Warshawski as a “Huntress” in Sara Paretsky’s

*OverBoard*

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Abstract— V. I. [Victoria Iphigenia] Warshawski was introduced by Sara Paretsky in her debut novel *Indemnity Only* (1982) and she has written more than twenty novels featuring Warshawski as the protagonist. Thus, Paretsky created the Warshawski series in the literary world. Warshawski is a private investigator whose parents are dead and she herself is divorced. She is the first hard-boiled woman P.I. who could be a member of the police department in Chicago and she is always out on mean streets if it is necessary. Though her cases often involve patriarchal institutions like the banks, local government, corporations and churches, yet in the end, she links up with the people she knows. Even though it involves the people she knows she doesn’t stop chasing the mystery until it gets resolved. Thus, they named her well, Victoria Iphigenia - it means ‘Artemis the huntress’ according to Greek Legend, this is the myth of Iphigenia. The other meaning can be found as ‘strong-born’. She is a woman who does not run to men in a time of trouble. As a result, characters like Warshawski drop a remark on the readers.

*Keywords* — Detection, hunting, mystery, real estate mafia, female oppression.

_I am the woman who fights,  
I am the woman who  
Grows roses [...]  
You want only half  
Of me and I  
I want to be whole._

-Marge Piercy

The detective genre was largely dominated by male writers but then female writers like Marge Piercy, Lisa Alther, Marilyn French, Doris Lessing and many more have set forth new trends in detective fiction. As *A Companion to Crime Fiction* states, “As female detective fiction passed from Victorian originators through twentieth-century godmothers of crime such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and P. D. James and onto rebellious goddaughters like Sara Paretsky, Sue Grafton and Patricia Cornwell, a female and feminist vision of crime became a clear norm”. (*A Companion to Crime Fiction, 258*) American female crime writers like Marcia Muller, Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky brought a big breakthrough in the detective genre by introducing the female eye in their fiction in the early 1980s. Their sleuths were introduced as intelligent and sharp to handle anything and everything as *A Companion to Crime Fiction* states, “these urban private investigators take a physical active approach to crime that is far from ‘spinsters cozy.” Fit, self-contained, and street-wise, they handle guns, face threats and attacks from man, and kill when they have to”. (*A Companion to Crime Fiction, 264*) V.I. Warshawski is one such character which is created by Sara Paretsky, the character became so strong and so impressive for the author herself, in order to come out of that impression which the character had left in her mind Paretsky created a series of novels featuring her as a protagonist since 1982. In each of these novels, V.I. Warshawski went on facing, tackling and ultimately solving the cases which she has taken up. The dedicated reader of this series can feel the essence of huntress in Warshawski.

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Sara Paretsky obtained a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and a PhD in History from the University of Chicago in 1969. She started her writing career in 1982. She won the ‘Cartier Dimond Dagger’ award in 2002 for lifetime achievement from the Crime Writers Association, as well as the ‘Grand Master’ award in 2011 by Mystery Writers of America. Paretsky challenges the firmness planted and rooted in this genre traditionally.

The present novel *Overboard*, which is taken up for the study is the latest novel in the Warshawski’s series, in which we can see V.I. Warshawski as a huntress.

The plot revolves around the suspicious girl who is found in between the rocks. The protagonist Warshawski has gone out for an evening walk with her pet during the pandemic COVID-19. Detective Warshawski unravels, a set of mysteries in the novel along with her dog Mitch, the one who found the girl in the hillside. A girl who is stuck in there is barely alive. This made
Warshawski to immediately call ‘911’ (one of the emergency numbers in America). Using her cellphone flashlight Warshawski tried to see the face, while a girl was uttering the word “Nagyi”. As a light flashed on the girl’s body Warshawski noticed her torn jeans and the pus emitting from her wounds, the burn marks which seem because of fire and as well as it shows the extreme level of torture on her body. As a consequence, it cost Warshawski a new client, that’s where her hunt begins.

The rescue team took almost half an hour to find them, while they are taking a girl into the ambulance detective Warshawski wraps the girl in her jacket. This has become a piece of breaking news during the pandemic, so many news channels are waiting for detective Warshawski’s exclusive remark on the girl and the incident.

The other storyline weaves the story about the “Shaar Hashomayim” (which is famously known as Synagogue) the worshipping house which arises vandalism, this is an ugly coalition of Chicago brokers and local mobsters. Donna Ilona Parient, Detective Warshawski's old friend lives and is involved in the ‘Shaar Hashomayim’ building.

Detective Warshawski’s rescue mission starts and she begins her investigation from the hospital. At that time the cops come to enquire detective Warshawski about the girl was identified as Jane Doe, a 15-year-old girl. They also wonder why her family members have not yet visited the hospital even after photos and video clips circulated in the news. So, they assume “she could be a runaway” (OverBoard, 14). This might explain, why people are not identifying her.

At this juncture, everything is clumsy and detective Warshawski cannot get which button has triggered the Chicago police in the case of Jane Doe. Detective Warshawski believes that Jane might be African American, because of her dark skin and curly hair or she might be a “teenager who was a victim of domestic abuse didn’t have a lot of options for reporting it.” (OverBoard, 19)

So, detective Warshawski started to dig up for the apartments and the buildings which were burned down in a radius of a hundred miles of Chicago city. Sadly, there is no one looking for Jane Doe. In the meantime, there is an attack on the Synagogue building, they “found graffiti painted across the door and the windows broken.” (OverBoard, 20) Donna Ilona got scared because it reminded her childhood incident of Mussolini’s race leading to the riot against Jews and their shops. So, Donna Ilona asked detective Warshawski to track down the vandals who escalated the violence in a very dangerous way. So, Detective Warshawski decided to fix up the CCT cameras on the Synagogue building. Thereby, she can supervise the building. This is where one can witness how Sara Paretsky uses upgraded investigation techniques in a modern digitalized world.

Subsequently, detective Warshawski learns about Jane Doe from Max, the Director of Beth Israel, though she recovered consciousness, still she did not say anything. “They have tried Spanish and Arabic on her, trying to guess her nationality, since she hasn’t been responding to English.” (OverBoard, 25)

After discussing with Max all over the word ‘Nagyi’ which Jane Doe repeated while rescuing her. Detective Warshawski comes to the conclusion that Jane might be a Hungarian refugee. So, the hospital hires Jan Kadar, a Hungarian translator. As a great twist which is so unexpected, Jane Doe disappeared from the hospital. “She was in her bed at the seven A.M. shift change, but when the burn unit nurse went in to replace the dressings, she wasn’t there… The nurse went back twice, thinking maybe she was in the toilet. But she’s gone.” (OverBoard, 28)

At this moment the hospital hires detective Warshawski because they think she is the most suitable person for the task of finding Jane Doe. So, Warshawski begins her inspection with the help of Mitch (her dog) to find Jane by smell. When this idea fails she starts enquiring about Jan Kadar a translator, because, he is the last person to visit Jane along with Mystery Man, pretending to be a Cop. Detective Warshawski goes to Jane's room to investigate her belongings and there Warshawski is unable to find her jacket, which she has wrapped Jane while shifting to the hospital. Later, she enquires about Jane’s hospital roommate Ariadne Blanchard and she describes the Mystery Man and he looked like, “he’d been big. White. Wearing a warm-up jacket.” (OverBoard, 35)

Eventually, detective Warshawski gets a call from Corky Ranaghan, a Broker and managing partner of Klondike Financial Corporation. Corky expresses his desire, “I’d offer to be a silent partner.” (OverBoard, 40) Surprisingly, he wants to be the owner of Synagogue, a temple. He wants it so badly that he even offers a commission to detective Warshawski in order to get ownership of the building. While she is on the call as one more surprise she learns that the cop Pizzello is at her doorstep. Pizzello draws the connection between Jane Doe and the Mystery Man, who might have his hands behind this murder.

In the later part of the novel, detective Warshawski’s childhood friend Donny Litvák’s son Brad pays a visit to her apartment, he briefly summarises his family problems and how they have impacted him. The reason for his visit is that his father Donny is recently bailed by his sister Sonia and he overheard his father’s phone call which made him a little disturbed. Because it felt to him that, someone is threatening his father to pursue a criminal act by which he (Donny) may end up in jail again.

In the one hand, detective Warshawski is stuck in the fruitless job of searching for Jane and the vandals of Shaar Hashomayim. On the other hand, Brad is asking her to find out what his father is up to. At this moment under the mental pressure, the childhood memories and her good old days are hitting detective Warshawski hard.

Detective Warshawski gets the devastating news of the murder of Jan Kadar a translator. He was brutally murdered “his throat had been cut. There was blood everywhere!” (OverBoard, 59) Detective Warshawski’s interpretation of Jan Kadar's murder draws the connection between Jane Doe and the Mystery Man, who might have his hands behind this murder.

In due course, Mr Scott Coney the lieutenant himself has come around the Warshawski’s apartment, concerning Jan Kadar’s murder. He is so ugly in his way of interrogating, that he even hits Warshawski, “He hit me, so quickly that I couldn’t duck from his hand.” (OverBoard, 67) Here Sara Paretsky shows how the female detectives face troubles when they are dealing with their cases.

But the query remains in her mind, why everyone is focusing on this Hungarian girl? Why Jane has become such an interesting case to the Chicago Cops? After a while, detective Warshawski gets a call from an unknown number at midnight, the female voice is so hoarse that the voice asks Warshawski to find “Yulchya, you must find her before” (OverBoard, 71) Warshawski hears a man’s voice in the background and the line is disconnected. Instantly, detective Warshawski finds out the address and name,
under whose name the cellphone is registered through the connection, she has in the telephone department and it is there in the name of Gisela Querigo.

The more detective Warshawski digs deeper, the more complex the case becomes. Warshawski has so many things to take up and simultaneously she is facing problems in breaking the puzzle. There are so many mysteries to be resolved by Washawksi, they are:

1. She has to find Jane Doe,
2. Who is Yulchia? And to find the midnight caller?
3. Why does Corky Ranaghan want to be a silent partner of the Synagogue building?
4. The Mystery Man who questioned Jane Doe?
5. Who murdered Jan Kadar?
6. What a dreadful thing Donny had done, Why Sonia had to bail him for?
7. She has to find Vandalos of the Synagogue building.
8. Who murdered Ariadne Blanchard?

Detective Warshawski does not have any problem with Jan Kadar’s murder but Scott Coney’s counterassault in her life made this her business, But before that, Warshawski pays a visit to the Phone call address. Her name is Gisela Senora Queriga and she works at Archangel Senior Living Home in Northfield. The private nursing home for mentally retarded people. Warshawski gets to know that Gisela lost her cell phone two days ago. By this Warshawski believes that it might be taken by one of her patients in the hospital.

The next day Brad’s parents as well as detective Warshawski’s old friend Donny Litvak and his wife Ashleigh Visited Warshawski’s apartment to enquire about their son Brad and what made him to meet Warshawski. Because, after Brad’s visit, the police snatched him in the street and made a cavity search along with interrogating him about Jane and why was he in Warshawski’s apartment. This makes detective Warshawski dwell on the Jane case. After all, why the police department would put the risk of getting into her client, who is still a minor! But this makes sense about Jan Kadar’s murder and the disappearance of Jane Doe. Detective Warshawski takes the step to know more about Donny Litvak’s family. She does some enquires and unfolds the past story of Donny and his brother Reggie’s relation with the Local mobster Tad Duda, who is interested in the ‘Title’ of the Mansion and Valentine Tommaso, who is now the owner of Tommaso Cement and Tad Duda is his partner.

In the meantime, Scott Coney brings a search warrant to Warshawski’s premises. This is when we see the miss employ of power and at the same time Scott Coney abuses detective Warshawski by grabbing her arm and dragging her to stairs, “He backhanded a slap across my face” (OverBoard 110) for the second time Coney hits Warshawski, even in this condition Warshawski shows attention and asks her neighbour’s to take pictures of her assault, the cops takes her to Homan Square the police headquarters to enquire more. Chicago police are eager to know Warshawski’s moves in advance. Because of this, they planted Voice Trackers in her apartment but being the master of detectives, for Warshawski this move of police felt like a game of some small kids, and as soon as she returned to her apartment from the police enquire she found them easily without taking much of time as well as pain.

Each and every one, “thought Jane had something of value, and they wanted it badly enough to attack a kid.” (OverBoard, 83) Infact they even did a cavity search of Warshawski and a detailed search of the apartment as well as her office to find it out. At this moment Warshawski guesses that they are looking for an object which might be too small. In this way, Sara Paretsky takes a curious mind and seizes the readers to think more consistently about the detection. Then detective Warshawski meets Bard with photocopies of all the cops to identify the guys who have searched Bard last night. Then it becomes clear to Warshawski that they are not from the police department instead they are mobsters. After all these incidents, the investigation of Warshawski focuses on the undeniable facts which remain unsolved, they are:

1. Brad has been interrogated by punks who disguised themselves as a cop and are looking for some mysterious thing.
2. Warshawski herself was attacked by Lt. Coney and his team who are looking for some mysterious thing.
3. Jan Kadar who interrogated Jane was murdered horrifyingly.
4. The important thing is Jane is still missing.

While Warshawski is pondering her inner thoughts about all these things, she gets a call from Mr Contreras, her neighbour, who tells her that Brad is in trouble and he is wet because “I was pushed into the river.” (OverBoard, 141) While he was following her mother, who was in Zigler Mansion with some guy.

In search of that guy who was with Ashleigh last night, detective Warshawski visits Zigler Mansion and notices that the kitchen and basement door were burnt down, “Someone lit a fire here- you can still see some red in the ashes.” (OverBoard, 155) This may explain the burn marks on Jane Doe’s legs. But the question is, where are all the members of the Zigler family and the elderly woman Silvia Zigler the owner of the Mansion? Warshawski’s set of circumstances becomes so hard when she is solving one mystery instead of getting it resolved, the new one is awaiting on her way, which is also interconnected with the previous one and compels her to solve these mysteries in order to solve the case. This is how the master creator of the detective stories Sara Paretsky arises interest among the readers by interlinking the stories.

When all these things are happening, Litvak’s family blame each other in detective Warshawski’s apartment but, Donny Litvak’s brother Reggie accuses Brad for stealing Skyrocket ‘the flying computer’ which was invented by him. Thus, two more pieces of the jigsaw were added to the list of detective Warshawski.

Among the list to be solved by detective Warshawski, the urgent project is to find Silvia Zigler. Somehow Warshawski with all the troubles and efforts finds out about Silvia that she is from Hungary and has one daughter Emma and one son Augustus. After knowing everything about the Zigler family, Warshawski also assumes that Silvia Zigler might be the midnight caller who had asked to find Yulchia. With all this primary research Warshawski does the investigation in this matter and comes to know that
Silvia Zigler is the grandmother of Jane Doe and her pet name is Yulchia. Then Warshawski meets Augustus Zigler and makes inquiries about Silvia and Jane but Warshawski does not get satisfactory answers from Augustus and this kind of attitude of Augustus makes Warshawski to come to the conclusion that Silvia Zigler’s missing might be convinced by her son Augustus, who wants to make money by selling the Mansion because he is having a loss in his business and in this task he might have taken the help of his friend Tommaso the broker. But Warshawski needs proofs to prove this fact and the solving of complex detection continues.

Detective Warshawski gets a call from Beth Blacksin the news reporter, who informs that they have found the dead body of a girl in Warren Park and asks Warshawski to identify the dead girl believing that, the dead body might be of Jane Doe. Warshawski goes there with a heavy heart and praying the body should not be of Jane because Warshawski has a soft corner towards that small girl who is suffering because of property and Warshawski wants to set Jane free from the vicious circle which was created by her uncle Augustus. By God’s grace when she reaches the crime scene, she finds out that the body is of Ariadne Blanchard who was Jane Doe’s hospital wardmate. Detective Warshawski steals her jacket from Ariadne’s body, which triggers Scott Coney to go to Warshawski’s home and directly orders, “Warshawski, hands in the air, down on your knees,” (OverBoard, 196) Scott Coney is inspecting about the jacket, which detective Warshawski has stolen from the crime scene. At this point, it becomes clear to detective Warshawski that The Mystery Man and Scott Coney are looking for something that they think Jane Doe has.

Eventually, after thinking much about the interest of cops in this case Warshawski assumes that there might be some unseen hands of the mafia behind this. So, detective Warshawski along with her reporter friend Murray invade the Zigler Mansion to find the trade connection between Silvia's Estate property and the brokers’ mafia. Meanwhile, both of them have to escape from the Zigler Mansion as they notice the advancement of some people towards the mansion. In the process of escape one of the persons sees Warshawski and opens fire but using her tactics she slips away from the attack and finally, she jumps into the river and escapes from there. Even though Warshawski is afraid still manages to escape and makes up to a nearby house which is deserted. In that tender house, detective Warshawski discovers Jane Doe unexpectedly, whom she was searching for, this was the biggest breakthrough for her investigation.

When Jane sees detective Warshawski there, with tearful eyes Jane gives an account of her story. After listening to that, detective Warshawski decides to snatch her. Finally, he succeeds in his mission and he gets Warshawski, the moment he gets hold of her, with all this pathetic flashback of Julia detective Warshawski took Julia to her apartment in order to provide shelter. After gaining confidence in Warshawski, Julia shares the information about the key and the location of the lockbox with her, she says the lockbox is with her Granny’s lawyer and the key is with her, which, she has kept in detective Warshawski’s jacket, when Warshawski has wrapped her while shifting to the hospital, “And there it was, wedged into the back of one of the buttons. The big black button that had been part of the jacket’s charm… Julia had slid her key inside the button’s rim.” (OverBoard, 234) Warshawski thinks that her apartment is not a safe place for Julia and asks Sonia to keep and protect Brad as well as Julia in her home. But, Sonia suggests the safest place would be her son Gregory’s apartment for Julia and Brad. Finally, both Julia and Brad are shifted to Gregory’s apartment.

Istvan Reito, the lawyer of Silvia Zigler agrees to meet detective Warshawski after knowing about her through Donna Ilona (a friend of Warshawski and his client). Istvan Reito meets Warshawski disguising himself as a woman. Because, he is afraid of Augustus Zigler who has threatened him many a time to give the information about the key and lockbox and for “the title to the house, which I believe is in a lockbox” (OverBoard, 291) With the aim to sell the ‘Title’ to the broker Corky Ranaghan in the lust of getting two to three hundred million. At this stage of the novel, so many identities are revealed, but there is yet a mystery waiting to be solved.

On the other hand in the story of the novel, Corky Ranagh the broker puts his eyes on Skyrocket (the magical instrument which gets the information of the members of any house on which it flys) ‘the flying computer’, which was invented by Raggi Litvak. Corky threatens Donny by showing some photographs of his stealing, in order to snatch away the skyroocket from Raggi after knowing its importance. After knowing about the stealing of ‘Skyrocket’ also detective Warshawski dwells on the mystery behind Scott Coney’s craziness in Julia’s case. This makes detective Warshawski to dig into Scott Coney’s life and his background which leads her to know there are blood relatives, Broker Corky Ranaghan and Scott Coney are cousins, “No wonder Coney was driving around Chicago threatening private eyes and doing cavity searches on teenage boys. Family sticks to family” (OverBoard, 322).

After clearing the number of doubts which are there in her mind, detective Warshawski invades the Nursing home in the disguise of a nurse and kidnaps Silvia Zigler from the hospital. This daring advancement of Warshawski outrages Scott Coney and he decides to snatch her. Finally, he succeeds in his mission and he gets Warshawski, the moment he gets hold of her, with all happiness he says, “You’ve been running, Warshawski, but you can’t hide, not from me. On your feet, cunt. Coney.” (OverBoard, 350) Then they shift Warshawski to the ‘Home Square’, where they torture Warshawski in a very brutal manner to get the information about Julia and Silvia Zigler, here again, Paretsky puts emphasis on how the women are ill-treated by men. They clip paper clips on her face so that it can hold her eyes to the bright light and they sprinkle pepper spray on her face. Despite all this horrifying torture, she attempts a daring escape by picking up the same paper clip with her teeth to unlock the cuffs. She is thinking of a way of unlocking the door of the room but as soon as she reaches the door she gets to know that the door is unlocked, being...
the detective it does not take much time for Warshawski to understand that because of the power cut all the electric locks got unlocked. So, the escape attempt of Warshawski becomes a successful one.

When she comes out of the ‘Home Square’ she sees Raggi, Brad and Julia who are waiting outside, They are surprised to see Warshawski there and Warshawski learns that it is them who cut off the power and trying to do something in order to get Warshawski out of the custody. They all have come there along with the new ‘skysocket’ which they have created again, with the help of the software and the design, found by Brad, in his mother’s drawer. Later, all of them flew away from there. The unstoppable nature of fighting back detective Warshawski made to take a selfie of her battered and swollen face and her bruised wrists along with torn clothes. Which may help her later as evidence to prove herself. Further, she sends these pictures to Muray the reporter, to make the news about it.

Thus, Sara Paretsky draws a conclusion to the plot. When Detective Warshawski and her team make a final game plan, they spread the fake news that Silvia Zigler is back in her Mansion. In considering this news, all the brokers and mobsters in Chicago including Augustus and Scott Coney come around the Mansion to hunt Silvia and Julia Zigler down. This act of evacuating Silvia and Julia becomes a flop show because, they find Silvia on her bed and they open a fire. Soon, it is a surprise for them to know that detective Warshawski is sleeping in the disguise of Silvia in her bed. In response to that, detective Warshawski also opens fire. In due course, the police arrive and “A voice called through a bullhorn, “This is the Chicago police. Drop your weapons. I repeat, this is the Chicago police. We have the house surrounded. Drop your weapons.” (OverBoard, 374) At that time detective Warshawski says to Lieutenant Finchley, “What a welcome surprise.” (OverBoard, 374)

Though, being a feminist detective writer, Sara Paretsky has created her central character Warshawski as all equivalent to male detectives. In the process of detection, Warshawski implements clues, in order to solve her case, she always thinks from all possible angles. The foremost important ability of Warshawski which the readers can witness in her novels is, that she makes others comfortable while conducting her detection, whether it may be victims, suspects or witnesses. She never stops her investigation until it gets resolved and never fails to convey the detection of her investigation to the police in the end. Victoria Iphigenie Warshawski, as her middle name is Iphigenie, which, “…in Greek legend Iphigenia is also Artemis the huntress” (Killing Orders, 345) Which symbolically gives the hint to the readers that Warshawski’s hunt will be continued.

WORKS-CITED: