgynous either, and so in some places in the novel, there are some traces of stereotypical gender roles as broadly perceived. Still, she is a strong woman, capable to fight her own battles. At the same time, the author uses humor in his novel to shed light on the roles that are assigned to men and women, both in literature and in real life. He has not created Karen Gillespie as an angel or a monster, nor has he portrayed her as a whore or a virgin. In fact, he has had her evade the most usual roles that have been common for women in crime fiction, as the “spinster-sleuth” or the “chick-dick,” and has made her a self confident professional police officer.

Karen Gillespie is a good example of a woman who, in spite of the male-domination that still figures today, does not allow herself to be held back because she is female. Brookmyre has, in Karen Gillespie, created a female hero who all kinds of readers can identify with.


