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Regional aspects of Miami crime fiction

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

REGIONAL ASPECTS OF MIAMI CRIME FICTION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Heidi Lee Alvarez

1999

To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Heidi Lee Alvarez, and entitled Regional Aspects of Miami Crime Fiction, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Joan Baker

Mary Jane Elkins

Gregory Bowe

Kenneth Johnson, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 19, 1999

The thesis of Heidi Lee Alvarez is approved.

Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

Dean Richard L. Campbell
Division of Graduate Studies

Florida International University, 1999

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, José Enrique Alvarez. Without his patience, understanding, support, and most of all love, the completion of this work would not have been possible. I also acknowledge Juliana, Gabriella and Sabrina with love, all of whom provided the inspiration to finish what I started.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

REGIONAL ASPECTS OF MIAMI CRIME FICTION

by

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Florida International University, 1999

Miami, Florida

Professor Kenneth Johnson, Major Professor

This thesis argues that forces of literary regionalism and postmodern culture are behind the explosion of crime fiction being written in and about South Florida by a growing number of resident authors.

Research included four methods of investigation: 1. A critical reading of many of the novels that make up the sub-genre. 2. A study of the theories of regionalism, postmodernism and the genre of the crime fiction. 3. Interviews with a number of the authors and a prominent Miami book seller. 4. Sociological studies of Miami in terms of historical events and their cultural significance.

Today's South Florida crime fiction authors cast their narratives in the old genre of the detective novel where characters are delineated according to traditional definitions of good and evil. Evil characters threaten established order. What makes South Florida crime fiction different from traditional detective fiction is its interest in the exotic, postmodern culture and setting of South Florida. Like the region, the villains are exotic and the order that they threaten is postmodern. There is less of an interest in attributing a larger social meaning to

the heroes. Rather, there is an ontological interest in the playing out of good against evil in an almost mythical setting that magnifies economic, environmental and racial issues. There is a unique cultural diversity of the city due to the geographical location of Miami in relationship to Latin America and the Caribbean, and the political forces at work in the region. South Florida's sub-tropical climate, fragile ecosystem, and elements of frontier life in a cosmopolitan city work to support Miami crime fiction. The setting personifies the unpredictability and pastiche of a postmodern world and may call for a new definition for literature that relies on non-traditional regional characteristics.

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Regional Aspects of Miami Crime Fiction

Introduction

Miami, Florida is home to an impressive number of crime fiction writers. Their numbers have continued to grow since 1980. There are similarities in characterization, setting, and plots that suggest that crime fiction is the regional literature of South Florida. The crime fiction novelists draw from Miami's unique environment, both natural and developed and a multi-cultural population. These elements of Miami combine to create a postmodern frontier atmosphere¹ that provides the ideal backdrop for this genre of fiction.

It is not possible to identify Miami crime fiction solely with either regionalism or genre. This begs the need for a discussion of both and some analysis to determine how Miami crime fiction is or is not a regional literature and how it has become a sub-genre of mystery / detective fiction as defined by John G. Cawelti, author of Adventure, Mystery and Romance. Cawelti has a great deal to offer in providing a definition for genre fiction, also referred to as "formulaic stories," in his book (2). While Cawelti first observes that the form has the primary purpose "of enjoyment and entertainment," he also emphasizes that by studying this kind of artistic behavior we can discover, "...the cultural patterns it reveals and is shaped by, and...the impact formula stories have on culture" (2). He says that there are modern, "myths that focus on crime, criminals, detectives, and the police," that can be expressed through different archetypal patterns (3),

and that by studying these patterns we can learn how our culture is changing. His study of crime fiction emphasizes the need to take into account “a broader cultural and historical perspective and to consider the puzzling question of our extraordinary affection for literature about crime (3)”. This writer has taken Cawelti’s directive to heart throughout the study of Miami crime fiction. Cawelti also explains that the crime fiction form relies on the artistic skill to create “suspense, identification², and the creating of a slightly removed, imaginary world” (17). These three genre elements lend focus to this study in terms of how the texts utilize South Florida's attributes to fulfill the form.

Regional literature, on the other hand, is always concerned with landscape, ethnicity, and the gender roles of the men and women that inhabit the plots. Cawelti had this to say about the standard elements of the western, one of the most recognizable forms of regional and genre literature:

...many westerns employ revenge stories, while others emphasize the action of chase and pursuit, or conflicts between groups such as pioneers vs. Indians, or ranchers vs. farmer. The element that most clearly defines the western is the symbolic landscape in which it takes place and the influence this landscape has on the character and actions of the hero. (193)

Cawelti goes on to observe that the western’s geography is its defining element, portraying the action that takes place on the line between civilization and the wilderness. The protagonists were generally characterized as the civilizers or pioneers geographically remote from civilized society, in constant danger of

being cut off by Indians or outlaws. Cawelti emphasizes that the import of the western was its moment in time where the old life and the new confront each other and each decision, each individual action had the ability to allow either civilization or wildness to triumph, “thus shaping the future history of the whole settlement” (193). As we shall see in this discussion of Miami crime fiction, the frontier qualities that Cawelti describes in the typical western are recreated on a new geographic landscape at the southern end of the Floridian peninsula. We will visit the frontier aspects of Miami and the drug economy later in this piece.

Right now, the relationship between the regional characteristics of South Florida and the genre expectations discussed above provide a good place to begin the discussion. John Shelton Reed, a rural sociologist, quoted in Geography and Literature, says that traditional regional identity relies on feelings, attitudes, values and perceptions that build a group culture in a particular place far more than shared economic and political concerns (6). That observation might explain why Miami has not built a homogenous group culture, for it is primarily our economic interests that bridge the differences in the multi-cultural composition of our population. South Florida can more easily be used as a supportive example of the observations made by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, in Beyond the Melting Pot, where they argue that all immigrant groups in America assimilated and prospered with varying degrees of speed and success depending on where they chose to settle (Mallory 6). It is necessary to talk about regional identity in order to pinpoint what is meant by the term, regional literature. Again traditionally, regional literature, “has been employed as

a term of relegation that serious writers have been less than eager to be identified with,” according to Jim Wayne Miller, an Appalachian poet, fiction writer and critic (Mallory 2). Anatole Broyard, a literary critic, uses the term regional literature to describe rural or small town life anywhere in America (Mallory 2). What Broyard does not take into account is that regions in the United States and elsewhere can be defined by other shared groups of characteristics that have nothing to do with small town life. For example regional literature set in the West presented, nature that was beautiful but dangerous, women as a liability, and an easily identifiable enemy in the form of the Indians, the Other. The regional setting of Miami crime fiction has some similarities to western literature but more differences because of the urban nature of life in South Florida.

Urban or even suburban regionalism is a more apt description of the characteristics of Miami and the type of literature that has been developed here. A discussion of the combined terms *urbanity* and *regionalism* is not easy to come by through literary research because of what Miller describes as “a feature of literary modernism is the tendency of writers to locate themselves in history—in time, that is, rather than in space” (Mallory 4). As we move beyond modernism that distinction falls away. Barbara Parker placed the crime fiction coming out of Miami:

You know, Miami's also very suburban. You see, that's the thing. You'd love to have an answer where I talk about Miami as an urban crime center and of course it is and it has its urban area and raises its urban crime but this is a very sprawled community in some ways like L.A.. New York is

totally different. That's urban. This I consider to be a lot of little neighborhoods with a very small center city. Surrounded unfortunately by a pretty wretched poor area. You could drive for miles and miles and miles past communities and communities, Pinecrest, Kendall, all that. Miami may reside more there, the concept of Miami is more suburban for me than it is urban. Of all of us probably Edna Buchanan is the most urban writer. Standiford is definitely suburban. Paul Levine is more urban. Hiaasen is almost suburban or rural and James Hall is also suburban. I think it might be a product of the times in which we were raised cause we're all about the same age and we were brought up in the suburbs. Bet you a dollar all of us were. So, for urban literature I suggest you go to Boston, New York and Chicago, but not Miami. I don't see it as an urban city.

For Parker, the crime fiction of South Florida is neither a traditional regional literature, nor an urban regional literature. It is a hybrid that reflects a general shift in society away from hard-edged definitions of place. Parker senses the distinction between a modernistic definition of time and space *à la* Gertrude Stein whose "reality resided in the timeless consciousness rather than in space (Mallory 2)" versus the sometimes ethereal, sometimes gritty countenance of South Florida portrayed, one might even say, mythologized through its literature.

In addition to the singularity of its regional classification, Miami crime fiction differs from other crime fiction, setting it apart as a sub-genre. English crime fiction relies primarily on a closed-box scenario where there is a body and a confined universe of suspects are narrowed down until the audience discovers

who did it. For example, in Agatha Christie's The Orient Express there is one corpse and a set number of suspects all contained on the closed set of the train. Urban New York and Los Angeles have traditionally offered up a hard-boiled brand of crime fiction centering on organized crime. Lawrence Sanders, author of the Deadly Sin series set in New York City, followed the English scenario by confining the investigation to a specific universe of suspects. The Fourth Deadly Sin features a murdered Manhattan psychiatrist and the investigation is confined to the doctor's patients and immediate associates. Sanders does have his detective hero, Edward X. Delaney, acknowledge that if none of these suspects pans out, they will have to widen the search, allowing the possibility of chaos to enter the plot; however, the usual suspects do yield the killer. The plot structure of Miami crime fiction is not so neatly contained. Unlike the Christie or Sanders examples, in James W. Hall's Tropical Freeze the mystery concerns a multitude of murdered illegal immigrant corpses, previously people of means. While the plot centers in the Upper Florida Keys, the main characters travel to Miami, out to sea, and consider Latin American and Caribbean fugitives, in their efforts to solve the crime.

Miami crime fiction owes its inspiration to a polyglot society capable of producing truly awful and imaginative criminals who only seem plausible here, in a hot tropical paradise where cultures butt up against each other. Les Standiford commented on the advent of a new school of crime fiction:

Yes, there is a lot of crime. And, there's a lot of intrigue in an area like South Florida, which is undergoing tremendous cultural change, with a focus

of a great deal of immigration from Latin America. We're a frontier city. And, as the general consensus being that the frontier is dead or closed, or the movement westward is over within America, all of a sudden there appeared a new frontier city. And, I think that there's always interest in such a place.

Standiford's novel, Done Deal, opens with a chilling example of what can happen when a variety of immigrants get in the way of a ruthless native white Miami developer. The industrious Cuban watches as his lazy garage helper is thrown into the trunk of a car, occupied by two murderously hungry canines, by a cruel Cuban immigrant and a marginalized native Black Miami man in its first few pages:

The big man snapped open the lid of the trunk. Manolo [the Cuban gas station owner] caught a glimpse of fur, teeth. Something... no, *two* somethings colliding in a frenzy, frantic for the light. On chains, jaws snapping, spit flying, an awful smell of shit and animal stink...

...and then Raymond was flung inside and the lid slammed down. Snarls. Rap Steady. Raymond's screams. The man with the ruined face leaned in to turn the music higher.

The car bucked and heaved until Manolo felt his stomach give way once more...A tremor coursed the metal of the hood, then another.

Manolo nodded. Still weeping, he took the pen. (5-6)

This scene takes place on a Little Havana street corner and while it is not business as usual, this quirky violence is a trademark of the novels under consideration. Nowhere was that quirkiness explored more thoroughly than in a

parody showcasing contributions from many of Miami's most prominent writers, bringing into focus the notion that Miami might indeed have a regional literature, and one genre stands out as its form of choice—crime fiction.

This thesis explores the specific regional characteristics that have encouraged the development of crime fiction that depends on a location, Miami. In 1995, Naked Came the Manatee, a publishing collaboration of thirteen authors appeared in serialized form in Tropic, the Sunday magazine of the Miami Herald. It is a rare, but not unique, event to have so many writers living and working in the same place come together to collaborate on a story³. A different South Florida writer wrote each chapter of Naked Came the Manatee.

Although seven of the thirteen authors write crime fiction⁴, there seemed to be unanimous agreement that this project should take the shape of a crime fiction novel. The weekly releases of a new chapter found a dedicated audience in the Miami area and a year later the book has found a much wider audience in its hardcover form published as a thirteen-chapter novel. Clearly there is not only a community in South Florida that nurtures the genre but also a world-wide audience with an appetite for crime fiction set in Miami that sustains the work. The collaboration on Naked Came the Manatee, in addition to the current proliferation of crime fiction being written in and about Miami, raises some questions about the way cultural and geographic forces can shape the literary development of crime fiction.

This thesis studies the fiction using primary and secondary sources including interviews conducted with Miami's own crime fiction writers. The

interviews confirm that Miami is essential to the plots, protagonists and antagonists in their novels, so essential that what we are witnessing can be illuminated by consideration of both genre and regionalism. Paul Levine, one of the local authors who writes the Jake Lassiter Miami crime fiction series said:

I consider it [Miami] an ideal setting for this genre, because it has so many different facets to it. It has crime, it has corruption. It has so many things that are so different than the way most people in the country live, that people can read about it, and it transports them here. It transports them into a different life.

Elmore Leonard has found inspiration for several novels in the area. He said:

South Florida has a wonderful mixture. It is a great area to set a story. The Mariel boatlift...LaBrava is set on South Beach when drug dealers move in on the old residents of the area.

The uniqueness of South Florida and the important role it plays in the development of crime fiction will be discussed at further length later in the essay.

Miami; Voices From The Frontier

A frontier is conventionally thought about as an international border, or a region just beyond or at the edge of a settled area. Until this century the American West was a vast undeveloped area ripe for discovery, homesteading and economic exploration synonymous with frontier all over the world. As mentioned in the introduction, Cawelti has observed that, “the western tends to be as formalized in its way as the detective story (192),” so there are useful

parallels to be drawn between the western frontier of old and Miami's current geographical and figurative role as a postmodern frontier. For over one hundred and fifty years the tension, challenges and lawlessness of life in the western frontier have been mythologized in genre fiction beginning with James Fenimore Cooper and continuing to the present with Louis L'Amour, author of well over one hundred novels about the old West. Mr. L'Amour discussed the railroad's role in the development of America's western frontier:

There was a change in the West when the railroads were built.

Before that time nobody ever locked their door. People who came out in wagon trains and came out the hard way were a pretty decent honorable bunch. When the railroads were built almost anybody could come West.

You didn't need a lot of nerve, all you needed was money for a ticket. Then trouble began to come into the country (Thoene 22).

The railroad was also responsible for the growth of Miami, but we can look to water, road and air transportation from all over the Western Hemisphere for exacerbating or enhancing the frontier aspects of South Florida, depending on one's view of immigrant energy.

We tend to think of a frontier in a historical sense of settling something new. What we have in Miami is a kind of frontier in terms of breaking the rules. Miami crime fiction heroes, like their western counterparts, are holding the line between lawlessness and civilization and every battle has the ability to shape the future of this town (Cawelti 193). Like the western, Miami crime fiction offers two primary kinds of conflict. One conflict concerns man's struggle with the natural

environment. The other has to do with a criminal element that derives primarily from an immigrant population that has a different notion of law and morality, if they have any notion of these things at all. In juxtaposition, the heroes of westerns such as Owen Wister's The Virginian, were the immigrants, where in Miami crime fiction the majority of heroes stem from the native Anglo population. Yet, transplanted easterners found a sense of regeneration in the wilds of the western frontier just as immigrants to Miami have enjoyed tremendous success in regenerating their past lives. As the western novel form matured, it dealt more and more with the social consequences of integrating into a new kind of society where "traditional restraints were off and the hierarchy changed every day as one man's claim played out and another struck it rich" (Cawelti 216-17). Certainly there are interesting parallels between the lawlessness and opportunity in the Old West and the drug cowboys at work in the 1970's and early 1980's in Miami. To immigrants Miami is a frontier. It is something new to them. The way Miami's culture changes in terms of Caribbean and Latin American immigration is taken up further in the following section.

Elmore Leonard, Les Standiford, James W. Hall, Paul Levine, Vicki Hendricks, Barbara Parker and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera all agreed to be interviewed for this project. The authors were aware of how Miami's recent past had effected the frontier nature of life in the region and this theme ran through their work. For instance, Standiford said, "Everything that Miami is today, in large part, is 15 years old." He goes on to explain that Miami has virtually no history and his protagonist, John Deal, "finds himself in the position of trying to rebuild a life on a

foundation that he's learning about as he goes, where his father had the luxury of building upon a foundation that was essentially the same as any other American metropolis, over the previous 150 years." Jim Hall also discussed the lack of history in Miami:

Well, yeah, Miami is a work in progress, and that's what makes it interesting, that it's not a town like New York, or Chicago, or a lot of others, in which there is a fairly clear, defined character of personality to the area, and that there's a certain makeup, demographically...and they're all fairly constant...somebody said this in Hard Aground, that we don't have any basements in Florida. Nobody has any roots, nobody is anchored, nobody is really here for any duration, and that sense of anonymity, and not having a sense of family history and connecting us with a place, or not having a body, a social group, which has a long-term investment in a place, creates a sense of disagreement, let's say, about what the moral center is.

The lack of basements in Florida comes up again and again in the interviews. It seems to give license to the crime fiction writers to create family histories and invent basements where none exist. Barbara Parker explained:

The history of South Florida is preserved like a little museum downtown on Flagler Street and then you get the exhibits under glass at the Coral Gables library or the little history center down in Perrine. We don't really participate in history, do we? It doesn't seep through our lives. It's not in our consciousness, the way it would be say in Boston or even New York.

The northeastern United States set the standard expectations for immigrant behavior in the early part of the twentieth century. Immigrants should be hard working, keep their place, and there should be a multi-generation rise in social, economic and political status. James W. Hall commented on how this immigrant behavior produces conflict in the native population of Miami:

One of the frustrations Anglos have about Cubans in Miami is that Cubans came to Miami, and didn't want to stay in the service jobs and in the lowest economic echelon. And, they wanted to move very quickly up the ladder, and that's not the way, you know--you do that over two or three generations, in American history. The Italian father educates the son, and the son has a middle-class job, and he educates his son. And then, eventually, they work themselves up the economic ladder. So, there's a certain tension that's come in Miami, because immigrants don't play by the same rules, supposedly, that immigrants have elsewhere.

Cuban immigrants in Miami broke the stereotype, creating tension and setting the city apart from other regions and incidentally providing a key element of character development in much of Miami crime fiction. In City on the Edge, the authors observed the unique way in which immigrants settle in Miami:

Other U.S. cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, also have large Spanish-speaking and immigrant populations, but nowhere has the social and economic weight of the newcomers or their political significance been greater than in South Florida. In New York, new arrivals are promptly absorbed into the immense fabric of the city; the very diversity of

nationalities in New York conspires against any single group becoming too prominent. In Miami, the regrouped Cuban bourgeoisie not only redefined the character of the city, but also prompted other ethnic communities—native Blacks and Whites included—to cast their own identities in sharper relief (Portes xii).

Through the interviews, the authors acknowledged that the way immigrants settle in Miami is very different from the expected integration discussed above and that has a lot to do with how characterization and plot is achieved in Miami crime fiction.

Specifically, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, who is of Cuban origin, expressed her concern about portraying the more cultured Cuban immigrant:

It's sort of education about immigrants to show that they work hard because it's not all illegal immigrants. I feel that in a way other crime fiction primarily portrays immigrants as the criminals. I want to get the message across that there are all kinds of immigrants. Some have education. In my books there are elements of Cuba in every page so I do try to educate.

Garcia-Aguilera went on to say that she thought there was an imbalance in the number of Cuban characters that take the role of villains in Miami crime fiction.

Conversely, Barbara Parker was particularly interested in the way the suburban milieu of Miami is affected by immigration because of the tension it engenders:

What we've got here is a fragile place. It's a sense of being fragile. A hurricane could come along and blow everything away. The waves of immigrants that come in and change our demographics so quickly. Urban

riots...suburban riots. But everybody is looking for a foothold and it makes a wonderful environment for crime fiction. There's always an undercurrent of fear here, which comes from the insecurity. 'Is my group going to be supplanted in this place with very little history and is my identity going to be erased?'

While Miami has become a very real immigrant destination for Latin America and the Caribbean, the origin of Miami was that of a vacation land, a place to visit and then to leave behind.

Miami is a fictional construct based on a fantasy to appeal to tourism, and it also happens to appeal mightily to an international reading audience. Miami Vice, Miami Nice, Miami the Magic City...Miami is a montage of images dreamed up in advertising agencies and glorified through television shows, movies and crime fiction novels. South Florida borrows its cultural icons including architecture, place names and the very inhabitants along with the history and lore they bring with them. For example, George Merrick founded the city of Coral Gables and named every street with European place names, the majority from Spain. As David Rieff observes in his sociological study, Going to Miami,

In Coral Gables, the streets are called Ponce de Leon, Alhambra, Cordoba, Almeria, Toledo, Alcazar, and on and on, mapping Iberia over again. The comedy of these decisions is that today they actually mean something (11).

Rieff goes on to explain that many of the current residents of Coral Gables are Spanish speaking. Not only can they pronounce the names George Merrick

assigned in a whimsical fashion but also their family history is anchored in these place names.

Miami's historical grounding is as the host of a culturally diverse population that thrives in the area, providing both the contrast and the conflict that nourishes good crime fiction. James Hall expanded on the idea that there is no moral consensus in Miami and why the local population's multicultural history provides such a rich background for his work:

And, that makes them very interesting. It makes it a very interesting place, because a lot of us think that we know what the moral middle-C is or should be, and a huge percentage of people who live here don't agree... they come from other moral constructs altogether... for instance, one of the things that is going on right now in Miami life is this pattern of ripping off the city government of Miami. It's over \$68 million in debt. Well, where did that happen? Where did that come from? Sure, politicians of all stripes have had a long history of graft and kickbacks, and that sort of thing. But, my experience with Spanish culture--because I lived in Spain for a year--is that in Spain, you call up the phone company, and unless you know somebody, or unless you can pay somebody off in Spain, you don't get your phone hooked up for six months. And, that's just the way it operates. And, that's not immoral, unethical. That's just the way it operates. And, to us, to a middle-class, Midwestern American perspective, that seems offensive and wrong.

In this next example from Hall, he shows what can happen when people learn the rules of the road in various countries and then apply them in Miami.

Just look at the driving in Miami. Look at the highways. What you've got is people following driving practices that they learned in Egypt (for example) and using them in Miami, as though everybody else drives that way. And, they're not adapting. .. they're just bringing the driving methods that they learned somewhere else. And, I think that's one of the things that makes this an interesting place to write about, and a very useful place, because people are not modified by the place. They modify the place.

As Dr. Hall explains with the examples above, the people that move to Miami have traditionally forced the place to accommodate them. From the beginning, Miami was modeled as a resort town to attract tourists to winter here. Every historian of South Florida recounts how Julia Tuttle, a wealthy landowner on the Miami River, lured Henry Flagler to extend his railroad from Palm Beach to Miami with a fragrant orange blossom in the dead of winter when the rest of the state was in the deep freeze. Ever since that fateful act, Miami has seduced a multitude of disparate people to the area.

There is a dangerous excitement in this region fueled by the weather, by immigrant energy, by its geographic location as a tourist Mecca. Sheila Croucher begins her ethnographic study of Miami over the last thirty years with this image:

Images of tourist strolling leisurely along sandy beaches compete with images of the dark bodies of Haitian refugees washed up along those same shores. Never too far removed from the glitz and the glitter of an

“American Riviera” are the burning buildings and broken glass of a
“Paradise Lost” (1).

There is only a fine line from the image that Croucher paints based on Miami’s recent history to the literature of crime fiction that locates itself in Miami.

Consider these examples from the opening pages of Carl Hiaasen’s Skin Tight and Barbara Parker’s Suspicion of Innocence respectively:

On the third of January, a leaden, blustery day, two tourists from Covington, Tennessee, removed their sensible shoes to go strolling on the beach at Key Biscayne.

When they got to the old Cape Florida lighthouse, the young man and his fiancée sat down on the damp sand to watch the ocean crash hard across the brown boulders at the point of the island. There was a salt haze in the air, and it stung the young man’s eyes so that when he spotted the thing floating, it took several moments to focus on what it was.

“It’s a big dead fish,” his fiancée said. “Maybe a porpoise.”

“I don’t believe so,” said the young man. He stood up, dusted off the seat of his trousers, and walked to the edge of the surf. As the thing floated closer, the young man began to wonder about his legal responsibilities, providing it turned out to be what he thought it was. Oh yes, he had heard about Miami; this sort of stuff happened every day.
(Hiaasen 1)

These particular people in the airboat, he guessed they were from Sweden, the way their voices slid up and down. Probably taking a day trip

off one of the cruise ships at the Port of Miami. Their noses and cheeks were already red. They weren't made for this latitude. The locals he took out were mostly younger, usually with a kid or two. The old people liked to take the bigger airboats up at the Holiday Park where they could all sit together, a dozen or more behind a Plexiglas windscreen, with a roof to keep the sun off. The Cubans liked the airboat. They'd pay him extra to stay out longer. The Blacks hardly ever showed up, for some reason.

(Parker 10)

This image of the tourist or the innocent resident caught up in Miami's maelstrom of crime is not isolated in the literature under review. On the contrary, the examples are easy to come by. In the Parker example above, the prologue of the novel features tourists touring the wilds of the Everglades with an Indian guide when they stumble upon a corpse. Notice how Parker builds tension with reference to the danger of the natural environment. This paragraph not only establishes the scene, but also provides the reader immediately with the information that Miami hosts a diverse population, implying that this information will somehow be central to the story. In fact, this form of literature is believed to serve some significant cultural functions according to Cawelti, because it provides a safe way the audience can assimilate new interests and values. Cawelti asserts that "this process is probably of particular importance in a discontinuous, pluralistic culture (35)," which supports Miami's appeal as a setting. Miami also offers the worldwide audience a concentration of diversity, beyond what they may be encountering, but not so foreign that it cannot strike a

cord of familiarity. Cawelti goes further in his exploration of the impact the form has in regard to negotiating multicultural relationships between characters, and ultimately between readers. He names several areas that the dialectic between the form and the audience help cultural stability. They include assisting in the process of assimilating changes in values; resolving tensions and ambiguities resulting from the conflicting interests of different groups within the culture; enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary (35-6). For example, the form can explore both interracial unions and the acquisition of wealth by subversive means. Both of these taboos arise frequently in Miami crime fiction.

To continue with the Parker example from Suspicion of Innocence, the family is now deep into the Everglades:

The man was watching the water. "There are alligators here?"

Alligators. They all wanted to see the alligators.

"Look over that way. They like to hide in that pond, under the bushes."

Then the boat rocked a little. The girl was standing up on the seat. She was steadying herself on the propeller cage, looking toward the break in the cattails, not saying anything. The water tapped against the sides of the boat. The girl squinted in the sun, looking toward the shore. Just looking, quiet now, not moving.

He could see it now, too, about twenty feet ahead. The end of the nature walk, the heavy wood weathered to gray above the shallow water. Somebody had spilled a can of rusty-colored paint, maybe. The streaks had run down the two-by-twelve and one of the pilings. And there was what looked like a bundle of clothes just off the end. Bumping up against the pitted white rock, moving in the waves the airboat had pushed to shore.

Jimmy stared. The water ticked on the sides of the boat. He heard the buzz of flies. The knowledge came to him slowly, like a picture turning right side up. (Parker 10-14)

While Parker integrates the geography of Miami into her fiction, Joan Didion describes her own observations as a traveler, where a foreign wildness differentiates Miami from the rest of the United States.

I never passed through security for a flight to Miami without experiencing a certain weightlessness, the heightened wariness of having left the developed world for a more fluid atmosphere, one in which the native distrust of extreme possibilities that tended to ground the temperate United States in an obeisance to democratic institutions seemed rooted, if at all, only shallowly. At the gate for such flights the preferred language was already Spanish. Delays were explained by weather in Panama. The very names of the scheduled destinations suggested a world in which many evangelical inclinations had historically been accommodated, many yearnings toward empire indulged. (23)

David Rieff, in accord with Didion, comments on his own experience of first entering Miami from the airport. He said, "From the moment one steps through the sliding doors of the terminal building out into the real weather, one is enveloped by a different scent, a heavier, more redolent air: the tropics (38). " This theme that the very atmosphere of Miami is unique is yet another characteristic that defines the region and is represented in the sub-genre of literature under discussion. Didion goes on to discuss Miamian's heightened sense of interest in personal security:

As in other parts of the world where the citizens shop for guerrilla discounts and bargains in semiautomatic weapons, there was in Miami an advanced interest in personal security. The security installations in certain residential neighborhoods could have been transplanted intact from Bogota or San Salvador, and even modest householders had detailed information about perimeter defenses, areas of containment, motion monitors and closed-circuit television surveillance. Decorative grilles on doors and windows turned out to have a defensive intent. Break-ins were referred to by the Metro-Dade Police Department as "home invasion," a locution which tended to suggest a city under systematic siege. (24-5)

There is a humor in Didion's description that also tends to find its way into Miami crime fiction along with the natural and man-made terror that readers can find in the novels. Carl Hiaasen and Les Standiford are perhaps best known for exploiting the irony of a situation, where six months each year the threat of

hurricanes undermine any claim to permanency that residents, builders, and businesses might have to the sandy soil.

The following excerpt from Les Standiford's Done Deal is illustrative of how the combination of foul weather, humor and danger build a scene representative of Miami crime fiction. John Deal, the hero in the series, is a Miami building contractor. Leon, a villain mentioned early is a Black man who throws a minor Hispanic character into a car trunk with some wild dogs to obtain a deed to a gas station. John Deal finds himself in Biscayne Bay, struggling to locate his wife, Janice⁵, who has been kidnapped by Leon:

She could hear the storm raging outside now, the water raging, shaking the foundations of the house. It had to be a place directly on the water, but somewhere all by itself. She'd heard some distant boat traffic, had screamed herself hoarse several times, to no avail. She tried to think where she could be, but it was difficult to concentrate. She was weak, from hunger, from exhaustion, from fear. But she would die before she'd wilt in front of this creature...

He [Leon] folded the papers away. "If he don't manage to die somewhere else real soon, then I'll let him know where to find his pretty little wife." He tapped the phone that was still belted to his side. "Let him know if I have to take out an ad in the newspapers."

He smiled, waving the contract in front of Janice. "Kind of guy he is, he'll put himself up in my face. And once he does, we'll tidy up what has to be."

“You’re crazy,” she said softly.

“Naw,” Leon said. “I’m in real estate...”

Deal felt something slither past his hand and froze in midstroke, instinctively jerking back, his head dipping in a swell, sucking in a half-pint of seawater.

Fucking-a, he thought. Grab a handful of seaweed and fall to pieces. Some commando.

“And what if she is in there.” It was Flivey again [Deal’s dead boyhood friend]. *“Gonna get yourself a team of dolphins, tail walk ‘em up the steps, flipper Leon into submission?”*

He opened his eyes again, then froze: there was a splash of light atop the pilings over there, somebody standing in a doorway, somebody too big to be anybody but Leon. Leon taking his time, staring out over the water, then glancing back inside, a last look, making sure everything was set....(259-265)

Even on the clear and glorious winter days when the sun shines like a million diamonds off of the gently rolling waters of Biscayne Bay there is an undercurrent of destruction in the very air. And of course there are the surges of renewal that follow any destruction. There is hope on the frontier, and the audience for Miami crime fiction is eager to partake of a life and death conflict from a safe distance, garnering some optimism for their own more mundane struggles.

The South Florida region has captured the imagination of many people from tourists to scholars, from filmmakers to novelists, from bankers to

politicians, and a number of sociologists. This interest exists because, “Miami provides a lens, albeit a bold and magnified one, through which to view other places, issues, and ideas of great contemporary significance” (Croucher 172). The crime fiction form is well suited to tell the stories of underdog heroes struggling to negotiate life in a wild, often foreign land, overrun with unexpected villains. Miami offers the futuristic element of a social frontier in combination with natural and man-made dangers in a seductively tropic, yet American city.

Miami conjures up many images, but perhaps the best descriptor is postmodern frontier town. Postmodern, because Miami is a compilation of architectural, cultural, and economic styles borrowed from other places. Unlike the traditional definition of frontier as an unsettled geographic location, Miami is a frontier in the sense that it is a border-land, and as such Miami presents an intellectual challenge to its inhabitants. They must negotiate each other, as earlier explorers had to overcome harsh terrain and hostile indigenous peoples. Sheila Croucher poses a number of questions about what Miami is:

Is Miami the “land of opportunity”? A “paradise lost”? A
“sophisticated tropics” or a “banana republic”? Is it the “city of the future”
or a “city on the edge”? Is Miami America’s Riviera or America’s Pretoria?
(172)

She answers her own question in the next sentence and further illuminates the postmodern nature of this city. “Miami is all of these things—a composite of images that overlap and intersect, compete and collide” (172). Fredric Jameson expounds on the collage of styles from various eras that society adopts as its

own. He counts *pastiche* as one of the major identifiers of the postmodern era in his essay, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," written in 1982. Jameson said, "One of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is *pastiche*" (CS 113). He defines *pastiche* this way:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style... but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared to which what is being imitated is rather comic (CS 114).

Miami is a model of *pastiche* as seen in its architecture, its government, its geography, landscape, and the diverse practices of its multi-cultural population which Jameson would call a "demographic explosion" (CS 115). These main unique styles inform all aspects of life in the city. While Jameson asserts that "personal identity is a thing of the past; that the old individual or individualist subject is 'dead' (CS 115) Miami's character defiantly shouts, "NO, diversity lives here, on the frontier of a new era." The state of *pastiche* that characterizes Miami has enabled individuality in spite of the consumer society that Jameson charges with homogenizing the individual.

In Sheila Croucher's estimation, postmodernism rejects established natural and cultural boundaries and conventional definitions of reality and instead emphasizes that the reality of one's environment and social interactions is subjective, ambiguous and relative (12):

The single-minded student.... who approaches contemporary conflicts, in Miami...from a conventional standpoint quickly confronts a bewildering array of claims and counterclaims, grievances and assertion, heroes and victims. (172)

She attributes this lack of consensus on the "Shifting Terrain" that changes even as a viewpoint is articulated (173). Miamians tend to embrace the idea of their own individualism in the way that they cling to their cultural backgrounds and practices, yet share in the multi-cultural offerings of the city. The way we live may not conform in totality to Jameson's vision of a postmodern society, but it does reflect his notions of *pastiche*, for there is no parodic mocking in the varied styles the city sports or in its third world approach to government.

When students of postmodernism examine Miami, either from a sociological perspective or through its literature, it is with an interest in identifying power bases within the politics and economy of the region (Croucher 12). Hegemony is no longer concentrated in a white Anglo-Saxon base because of the region's physical and ontological position. "Clearly, both geography and history have conspired to construct a city like none other in the United States" (Croucher 172). Miami is on the edge of social development because of its current and predicted demographics. It is on the edge of history between the modernist project and postmodernist lifestyle, because its history is short and primarily a product of myth-building to satisfy first tourism and later immigrant initiatives to fabricate their own country's cultures in South Florida. What little natural history the area has uncovered is in imminent danger of being bulldozed

into oblivion by developers. There is a violence in the layering of physical and social development that has enabled present day Miami to exist that is reflected in the crime fiction of the region. Postmodernism "seeks to expose the elusiveness, dynamism, and 'intertextuality' of social phenomena" and "Miami's image as a city of illusion" at the same time that it houses a government more akin to new or developing nations, is a microcosm of postmodern life (Croucher 20). Croucher says that, in the jargon of postmodernism, Miami is the text (23). The authors of Miami crime fiction take the text of the city and weave their stories through it, providing still more of the intertextuality that postmodernism seeks to deconstruct or uncover. Adding to Miami's postmodern frontier status is the location and topology of South Florida.

The geographic boundaries of Miami encompass much more than an incorporated municipality. They embrace all of the qualities listed by Croucher above. Furthermore, Miami's inception and growth had little to do with modernist theory on how cities are formed as described in City on the Edge. "Cities arise out of the imperatives of economic life and develop according to their importance in the larger economy. Their location can be analyzed by means of the same logic: urban concentrations emerge as marketplaces for settled hinterlands, as places where sources of energy converge with sources of labor, and as "breaks" in transportation routes requiring the physical transfer of commodities (Portes 203). What we have in South Florida is perhaps the first postmodern city, defined more by its political geography, than its economic situation. During the first half of the century, "Its sole assets were sun and beach, sold by the square

foot. The equally busy ferrying of arms to the rebellious Spanish colony of Cuba prefigured its character during the second half" (Portes 204-5).

Although Miami started out as a tourist destination, it has become the gateway to Latin America, setting Miami apart as a frontier because of its border status. International trade and finance attracted many new businesses to the area in the 1980's and, "passing through the Port of Miami, Miami International Airport, and other terminals was an estimated \$7.5 billion worth of Latin exports and imports" (Croucher 42). David Rieff attributes this gateway status to Cuban immigration:

In New Jersey, Cuba is far away and Spanish Harlem across a bridge; in Miami, Cuba is with you everywhere. So is Latin America, and that was the real key to the Cuban success in Miami, and, to the extent that the two are separable, to the success of the city as a whole. It was Cuban-Americans who, more than any other group, seized on the increasing U.S. trade with Latin America... They spoke Spanish, the only time, perhaps, in the history of Hispanic immigration to the U.S. that this has been recognized as an advantage, and they were experienced in doing business with Latin Americans. (47)

The failure of linguistic, natural, and moral boundaries to constrain economic pursuit has contributed to making Miami the thriving capital of Latin America, a foreign city within U.S. borders, rich in background and material for the creation of crime fiction⁶ set in a sub-tropical environment that does not exist anywhere else in the United States.

There are specific boundaries that contain the City of Miami, but to the world and even the residents of South Florida, Miami spills over the southeastern peninsula of the state onto Miami Beach, up into Broward County where the newly formed Miami Fusion soccer team plays, all across Dade County, re-christened this year as Miami-Dade County and down the U.S. 1 Highway into Monroe County, better known as the Keys. As with any frontier town, there are specific differences that cut Miami off from the rest of Florida and the United States. It is important for the definition of regional literature to understand what differentiates Miami. Now, let us look further into the comparison of Miami to the rest of the state of Florida and the U.S.

Prior to 1960, Miami was an American city but not a typical one according to the sociologist, Alex Stepick. It was newer, less traditional than other urban centers. It was neither fully southern nor northern. It had a large transient population and a large proportion of inhabitants who were first-generation migrants. As a result, it lacked a consolidated socio-political structure (Croucher 29). This fragmentation or weakness in the civic foundations of the city, at the same time that the waves of immigration from Cuba were beginning, laid the groundwork for the first world / third world political structure in Miami today. Miami is not a southern town and it does not represent the melting pot imagery of the northeastern United States as discussed earlier. It is not like central or northern Florida that more closely share the history and cultural values of the Deep South. Elmore Leonard said that there is a social and cultural line between Palm Beach and Okeechobee counties that sets South Florida in contrast with the

rest of the state. David Rieff presents a South Florida that is in opposition to Leonard's viewpoint when he writes, "Miami was and is an invented vision, a fantasy of ideal living. It is, as Jackie Gleason called it, 'the sun and fun capital of the world.' In other words, it is a whim of its real estate developers" (12). Leonard said that he did not buy into this idea of Miami being less than real:

I have been visiting Florida since 1950--I've always been there, so familiarity encourages me to place some of my stories there. Florida is not an imaginary world. It contains a contrast of different kinds of people that live in South Florida, Palm Beach County. Palm Beach and Okeechobee *contrast*. Out of Sight is about a Glades prison escape. It's based on a real escape. My books are anchored in reality.

It seems that all the novels are anchored to place, making a stronger case for considering them a body of regional literature. Historically, South Florida has always been set apart from the rest of the state.

While the central and northern areas of the state were being explored and settled, led by Ponce de Leon in 1513⁷, the area that is now Miami and the Indians who inhabited the hard wood hammocks⁸ remained largely ignored for another four centuries. In April of 1896, when Henry Flagler brought the first train into Miami, there were only three hundred settlers there to watch. According to the Florida historian, Dr. Michael Gannon; "Though Flagler expressed his belief that Miami itself would never be more than a "fishing village," he did build a resort hotel there, the Royal Palm" (59). There was little land to support a settlement until the Miami river was diverted to contain the wetlands of the Everglades,

creating valuable coastal real estate in a warm and hospitable climate, barring tropical storms, mosquitoes and humidity during the summer months. This diversion also changed a clear, fish-laden, swift running Miami River into a silt-filled, sluggish, murky mass, the first of many environmental casualties of Miami's growth into a metropolis. James W. Hall describes the transformation of the Miami River in Hard Aground where the setting plays an important role in the plot of the novel:

That stagnant water, the remnants of the original Miami River, was full of car tires now, styrofoam burger containers, cigarette packs, you name it...Where those old Good years were was about where the rapids of the river had once been, where the Everglades water had once spilled over the rocky Atlantic coastal ridge, the wall of rock that acted as a dam against the eastern edge of the Everglades.

A hundred years before, when they dynamited the rapids, it was as if they'd blown a hole in the dike, the dike that kept the millions of acres of pristine water from pouring into the bay, bringing along its dark silt. All of it gone now. Gone the mill and the cootie, gone the rapids the local plants. Gone a huge chunk of the Everglades. All of it gone so that more dry land could be made habitable for wave after wave of new residents.

For thousands of years before the white man came, the only dry ground in southern Florida was the five-mile band of earth running along the coast. It was where the Tequestas lived...all there had been for millennia was the Everglades, the vast domain of muck and mire, filled

with alligators, herons, egrets, flamingos... It was pure stupidity and uninformed pride, that made those first Yankees believe they could tame this territory. Despite the good weather, the southeastern tip of Florida was as inhospitable to human habitation as anyplace on earth. To establish a city on the edge of the Everglades was as idiotic as trying to build one on the peak of Mount Everest, or on the floor of the Grand Canyon.

Sure, it could be done. Yankee ingenuity would find a way to chop down the jungles, drain those millions of acres, so the trainloads of other fools could enjoy South Florida's perpetual summer. (35-6)

The following section continues this analysis of the role Miami's environment plays as a central theme in the crime fiction novels that comprise both a regional literature and a sub-genre.

The Environment

The environment is a key character in all Miami crime fiction. The South Florida landscape is inherently beautiful, as depicted in Hall's description above, but it differs significantly from the way the mid-United States were when the western settlement was going on. The Everglades presented a forbidding mosquito-infested marsh environment, in contrast to the regional landscapes of western literature, yet both play a pivotal role in shaping the literature. Cawelti wrote, "The element that most clearly defines the western is the symbolic landscape in which it takes place and the influence this landscape has on the

character and actions of the hero" (193). Cawelti goes on to designate the western in geographic terms, distinguishing it from other genre fiction. The hugely important role that South Florida's geography has in the plots of Miami crime fiction, supports the assertion that we are observing a new sub-genre of the detective or crime fiction story. "This is, I think why this particular formula has come to be known by a geographical term, the western rather than by a characterization of the protagonist's form of action, as in the case of the detective story or the gangster saga, or by some quality of action and mood as in the case of the gothic romance or the horror story" (193).

Every good crime novel needs a conflict, and the preservation or raping of South Florida's environment provides the basis for conflict in many of the novels. In Hard Aground by James W. Hall, treasure hunters threaten the environment. Les Standiford's Done Deal portrays the conflict between a residential contractor and big business buying up land for a new baseball stadium. Carl Hiaasen is arguably the most environmentally exploitative Miami crime fiction writer. In Skin Tight, the last of Key Biscayne's Stiltsville, a cluster of houses built on stilts right in Biscayne Bay, plays a prominent role. Hiaasen's Native Tongue exposes the lengths both tourist attraction owners and environmentalists will go to further their causes.

The extensive natural coastline plays a role in drug trafficking. Hall's Under Cover of Daylight portrays the good guys as marijuana smugglers trying to raise enough money to prevent tourist resort expansion in favor of the natural habitat of the Upper Keys. The arrival of illegal immigrants via the coastline

provides a springboard for Elmore Leonard when he explored the effect on South Beach of the 1980 Mariel boatlift in LaBrava. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's novels are shaped by her Cuban-American background, and the proximity of Miami and the Florida Keys to Cuba figures prominently in Bloody Waters. Carl Hiaasen's novels feature bizarre crimes that center on exploitation of the natural environment for profit.

The powerful features of the South Florida landscape, found in the multitude of inland waterways, the Atlantic Ocean, the Keys and the Gulf of Mexico, find their way into almost every crime novel of the region. The Everglades offer the beauty of bird and animal life though the deer, panther and most species of birds are endangered or extinct. The landscape of South Florida is dynamic and seriously different than landscapes offered up in other regional literature of the West, the South, England and New England. Kenneth Mitchell wrote in "Landscape and Literature," that: "Geography, or "landscape," has a profound influence in shaping any society—It is my conviction that literature, like all art, is ultimately a reflection and illustration of the landscape that produced it (Mallory 23). " Since a unique landscape is an important characteristic of regional literature this difference shows that South Florida has a landscape that can support its own regional literature.

South Florida's environment plays an important role in the development of Miami crime fiction. The environment undergoes exploitation for monetary gain. In Native Tongue by Carl Hiaasen a sleazy real-estate agent called Francis X. Kingsbury is pitted against a grandmotherly Molly McNamara who is not afraid to

hire ex-cons and shoot a gun to stop Kingsbury from developing any more of the Keys. Kingsbury owns The Amazing Kingdom of Thrills. This conversation between Kingsbury and a New York hit man illustrates Kingsbury's disrespect for the environment:

Francis X. Kingsbury asked the hit man not to shoot.

"Save your breath," said Lou.

"But, look, a fantastic new world I built here. A place for little tykes, you saw for yourself—roller coasters and clowns and talking animals. Petey Possum and so forth. I did all this myself."

"What a guy," said Lou.

Kingsbury was unaccustomed to such bald sarcasm. "Maybe I make a little dough off the operation, so what? Look at all the fucking happiness I bring people!"

The hit man seemed to soften, and Kingsbury sensed an opening, "Look, I got an idea about paying back the Zubonis. It's a big construction deal, we're talking millions. They'd be nuts to pass it up—can you make a phone call? Tell 'em it's once in a lifetime.

Lou said, "Naw, I don't think so."

"Florida waterfront—that's all you gotta say. Florida fucking waterfront, and they'll be on the next plane from Newark, I promise" (393-4).

Furthermore, Kingsbury hires a legitimate biologist to care for a made-up species of rat, called a blue tongued vole, to give himself a reputation as a

conservationist. He finds a way to escape Lou, but in the end it is a passionate dolphin in *The Amazing Kingdom of Thrills* that does him in. In addition to the outright disregard that developers show the environment, there are other more subtle angles that crime fiction writers can exploit.

Careless or sinister interlopers strain the environment and thoughtful, sometimes adamant defenders champion it. In *Tropical Freeze*, James W. Hall's second Miami crime novel, Thorn, the reluctant hero, finds himself doing battle with Benny Cousins, a wise-guy who relocates from Miami to Key Largo where he sets up a smuggling business, but the merchandise is not drugs. Benny is smuggling a collection of South American drug criminals who want to establish a new life in the United States and the Key Largo coastline is the perfect place to import them. Once here, Benny disposes of them under a majestic line of Royal Palm trees he has planted, one for each of his clients.

Geographically South Florida sits on a narrow strip of land bordered by coastline and the Everglades. The coral reefs and the river of grass that cosset South Florida are fragile ecosystems but they also provide the elements of the frontier. Either can be used for escape, to dump dead bodies, to perpetrate heinous crimes, and they contain natural resources that translate into an easy buck for conscienceless villains. Even some of the bad guys in *Tropical Freeze* rally against development. For example, take this description of Papa John, proprietor of a run down bar in Key Largo:

Here he was, the original thing. A Conch, sixty-three nonstop years on the islands. Half of that he'd spent running Papa John's Bar in Key

West, the rest of it bouncing around the Keys, making some smuggling runs, pot, rum, Uzis once, always on the lookout for a place with the fishing camp feel that Key West had lost. And then fifteen years ago he'd found it in Key Largo.

Now Key Largo was losing it. The hot tubs and wooden decks, pastels had arrived. Fancy stores were festering along the highway, full of plastic geegaws you wouldn't believe. Turning shit to chic. Everybody trying to snag the tourists on their way to Key West. Now the island was full of fern bars with brass railings and speakers seven feet tall. Bars with names of tropical fruits, Mangoes, Pineapples, Papayas. And the tourists dancing the night away while some guy did his Jimmy Buffet calypso imitation. All of them thinking this is the real Key Largo. Hey, let's boogie. It bothered the fuck out of him (56-7).

The modernist dropouts, like Papa John, who came to Miami and the Keys to break the rules, nevertheless object to their postmodern counterparts like Benny Cousins, exploiting the region. At the same time the environment of South Florida is rich with rallying points for preservationists including plant and animal life, artifacts, and legend to fuel crime fiction.

In Hard Aground, by James W. Hall, it is the promise of sunken treasure that propels the plot, and that possibility exists only because of the geographic location of South Florida in the route of the old Spanish galleons. In Carl Hiaasen's Tourist Season, a reporter called Skip Wiley is fed up with the interlopers that come to Miami for a vacation and leave it worse than they found

it. The novel could only be written about a sub-tropical tourist destination accessible by car from anywhere in North America. The following is a conversation that the slanted hero, Wiley, has with Brian Keyes, a private investigator. It is included to show how zealously some residents will protect their soiled paradise:

“So the question,” he went on, “is how to scare away the tourists.”

“Murder a few,” Keyes said.

“For starters.”

“No!” Wiley shot to his feet, uprooting the beach umbrella with his head. “There...is...no...other...way! Think about it, you mullusk-brained [sic] moron! What gets headlines? Murder, mayhem, and madness—the cardinal M’s of the newsroom. That’s what terrifies the travel agents of the world. That’s what rates congressional hearings and crime commissions. And that’s what frightens off bozo Shriner conventions. It’s a damn shame, I grant you that. It’s a shame I simply couldn’t stand up at the next county commission meeting and ask our noble public servants to please stop destroying the planet. It’s a shame that the people who poisoned this paradise won’t just apologize and pack their U-Hauls and head back North to the smog and the blizzards. But it’s a proven fact they won’t leave until somebody lights a fire under ‘em. That’s what *Las Noches de Diciembre*⁹ is all about. ‘Cops Seek Grisly Suitcase Killer’... ‘Elderly Woman Abducted, Fed to Vicious Reptile’... ‘Golf Course Bomb Claims Three on Tricky Twelfth Hole’... ‘Crazed Terrorists Stalk Florida Tourists.’” Wiley was

practically chanting the headlines, as if he were watching them roll off the presses at the New York Post.

“Sure, it’s cold-blooded,” he said, “but that’s the game of journalism for you. It’s the only game I know, but I know how to win” (166-7).

Wiley’s tirade brings up several characteristics present in Miami crime fiction in addition to the environmental issue. He alludes to political corruption, the role of transportation in shaping the region, the weather, and the very headlines that tend to shape the sub-genre.

Ethnic and Cultural History

As we will see the pliability of Miami’s history lends a creativity and flexibility to individual histories. This is one of the most attractive features of Miami as backdrop to the crime fiction written in and about the region, and it is worth taking some time to review the immigration history that has shaped the city even more than Henry Flagler’s railroad. Miami remains a dream land to residents, visitors and immigrants. More immigrants come and stay than in any other city in the United States because in Miami they can remake themselves. There is a long immigrant history of rags to riches stories. Even if they do not strike it rich, they can certainly live comfortably here among the many other immigrants.

Miami can boast only a short historical past, stretching back a little more than one hundred years, and this circumstance provides both the fertile ground and the transience, the almost liquid foundation, on which to grow a regional

literature. There is a lack of consensus among the disparate cultural entities including Anglo, American Black, Hispanic and Caribbean Black people, that ferments lawlessness most often equated with the frontier.

Though lacking temporal depth Miami's history is rich in plot seeds for the crime fiction novel. Today's Miami crime fiction writers acknowledge John D. MacDonald as the grandfather of the current genre. His novels used a plot device of contrasting the natural beauty of South Florida against exploitative criminal activity, and that element continues to appear in current Miami crime fiction. Additionally, Hemingway documented the free flow of interaction between Floridians and Cubans in his Key West and Cuban stories, perhaps establishing a nascent regionalism in the relationship between the populations of Cuba and South Florida. Before there was a Miami, in the late 1800s there was a well established Key West, that served as the thriving center of Caribbean trade. "The common history of the island and the peninsula under Spanish rule constituted the backdrop against which the events of the 1970s and 1980s were to unfold" (Portes 90). Jose Marti, the Cuban revolutionary established his headquarters in 1890 in Key West and raised money from exiled Cubans there and in Tampa and Jacksonville to launch attacks on the Spanish colonials that controlled Cuba (Portes 89). South Florida has never been a stranger to Cuban's or their political intrigues. What was to change drastically with the waves of Cuban exiles, culminating in the 1980 Mariel boatlift, was the political and economic power structure of the region. Political payola policies, ever present in South Florida's history, were to reach new heights of organization

predicated upon political practices in Cuba and coinciding with the explosion of the drug trade.

The Ethnic Question

I asked all of the authors about the way they characterized their protagonists and antagonists in terms of the ethnicities that they assigned to each. It seemed that there might be a tendency to have the heroes represent the American Anglo as the hegemonic culture that was being encroached upon by a collection of Hispanic, Caribbean Black, American Black, and corrupt red-neck groups. I broached the subject with Jim Hall by asking him what he thought about Thomas Pynchon's ¹⁰ notions about the need for immigrant energy to invigorate the culture and economy of a region. He said:

That's a very basic idea. I think it probably hides a very ugly reality, which is that we need immigrants to do the slave labor in the democratic—in a capitalistic society, that others have bored with doing or think they're too good to do anymore. And, that's the way we have traditionally used immigrants. That's one of the frustrations Anglos have about Cubans in Miami. One of the frustrations Anglos have about Cubans in Miami is that Cubans came to Miami, and didn't want to stay in the service jobs and in the lowest economic echelon.

Hall goes on to say that in American history it typically took two or three generations for immigrants to become educated and climb the social and economic ladders to success. He said, "So, there's a certain tension that's come in Miami, because

immigrants don't play by the same rules, supposedly, that immigrants have elsewhere." That echoes one of the Miami Tourist Board's slogans, "The rules are different here," emblazoned across a model's wet tee shirt. In 1998 there no longer is an overwhelming Anglo power base in the city. Both the city and county governments are dominated by Cuban immigrants that have catapulted up the ladder, proving that the rules really are different here. That doesn't mean that we have a conspiracy of crime fiction writers portraying Hispanic and Black figures in a bad light to satisfy the biases of an Anglo readership.

A Regional Literature

There are not too many anthologies of regional literature published anymore. The Information Age that has made the world a smaller place has also made it harder for regional writers to be identified. In North, East South, West; A Regional Anthology of American Writing, Charles Lee acknowledges that there may be some disputes about the regions assigned to some of the authors (2). There will be no such confusion about Miami crime fiction. Regional literature has been classified together with much less cultural glue that we can find in South Florida. For instance, Edwin Seaver considers the Middle Atlantic states a region because it is the "dominant financial and manufacturing center of the country, and the old tradition of the land was swamped by the new tradition of money" (Lee 132). Seaver goes on to explain that New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland have "less of the genius of place in its literature," than anywhere else. That is certainly a reversal of the way Southern regional literature is described.

William Faulkner personifies regional writing. His novels are selected time and again to explain the characteristics of Southern literature. Julius Rowan Raper, a scholar of Southern regional literature writing for the Southern Literary Journal, explains that traditional ties to place have a strong hold in the South and are therefore reflected in Faulkner's work. Raper suggests that in Southern Fiction the writer's and therefore the character's sense of place can be destructive in two ways. He refers to Walter Hines Page's South "as the abode of ghosts and mummies," and "Faulkner's Mississippi as a barracks of ghosts." Raper's position is that there is consensus among Southerners "that loyalty to the place and its people is required." His point is that even though the place may be destructive, yet it demands loyalty "creates the impossible double bind, the stone paralysis, traditionally called the Hamlet problem, that becomes for modern Southerners the 'Quentin problem'." He goes on to explain:

As Faulkner tells us, Quentin's spirit can never leave Jefferson, no matter to what New England college his body travels. Quentin drowns in his past, the fine dead sound of all his fathers' voices, as surely as he drowns in the Charles River. Loyalty to place is a double-edged sword, all blade, without a hilt to hold, as sure to wound the wielder as anyone. Yet fidelity to description of place remains a mainstay of Modern Southern Fiction—long after setting has begun to play a very different part in postmodern writing. (6)

So, Raper says that even though both the writers and the inhabitants of Southern literature realize that their loyalty to the region's history can be destructive, that is a part of regionalism and it continues there today. If we are to accept that Miami

supports a regional literature of its own, then we have to adopt an opposing viewpoint to Raper's. Miami's crime fiction relies on a lack of loyalty to place since the majority of the inhabitants come from somewhere else. Miami's story is an overlap of diverse and contradictory discourses (Portes xiii).

Vicki Hendricks, author of Miami Purity, identifies the lack of consensus in South Florida in terms of dining out:

Yes, that's what Miami is, just a variety of every kind of people and getting more so all the time. That silly thing about "the rules are different here," well I think that's really true. We just have a million different rules.

Everybody has their own rules from wherever they came.

She compares one aspect of Miami to the more homogenous culture of the Midwest, going to a restaurant:

One thing I notice when I go to other places, actually two things. First of all when you go into restaurants the people that serve you all speak English and can understand your questions and things like that which really bothers me. After a couple of days in some city in the mid-west ... I just feel like something's missing and I think you just get cut off from the rest of the world. I never felt cut off when I lived in Cincinnati but somebody with an accent in the same restaurant, everybody would be amazed... The variety of language and everything you learn not even noticing that you're learning it is to me one of the best things about Miami and that whole area.

Hendricks also made an interesting observation about the difference in clothing in South Florida compared to the rest of the United States, with the exception of

Southern California. As we shall see in the next paragraph she is not alone in commenting on this characteristic of regional life:

Also, another thing I'm noticing is that the clothing is so much different. I'm sure this is true of places like California ... My mother now lives in Colorado. Whenever I go out there I never have any clothes that I can wear in the summer. Everything is too short, too tight, too...you know. She'll point out women in the grocery store and say, "Look at that dress," and I'll think, "Yeah, I have a couple of those at home. What about it?"

Vicki makes the point that inhabitants of Miami become used to a variety of people, languages, and "the freedom to walk around with almost no clothing," and when they travel to the more homogenous Mid-West, or to colder climes they," find out the rest of the world isn't like that." Parts of Florida have historically been set apart from other areas of the United States.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, recognized as a chronicler of New England life, took the time to write six sketches about Post-War¹¹ Florida. She describes a region radically different from her home in New England and offers advice to settlers to recognize the need for a change in diet and clothing to avoid succumbing to the fevers there. Her sketches comprise the last forty pages or so of the posthumous collection, Regional Sketches, while the preceding two hundred are concerned with New England. For Stowe, the long journey south ended in the Jacksonville, St. Augustine area for in the late 1800's neither Miami nor Palm Beach were considered tourist destinations. The relatively late development of South Florida in itself contributes to the difference of this region from any other, including Beecher

Stowe's North Florida memoirs. If living or vacationing in northern Florida provoked writing about the striking difference compared to the Northeast for Beecher Stowe, certainly it is safe to say that the characteristics of South Florida are singular indeed. Raper's assertion that loyalty and a strong sense of history comprise the primary qualities of regional literature can be viewed in sharp contrast to the situation in South Florida with its short history and development as a tourist resort, a transient destination.

It becomes very clear that we are witnessing a different kind of regional literature in South Florida, where we are hard pressed to find ties to the land. South Floridians have a very different view of their history and loyalties. People in Miami feel free to reinvent themselves and this attitude definitely seeps into the crime fiction of the region. Vicki Hendricks observed, "It's a group of people that maybe didn't have any firm roots in the first place so therefore they could all just pick up and leave. The weather was enough to bring them here. That's what brought me here. Maybe they have some sense of freedom that other people don't have." Various authors discussed the profound effect the natural environment, including the weather, had on the Miami crime fiction form. They are in line with Cawelti, who attributes an important role to sex (as well as violence) in the formulaic structure of crime fiction because it stirs primal feelings (15).

Barbara Parker, also conscious of how the heat affects the way people dress and feel in Miami, said, "This is a very sexy place because of the weather for one thing. We just can't wear a lot of clothes. The outdoors are so seductive

with the soft breezes and the warm sunshine. When you look outside you see the beaches and the beautiful people, their tanned bodies and so forth is very primal here as well.” James W. Hall said that South Florida has changed him, that the region modifies the people that live here. In a discussion that seeks to analyze if South Florida is a distinct region, Hall’s statement carries weight. Ken Mitchell, a novelist, playwright and teacher, has written that literatures are markedly divergent because of environmental differences (Mallory xii). As mentioned early, Mitchell said that literature is finally a reflection and representation of the area that produced it (23). It is worth repeating here, in relation to the following quote because Hall’s experience is that South Florida’s natural environment has sincerely shaped him as a writer, which seems to add fuel to the affirmation that South Florida is in fact a literary region. He said:

In Hard Aground, for instance, one of the things that I was doing there with sex was that Hap was having all these sexual connections with people, looking for something more, but not looking in the right way, and not being prepared himself to know it when it came along. So, that’s really the way that book starts, is that he is like the kind of Spring-break coupling that you associate with Florida, to serve anonymous “slam-bam, thank you, ma’am” contact between people that seems not just Florida, but it is part of that transient culture. And, Hap is a real representative of that type of person. When he gets connected with someone who is rooted, as he is, in this place and this time, the relationship is more meaningful. It’s difficult, but it’s more meaningful than all these other relations he had. So, yeah, I see it as all

connected. I see him trying to write about the place-- See, I believe, in my case--I don't know if this is true with everybody--that this place, living in this place, has modified me as a human being in lots of serious ways. And, I believe that's true--I want to make that true also, for the characters in my stories. The place has a very profound impact upon them, shaping who they are.

Coupled with the heat and sexy atmosphere of the region is the ever-present threat of violent hurricane winds and rains that can potentially demolish everything built here.

This concern with a shifting or non-existent foundation, because of Miami's short history, transient population, and unpredictable climate comes up again and again in the interviews and the research. Carolina Garcia- Aguilera said, "It is a land of refugees and everyone makes up their pasts. By refugee I mean that they had a reason to leave something behind, so people are always reinventing themselves when they get here. It makes it harder to check on people's backgrounds." Garcia-Aguilera related the following story that illustrates the truth in her observation and also the flaw with it, especially in the Cuban community.

I grew up in New York and I was in my last year of high school or first year of college. I was at a party and an attractive man was introduced to me. The people at the party were told that his family had a large sugar plantation in Cuba implying he was from an upper class family. When

most of the people had left the party he came up to me and thanked me. I knew him as the son of the lifeguard at the pool in Cuba. He thanked me for not giving away his lie. He was very good looking. I had no reason to say anything. People come to Miami and make up their pasts all the time. Garcia-Aguilera describes the peculiar habit of Miamians to reinvent themselves because they believe they can get away with it. She also shows through her anecdote, that one cannot count on leaving the past behind, and that conflict becomes the basis for many Miami crime fiction plots. For example, In Bloody Shame, Garcia-Aguilera writes about the secret intrigues of the Arango family and how Lupe Solano uncovers them, much to the surprise of the senior Arango, who allowed his lawyer to hire her in the first place.

Miami crime fiction storytelling satisfies the human desire to construct control and familiarity where none exists, because of its formulaic outline. Cawelti explains that there is a relationship between the writer and their audience particular to formula literature, such as crime fiction, that establishes a common ground that is crucial to artistic communication. Cawelti writes that, "Audiences find satisfaction and a basic emotional security in a familiar form; in addition, the audience's past experience with a formula gives it a sense of what to expect in new individual examples, thereby increasing its capacity for understanding and enjoying the details of a work" (9). Fredric Jameson explains these desires in terms of nostalgic feelings, even in books and film set in present time, is a result of our own inability "to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience" (117). Certainly South

Florida provides one of the most complex and puzzling montages of cultural life available in the United States which translates into a rich environment for the production of this kind of fiction. Mitchell Kaplan¹², the owner of several prestigious book stores in Miami explains why Miami became such a seductive backdrop:

If you remember what was happening in Miami in the Mid-Eighties, turmoil in Central and South America, you had the Nicaraguan situation, El Salvador, Miami was just a roiling...Mariel happened, Art Deco was being rediscovered. It was this bubbling pot of all different things going on. It was atmospheric in that a lot of writers who were journalists were based here covering Central America, the Caribbean and South America. Given the tenor of what Miami had become at that point of time the form of the mystery genre seemed to be a perfect vehicle to capture the color of what was happening in Miami. The genre has grown. You have Carl Hiaasen taking the kind of absurdist view of Miami and sometimes he's not even making it up...Nothing written about Miami is as outlandish as the kind of things that go on. So you have Carl working in that vein. You have Jim Hall taking kind of an historical view of things, exploring different areas. Paul Levine can fit into that realm, even Les [Standiford].

There is wealth here in every sense, monetarily, culturally, educationally and all these aspects play a role in the Miami crime novel. Remember the opening of Miami Vice with the multiple shots of Miami's multi-national banks on Brickell Avenue, depicting a glitzy and successful economy. Florida International University has celebrated its twenty-fifth year and boasts one of the best creative writing

departments in the country. Money, education...extravagant examples of consumer society exist at Bal Harbour Shops, Dadeland, The Falls with more shopping palaces opening all the time; the malls are the new city centers where a multi-ethnic society can get together in the pursuit and appreciation of goods. Fredric Jameson wrote, " we were unable today to focus our own present, as though we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience....a symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (117). He essentially attributes this deficiency to consumer-capitalism but he also uses it to explain why postmodern society is so nostalgic. Gorgeous mansions abound on Miami Beach, Star Island, Palm Island, Cocoplum, Pinecrest, filled with a variety of people, from American and Latin American singers and movie stars, to drug dealers, entrepreneurs, fashion designers, from all over the globe.

International intrigue abounds with the Cuban exile community as its centerpiece. There alone notions of nostalgia are ripe for exploitation. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera said, "You can try to leave your past behind but different echelons of Cubans know each other so the past will always catch up to them." Her heroine, Lupe Solano, has a Cuban father that keeps his yacht gassed and ready to return to Cuba the day Castro falls from power. In Miami the clash between cultures for dominance coupled with the necessity and even the enjoyment of incorporating multicultural values on customs leads to an ideal setting for the crime fiction novel. Les Standiford explains why his hero stands out in Miami, yet has a familiarity to most U.S. readers: "Deal--as an Anglo, Deal

is Mr. Middle America, and Mr. and Mrs. Middle America is forced to comprehend a way of seeing the world that he never has before." Standiford shares a viewpoint that goes far beyond South Florida in his writing:

...that's me trying to say that this isn't just South Florida. This is the world. This is America as a whole. You know, we talk about entering the global village. Well, let's talk about what that means. That means being ready to give up some of your own cherished values to understand other people. This is going to be a two-way street. And, I feel very passionately about this. And, it's pretty much the way I depict right-wing politics in Miami. There are Anglos who [say], "How dare these people come in here and try to take our country away from us." Well, they just want theirs the way the robber barons of the '20's wanted theirs--all those WASPS, when they came down and ripped off the environment of Florida. There's no difference here.

South Florida crime fiction writers are indeed struggling to deal with time and history. It may be tempting to hypothesize that their struggle is more concerned with the aesthetics of the form than with trying to campaign to solve the ills that plague our corrupt paradise, but as we heard from Standiford above, many of them are morally and emotionally invested in their work. Mitchell Kaplan, from Books & Books agrees on the whole. He said:

I think part of the aesthetic is good versus evil in a sense. For instance, Carl [Hiaasen], who's whole thing I really admire. But some people read his stuff and they say, "God, he's not really concerned." I

don't think he comes at it because he's doing something for an aesthetic. I think he's doing it because that's what he's feeling. The same with Les (Standiford), Jim [Hall] as well. I think the aesthetic informs the good versus evil. I don't think that they want to write wholesomely. I think part of the aesthetic demands a certain amount of outrageousness.

To really understand why Miami crime fiction jumped from a blip on the literary time-line to something worthy of more attention, we must begin in 1980. This point in time is acknowledged by writers, sociologists and historians as a crucial demarcation, as we shall see in the next section.

1980 - Beginning a new history for Miami

In 1980 several events combined to mark a significant change in the status quo and provide a worldwide appetite for Miami crime fiction. Racial tensions came to a boil signally to the world that there was “trouble in paradise”. We saw an explosion in the drug trade in the United States, with Miami marked as the port of entry for marijuana and cocaine from South America. A television show called Miami Vice reinvented Miami as a player’s town, sexy, dangerous, and chic. As we shall see, once this audience was established the immigrant history and geography of Miami would provide inspiration for a number of authors.

Micro-regions nourish the disparity so attractive to the crime fiction writers of the area. Caribbean and Latin American immigrants share in the view that Miami is rich with economic opportunities both legal and illegal. These local

attitudes further the notion that crime fiction is the regional literature of South Florida because it reflects the cultural disposition--seize opportunity regardless of legal or moral mores--that is so prevalent in this area. Compared to the lands they have come from, Miami, more than anywhere else in the United States, is also a comfortable refuge. The micro-regions in Dade County allow residents to live a lifetime speaking and hearing only Spanish dialects or Haitian patois.

There are many civic groups that recreate the community immigrants have left behind whether they are from Oriente in Cuba or from Caracas or Bogota or a hundred other cities and villages to the south. The Latin Chamber of Commerce listed 678 organizations in 1971 and in 1972 the number topped 1000 (Croucher 35). Fredric Jameson's definition of nostalgia for something that does not now, and in fact never, existed is a characteristic of a postmodern society that easily fits the situation we find in South Florida¹³. Immigrants create community far from their homelands that reflect what they long for, but what they are nostalgic for, especially in the case of Cuban immigrants, is not available in Havana and hasn't been since perhaps 1959, if it ever was at all.

Cuban culture and immigration practices catapulted Miami into the spotlight in 1980 as the crime capital of the United States. At the same time Miami Vice developed an image of Miami, especially South Beach, that would shape the cityscape for the next two decades at least. These events, a television show and the Mariel boatlift that precipitated a crime spree, working together drew or invented a new breed of crime fiction writer to follow John D. Macdonald's cozy detective stories. Any discussion of Miami's ability to support

a regional literature must include an understanding of not only the Mariel boat lift, but the twenty years of Cuban immigration that laid the groundwork for what would happen in 1980. This year marks the turning point for Miami crime fiction, the city and the perception of it the rest of the world would form.

The first wave of Cubans came with their wealth intact, unlike most Black, and other Latin American immigrants. Anticipating the turmoil, many of the Cuban elite had transferred their wealth—and in some cases themselves and their families—to Miami before the revolution began. They were soon followed by a trickle of disgruntled Cuban compatriots who became disenchanted with the new government in Cuba. By 1965 that trickle had become a steady flow as thousands of Cubans were airlifted from the island and flown to Miami aboard "freedom flights" twice daily (Croucher 32-3). While continuing to experience a sharp nostalgia for a Havana that no longer exists, Cuban society has maintained their own culture without dilution or effective attack from other ethnic groups.

There was no organized resistance to Cuban immigration until the Mariel boatlift because it was only with this influx of 100,000 people that Miami was inundated with the lowest elements of Cuban society. Fidel Castro took the opportunity of the Mariel boatlift to empty his jails, and psycho wards. He said in his 1980 May Day speech, "Those that are leaving from Mariel are the scum of the country—antisocials, homosexuals, drug addicts and gamblers, who are welcome to leave Cuba if any country will have them" (Portes 21). The dictator used murderers, rapists, the psychotic and homosexual populations of the island as weapons against his enemies in South Florida. Alejandro Portes and Alex

Stepick emphasize the unusual immigration procedure in City on the Edge reporting that, “Mariel was a unique episode in American immigration history. Instead of immigrants coming on their own, they were actually brought into the country, not by government agencies, but in boats chartered by earlier immigrants. Mariel was high drama in the Straits of Florida...” (21). These characterizations of a major immigration event in Miami provided direct plot inspiration to Elmore Leonard for La Brava and for Carolina Garcia-Aguilera in Bloody Waters. The misfits and miscreants have integrated into South Florida’s civic and literary life, providing the archetype of the Miami criminal in our local literature. At the same time that Cuban immigrants were gaining a stronghold on Miami’s economic and cultural landscape, American Blacks were only beginning to gain access to the public and university school system.

The tension between these American Blacks and other ethnic groups exacerbated by close geographic proximity¹⁴ is a recurring factor in Miami crime fiction. You can see in this first hand description of the drama that plays out between Blacks and Cubans by Joan Didion, why crime fiction writers might find Miami as a backdrop to be irresistible:

There are between the street and the lobby levels of the Omni International Hotel on Biscayne Boulevard, one block east of the hundred-block area sealed off by police during the 1982 Overtown Riot, two levels of shops and movie theaters and carnival attractions: a mall, so designed that the teenagers, most of them Black and most of them male, who hang out around the carousel in the evenings, waiting for a movie to break or for

a turn at the Space Walk or at the sea of balls or just for something to happen, can look up to the Omni ballroom and lobby levels, but only with some ingenuity reach them, since a steel grille blocks the floating stairway after dark and armed security men patrol the elevator areas. The visible presence of this more or less forbidden upstairs lends the mall in the evening an unspecific atmosphere of incipient trouble, an uneasiness which has its equivalent in the hotel itself, where the insistent and rather sinister music from the carousel downstairs comes to suggest, particularly on those weekend nights when the mall is at its loosest and the hotel often given over to one or another of the lavish *quinces*¹⁵ or charity galas which fill the local Cuban calendar, a violent night world just underfoot, and perhaps not underfoot for long (Miami 46-7).

It is not by chance that 1980 marked a violent upheaval in Miami's Black communities. In 1959, while United States anticommunist sentiments supported congress in establishing liberal immigration policies for Cuban exiles, there were few social or political programs to advance the standing of American Blacks. For example, from 1968 through 1980 46 percent of SBA Dade County loans went to Hispanic recipients while only 6 percent went to Black firms (Portes 46). Inevitably this situation created a clash between Blacks and Cubans that would fuel the Miami crime fiction genre and the poor economic climate for Blacks has created a criminal drug culture along with geographic pockets of dangerous Black neighborhoods in Miami. American Blacks were pitted against Hispanic immigrants for years. David Rieff writes in Going to Miami:

The public schools were integrated in 1959. In 1961, the first Black students were admitted to the University of Miami. But just as Black people were slowly and painfully achieving some measure of enfranchisement in the City of Miami, the Cuban refugees began to arrive in large numbers. As early as 1966, Martin Luther King came to Miami and recognized the hostility that had arisen between the two groups over jobs. (171)

The frustration of the Black community erupting in 1980 with violent and fiery riots that would make the national news all across the U.S. and abroad. The press that resulted in these race riots would ultimately be reflected in the literature of the region.

Contents Under Pressure, a novel by Edna Buchanan features a plot that culminates during a riot in downtown Miami. She writes:

The holiday season was not especially jolly. Miamians were jittery, the multi-ethnic community seethed, more tense and divided than [sic] ever (227)...The streets were growing more intense. I could feel it as I made my daily rounds, and saw it in the graffiti on the walls of Overtown and Liberty City. (228) [Describing a riot that broke out because some White and Hispanic police officers were acquitted of killing a Black man] It was too late to stop it--the juggernaut was rolling over our city. I could hear it on the radios of the cops assigned to the perimeter. Sections of expressway that cut through Black neighborhoods had been shut down as unsafe for motorists. (269)

Barbara Parker mentioned Edna Buchanan in explaining why her own novels do not feature Miami's Black community; "to miss the Black portion of Miami is to miss the point too; however, I would say that probably except for Edna Buchanan we all miss the Black part of this area. It is again because we are all White middle class, educated and I would bet you that none of us have any extensive experience with the Black community so we ignore the Black community just as this community ignores the Black community." Nevertheless, Parker does include some significant reference to Blacks in her novels, for example, one of the main characters in the Suspicion series. Parker said:

I had a Black woman tell me she really liked my character, Anthony Quintana, because he wasn't just your pretty boy, blond, blue eyed hero. He's part Black and she picked up on it. Well, you'd have to go back to Suspicion of Guilt where I mention it briefly. His father's people are ex-slaves. It's not something I play up in the book but I love to play with ethnic differences.

American Blacks lacked the educational and financial means to protest against the Cubans who were swooping in and securing many of the service jobs that had traditionally been theirs (Portes 39). This set up a scenario ripe for both resentment and indifference between the American Blacks in Miami and the Cuban population, as Parker noted in the previous paragraph. In order to understand the dynamics, a little more Miami Black history is needed.

Joan Didion made the following observations about the segregation of the Black and White population through the 1950's that created tremendous

tensions. While Blacks from the Carolinas and the Bahamas started as equal in numbers and political clout when Miami was incorporated in 1896¹⁶, that status did little to help them in the middle of the twentieth century:

Miami Blacks did not swim at Dade County beaches. When Miami Blacks paid taxes at the Dade County Courthouse they did so at a separate window, and when Miami Blacks shopped at Burdines, where they were allowed to buy although not to try on clothes, they did so without using the elevators¹⁷. (Croucher 28)

Didion's historical perspective spills over into the pages of Miami crime fiction in both sympathetic and purely evil characters. James W. Hall, like all the authors, sees himself as employing all the races in his crime fiction. He said:

There were so many bad guys in Hard Aground. There was Alvarez, who is Hispanic. There was Hollings, who is a redneck. There's Martinez, who is Black. It's like the whole social range. The whole ethnic range in Miami is there in that one. And then, Martina [a Black] was male and female, too. So, you have a guy who's also a woman, you know.

There is a sharp division among South Florida Blacks as to the success they enjoy within the economic climate of the area. The Jim Crow laws that permeated the South were also the rule in South Florida as late as the 1950's. This was a boom time for tourism and construction. The Black residents of Overtown enjoyed the benefits of the tourist boom along with everyone else. A. E. Chapman, an historian of South Florida wrote, "As the decade wore on, however, it became increasingly clear that in addition to sun, surf, and tourists,

Miami was home to a sizable population of Blacks, who were frustrated at not being afforded the same opportunity as their white counterparts to reap the benefits of the Magic City" (Croucher 28). Additionally, Miami differed from other large metropolitan areas that were coping with issues of integration and economic growth because of its youth.

It is at this pivotal historical moment in 1980 that the explosion of Miami crime fiction began. "The once "Magic City" became better known nationally and internationally as "Paradise Lost" (Croucher 41). In 1980 after the riot¹⁸ residents and civic leaders were mourning the tarnished image of South Florida. At the same time the unique mix of people, cultures, class hierarchy, natural and man-made environmental and geographic attributes had attracted the attention of Hollywood and a new breed of crime fiction writers. According to T.D. Allman,

In 1980, Miami's image changed, and not for the better when it was struck by a triple disaster that might have crippled a less resilient place. First, Liberty City and many of its other Black neighborhoods exploded into some of the most frenzied civil disorder ever seen in this country. Then Miami fell prey to a veritable foreign invasion as more than 100,000 people fleeing Castro's Cuba poured into the city. Finally, scores of Haitian boat people drowned in its waters off South Florida, and in full view of visiting tourists, their bodies washed ashore on the beaches (qtd. In Croucher 41).

Allman's account does not even get into the enormous drug trade that was fueling the economy and the escalating violence in the area. These were the

sparks that ignited the production and the interest in Miami crime fiction, beginning with Miami Vice . The media spotlight was turned on South Florida's diverse population because it serves as a microcosm of American society as a whole. The problems and benefits of a culturally diverse population can be studied first in Miami, but the trend toward a more and more heterogeneous population is expected to spread throughout the United States during the 21st century.

Drug Economics

Air transportation plays a significant role in setting the boundaries of Miami and consequently the wide range of possible venues available to Miami crime fiction writers. The geographic location of South Florida's airports provides a permanent bridge for immigrants to their homelands, illustrating how flexible community and culture are here. Many residents keep familiar connections alive, in some cases forming the basis for economic opportunities both legal and illegal. This idea finds its way into the literature. James W. Hall, in describing the process of making a sail board in Hard Aground, incorporates the typically blasé attitude that Miamians have toward smuggling and guns:

He set the hot-knife down on the tool bench and opened the oak cabinet, took down his wood-burning set. He plugged the thing in a wall socket, waited a few seconds, then bent over the board and began digging deep gashes, from tail to nose, six parallel grooves two inches wide, an inch deep, that later he would fill with strips of ceramic, carbon and Kevlar. He bought them from a gun manufacturer up in Hialeah. Some guy who'd

invented an all-plastic pistol for beating airport X rays. Guns, next to sunburns, being Miami's major export (14).

Les Standiford mentions the suspicion that Castro is protecting a drug connection between Cuba and Miami in Raw Deal. The subject is mentioned casually in a dialog between John Deal, the hero, with his friend Driscoll, a retired Miami police officer. Their primary concern is identifying a shooter and the gun that was used in a killing:

"Yeah?" Driscoll said, surprised. He turned to Deal. "It's a Kalashnikov. A rare one, a pistol they used to issue to Russian army officers. We had a hell of a time getting a make on it."

"The Russians mothballed them years ago," Osvaldo said. "Later a few of them turned up in Angola and then Cuba, part of the military aid package. Only time I saw it used around here was the case I mentioned."

"Guy ran a restaurant down in South Miami," Driscoll said by way of explanation. "A place he used to launder his drug money. Everybody figured it was just another drug deal gone bad until they found out what kind of gun was used. The Feds've been harping on it ever since. They're using it as part of the drug thing they're trying to pin on Castro" (320-1).

Drug money is credited with shaping Miami's skyline and legitimized illegal operations. In the 1980's Chase Manhattan and Citicorp opened branches in Miami as did over fifty foreign banks (Croucher 42). The influx of money gave rise to the whimsical architecture¹⁹ that houses the many splendid bank and

apartment buildings that sprung up on Brickell Avenue during this time, the same buildings that were featured prominently in the Miami Vice movies and television shows. David Rieff wrote:

The banks, happily turning a blind eye, made a fortune accepting drug money deposits. Soon the city was the point of arrival for most of the marijuana and cocaine, coming into the United States from the South. It would have taken Pat Nixon not to notice. Everybody—the bankers, the merchants, the salesmen, down to the greenest bellhop straight off the boat from Nicaragua—was living off this cash. Everyone, as the heroin addicts say, was getting well. Even Anglo housewives from West Kendall were making \$200,000 a year as realtors (28).

The banking industry helped create a criminal class that profoundly influenced economic growth and politics, both of which are clearly reflected in the literature that began coming from the region in 1980, crime fiction. The following section, “Miami Vice,” examines the inextricable ties between the region and its texts in more detail. International trade and finance attracted many new businesses to the area²⁰. Drug dealers financed their own banks in the free for all enabled by billions of dollars in illicit trade.

Miami Vice

Miami Vice, The Movie²¹, has its opening scene in New York City, where a Black plain clothes policeman, later identified as Ricardo Tubbs, is tracking a Colombian drug lord who killed his brother²². It is significant that a Black cop from out of town started the series that changed Miami. He questions the honesty of

the police here because he believes that only corruption could have enabled the explosion in the drug trade in Miami. Featuring Tubbs' story in the opening of Miami Vice might signify to the audience that they will be entering Miami through the eyes of an outsider. Contrast Tubbs' character with Sonny Crockett who is a Florida native. He played football for the University of Florida Gators and would have gone pro if the Vietnam war didn't derail his chances. Tubbs and Crockett together gave the Miami Vice audience an ideal mix of the standard Anglo male hero coupled with the exotic stranger who could masquerade as an American Black, a Hispanic, or a Caribbean Black.

This show influenced popular culture in the 1980's on a variety of fronts. It created new fashion trends through the characters of Tubbs and especially Sonny Crockett, trends that are still with us today. Socks were out. White suits with pastel colored tee shirts were in. Sonny's wardrobe reflected the cyan and pink logo of Miami Vice. There were razors invented that would leave a two day growth of beard on a man's face. The opening of Miami Vice showcased South Florida every week beginning with a shot of majestic Royal Palm trees against a blue sky and continuing through a list of scenes that have become Miami icons such as the waterways, beaches, expensive cars (Rolls Royce, Lamborghini, Ferrari), girls in bikinis, gambling via horse racing, Greyhounds, Jai-Alai, mirrored highrise banks, colorful condominiums hanging over Biscayne Bay, sailboats, sunsets, parrots and flamingos. Much of the South Beach scenery featured on Miami Vice was created at first for the television show and only later did real tourists flock to the area. The nightclubs and renovated art deco hotels that are in business today are in large part

inspired by Miami Vice's producers and director. Miami Vice reinvented South Florida and introduced a new kind of hero to us. Caroline, Sonny Crockett's ex-wife said, "You and your vice cop buddies are just the flip side of the coin from these dealers you're always masquerading around with. You're all players Sonny. You get high on the action." We had seen undercover cops, like Serpico, get involved in the underworld, but never had undercover cops lived like multimillionaire drug dealers. This show brought the glamour of being a player to television and to the collective consciousness of Miami, the nation and the world. No wonder Jim Hall and Les Standiford look at Miami's history from before and after Miami Vice.

Behind the glamour was the action upon which the show was predicated. There was always an excuse for a car chase or a Cigarette boat chase through the canals, bridges and coastal waters that surround Miami. These episodes differentiated Miami from any other place in the country. You do not have smuggling in Kansas. Furthermore, the ever present music orchestrated by Jan Hammer and supplemented by Glen Fry and Phil Collins, both of whom appeared in acting roles on the show, gave Miami its own soundtrack. And there was always the danger associated with institutional power gone bad. Sonny Crockett told his boss, "Three quarters of the dealers turn out to be cops. You know my badge says Miami, Lou²³, but lately it's looking a lot like Disneyworld." Tubbs also commented on the lack of security in the police department. "No offense, but when it comes to security leaks this place isn't exactly Pentagon South ²⁴." Whether by coincidence or a design inspired by Miami Vice, in the summer of 1985 the Miami River cops, a corrupt band of Hispanic City of Miami policemen, "prowled the waters of the Miami

River, searching for white powder treasure galleons (Mancini). This passage from the non-fiction account called Pirates in Blue helps sum up the condition of Miami when the Miami Vice television series was filming here:

He ²⁵ had been at war with undesirables like this man since Fidel Castro had used the 1980 Mariel boatlift to dump the so-called "Marielitos" from the homosexual wards, prisons and mental hospitals of Cuba onto the streets of Miami. The man had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Too bad. It was a tough time for everyone in Miami

By 1981, the city's crime rate had quadrupled. By 1985, a drug war between the Miami Police Department and the Marielitos had erupted along the banks of the Miami River in Little Havana...One third of all Miami murders were now being committed by Mariel refugees, and the number of robberies in the city had more than doubled (Mancini 2).

It is easy to see where antagonists like Elmore Leonard's Cundo Rey came from. Along with the rise in crime came a concerted effort to hire more police and get them on the street but many of those newly charged with enforcing the law were in the jobs to make breaking the law easier. The drug trade definitely encouraged the frontier aspects of Miami. Citizens felt compelled to buy firearms for their own protection and everyone wanted to either be part of the game or damn the immigrants who had disrupted their sleepy little paradise.

Miami Crime Fiction – A Genre, A Regional Literature, or Both?

The discussion thus far has been concerned with defining the regional characteristics of Miami as they support the development of crime fiction as the most prominent literature in the area. In order to further the research into the question of whether Miami has a regional literature, and if it is of the crime fiction genre two more steps presented themselves. One was to find out what the definition of the crime fiction genre was. The other step was to interview the authors themselves to find out how they perceived their development of a body of work in and about Miami. Fortunately most of the authors were generous with their time and gregarious in discussing their craft.

I was able to interview several of Miami's crime fiction writers including Les Standiford, James Hall, Paul Levine, Elmore Leonard, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, Barbara Parker and Vicki Hendricks using a particular set of questions structured to explore if South Florida was the site of a developing literary regionalism. The point of this investigation was to learn, from the authors' point of view, what was it about South Florida that encouraged such an outpouring of crime fiction novels and again, from their point of view, was this trend significant and long lasting or just a passing phenomena. The interview questions were formulated in part based on Cawelti's definitions of genre fiction. The interviews did help clarify those questions and this section makes mention of some of the questions asked and analyzes the author's answers.

The Crime Fiction Genre and Miami; A Symbiosis

The crime fiction genre has undergone many permutations of form since it began. John G. Cawelti examines the development of crime fiction, tracing its roots back to the beginnings of literature with the rape of Helen in The Iliad, Odysseus' fight against a suitor's conspiracy in The Odyssey and on through other Greek and Roman dramas, Shakespeare and other Renaissance tragedians (52). He says, "Of course crime, particularly violent crime, has always been a sure-fire topic for the entertainment of the public" (52), but Cawelti goes deeper to explore why the criminal has always held an important place in the imaginations of law abiding citizens.

Briefly, Cawelti identifies three main reasons the crime fiction genre has succeeded throughout the ages. The first is the moralistic chord that portrays the criminal and his activities as a representation of original sin. The second reason is that crime fiction reflects societal failures that produce an underclass engaged in criminal behavior, particularly represented by the gangster tragedy and hard-boiled detective stories of the 1920's and 1930's (Cawelti 61). This is when authors Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett came to prominence. More recently readers have been engaged by crime conspiracy stories, most notably The Godfather series by Mario Puzo. This type of crime fiction depicts the evils of giant corporations in the guise of organized crime families, business cartels and corrupt political / government alliances. As the focuses of the genre have changed, so have the elements that construct the form. Cawelti says that the new formula for crime fiction concerned with the criminal "family" has three major elements; "(1) the character of the organization leader; (2) the central figure of

the specialized professional criminal, highly trained and talented in his vocation and ruthless in his dedication to it²⁶; (3) the type of narrative structure that is organized around the careful preparation and execution of a complex criminal act, the caper" (65). Miami crime fiction does portray these elements in a fairly consistent manner, but is primarily concerned with the additional element of a strong central hero often caught in an intrigue they did nothing to provoke. In other words, Miami crime fiction involves the reader not only in the criminal underworld, but in the way this world is integrated into life in Miami. The hero must negotiate criminality that springs haphazardly as part of the landscape of Miami. Several examples come to mind.

Les Standiford's John Deal, a building contractor, does not intentionally fight crime in Done Deal. Opportunistic developers force him to defend his property when a baseball arena is planned in his neighborhood. James W. Hall's Thorn, living a quiet life fishing and tying lures in the Florida Keys, is drawn into a world of drug smuggling and violence by a lover in Under Cover of Daylight. Carl Hiaasen does not write serial crime fiction and his heroes represent everyman, down on his luck and trying to make ends meet, when the conspiracy or lunacy of South Florida sucks them into a criminal situation. Hiaasen's Joe Winder is a second-rate public relations man working for a Florida Keys tourist attraction when a sleazy real-estate agent threatens the environment in Native Tongue. Winder can either walk away or fight.

Even when the heroes place themselves in the line of fire, they are just as likely to be confronted by an unpredictable adversary working alone or with a

small band of enforcers, as with a well organized family of conspirators as per Cawelti.

In Act of Betrayal by Edna Buchanan, the hero is Britt Montero, a crime beat reporter. While covering a story involving the disappearance of young boys, Britt stumbles across an enemy of her freedom fighting father, murdered after the Cuban revolution. Lupe Solano, the hero of Cuban-born author, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, finds herself in Bloody Waters between the Florida Keys and Cuba to solve a baby-smuggling conspiracy. Again and again we see that the multi-cultural nature of life in South Florida, as well as the geography of the region, has as much to do with provoking the crime as any master criminal. The preceding sections of this essay have provided a brief tour through Miami's historical and cultural development and make-up in an attempt to understand the roots of Miami crime fiction as well as the audience enthusiasm for the genre.

What about selecting the genre of crime fiction for a scholarly investigation? Crime fiction falls into the larger genre of detective fiction and the interviews explore the elements of the form with its authors. In The Poetics of Murder; Detective Fiction and Literary Theory , edited by Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe, the same question is raised and answered by the editors in the introduction:

The criticism of detective fiction has never been healthier or more wide ranging than it is today. Taking advantage of their popularity, their relative simplicity, and their clear position as a model for many other kinds of narrative, contemporary literary critics and theorists have used detective

novels as test cases and examples for all sorts of literary speculation, from investigations of narrative techniques to discussions of the social function of literature, its psychological effects, and the philosophical systems it assumes or promotes. These novels have come to be seen as contemporary folktales, cultural documents par excellence, and prime illustrations of mental and social processes (Most xi-xii).

Fredric Jameson is just one of many literary theorists who have taken the time to contemplate and write about the crime fiction genre. Jameson's theory of nostalgia seems to clearly reflect the way that Cuban immigrants have created another Havana in Miami that reflects a Havana that does not exist in Cuba, and really never has, given the unavoidable Americanization of their culture here. Another example of a nostalgia for what did not exist is the making of South Beach for the Miami Vice movies and television show. People all over the world were enthralled with the club scene and beach shots, not realizing that the South Beach of 1980 was run down and primarily inhabited by the geriatric crowd, with a peppering of Marielito criminal element. The soft art deco pastels and bright neon that we see on South Beach today exist because of an art director's vision and a cultural appetite to bring back the area.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that Jameson chose to use a town near Miami to illustrate how the concept of nostalgia has taken on new meaning in the postmodern era. Jameson's example, Body Heat, "is technically not a nostalgia film, since it takes place in a contemporary setting, in a little Florida village near Miami" (CS 117). Our South Florida authors benefit because they

can draw on the lack of history to give their stories a timeless feel for the same reasons that Jameson details for selecting a small town near Miami for the setting of Body Heat. Jameson explains that the small town setting that the surrounding areas of Miami evoke play an important role by allowing both the writer and the reader to either include or dismiss the objects of the contemporary world. This flexibility of South Florida provides aesthetic latitude and nurtures feelings of nostalgia the readers of crime fiction crave.

Cawelti, in accord with Jameson, says, “ the conception of genre involves an aesthetic approach to literary structure” (8). He observes that the categorization of formulaic literature creates its own field of reference (13). In other words, the audience has come to expect a certain set of characteristics from Miami crime fiction. In the following passage Warshow helps with Cawelti’s categorization of the “mimetic and formulaic literature,” featuring the detective and crime fiction genre. Warshow’s observations seem to describe the essence of postmodern simulation popularized by Jean Baudrillard²⁷. Warshow said:

The relationship between the conventions which go to make up such a type and the real experience of its audience of the real facts of whatever situations it pretends to describe is only of secondary importance and does not determine its aesthetic force. It is only in an ultimate sense that the type appeals to its audience’s experience of reality; much more immediately, it appeals to previous experience of the type itself; it creates its own field of reference (13).

The plot of the crime fiction novel follows a particular form that the reader expects and is comfortable with and since Miami was founded as a form of escape and entertainment, what better setting for crime fiction?

There is a particular set of unique characteristics of Miami crime fiction that the audience has come to expect. These characteristics include bizarre acts of violence motivated by greed and sadistic impulse. There are arousing sexual encounters that are enabled by the hot climate, lack of clothing, Caribbean beats and multi-ethnic relationships. Action sequences often involve the many water locals of South Florida, including the river of grass, the Everglades. Plots are often affected by weather; hot and humid, torrential rains or hurricanes that force both protagonists and antagonists to alter their plans. The characters themselves are more likely to come from varied ethnic backgrounds with the staple consisting of the rare Anglo-Floridian rubbing up against the good-old-boy redneck, Hispanic (primarily Cuban) immigrant, Caribbean and American Black. Miami crime fiction offers up these novel characteristics in a singular way primarily because the geographic location of South Florida is different than anywhere else. This is the borderland, where even the white Presbyterian firefighters know how to pronounce Pollo Tropical with a good Spanish accent. Let's look a little more closely and the characteristics of Miami crime fiction.

Sex and violence figure prominently in the crime fiction form and the sub-tropical heat helps set the scene and influences character development in many of the Miami crime fiction novels. Cawelti explains why these two elements succeed in the form; "No doubt violence, like sex, plays an important role in

formulaic structures because of its capacity to generate the kind of intense feelings that take us out of ourselves” (15). Vickie Hendricks breaks boundaries of explicit sexual content in Miami Purity, with a quirky heroine who wears very little clothing and finds both hot sex and murderous violence in a dry cleaning establishment. The growth of violent, hot and sexy crime fiction set in Miami brings a uniqueness to the form, perhaps insuring it a place as its own genre according to the requirements set down by Cawelti: “A successful formulaic work is unique when, in addition to the pleasure inherent in the conventional structure, it brings a new element into the formula...” (12). Miami’s own history, culture and geography seem to support the uniqueness needed to support the genre.

Not all of the writers are comfortable describing sex in their novels but Hall does a moving job in his depiction of two lovers in the South Beach surf at night with the neon lights of the Art Deco hotels painting a water rainbow all around them in Gone Wild. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera and Edna Buchanan purposely reference sex without the vivid description. Les Standiford is a master of implication without describing every breath, every bead of sweat.

Violence is a more important element than sex, on the whole, in Miami crime fiction and there is plenty of grisly torture and death in these novels. The authors were asked about the importance of both sex and violence to build suspense. Barbara Parker explained the difference between the classic detective story, like Agatha Christie’s, and the modern crime novel. She said that, “The modern crime novels reflect a modern world and we have a perception of rampant violence so if I don’t bump at least two or three people off I’m not keeping

up, am I? In what I'm doing now, the one I'm planning, we stumble across one body that I know of and some other girl is going to commit suicide, which hardly counts, does it? And now, I'm sort of looking around for someone else to bump off because I think I need another one... That's a requisite of crime fiction." James W. Hall, who is considered to be a master of the uniquely violent scene explains that knowing exactly how much or how little to include is always a difficult balance.

It's a very troublesome part of the whole process. I don't like to witness violence. I don't like to participate in violence. I don't like to describe violence. I don't like to write about violence. I do, do it, and this is always an area that my editors and my agent have responded to over the years. You know, my first agent said, "Put more stuff in. You're too coy," you know, "Show it more." And, my current editor wants me to diminish it, to downplay it. The actual graphic portrayal of violence is what I'm talking about.

Les Standiford explained that sex and violence symbolize life and death, the very essence of the crime fiction novel. Elmore Leonard explained how South Beach became the backdrop for his 1980 Edgar award winning novel, La Brava. The Mariel boatlift resulted in Cuban drug dealers moving in on the senior citizens of South Beach and Leonard found the combination of foreign criminals intruding upon and rubbing elbows with the elderly an inspiration. In response to the question of why South Florida works so well when it comes to the violent scenes he said, "South Florida has a wonderful mixture. It is a great area to set a story."

The authors were also asked if the stories of violent crime and kinky sex that appear regularly in South Florida's mass media helped or hindered their efforts. Most replied that the real crime stories either helped or did not detract from their work. In response to the true story of a Miami couple chopped up and placed in oil drums on the side of the Florida Turnpike, Standiford said, "I have seen nothing in any work of crime fiction, some probably 50 of them published over the last 10 years by various practitioners, that came even close to that. No matter what we dream up, there are evil people out there who will make it seem like child's play."

The writers' insights into Miami and the creation of crime fiction should provide a valuable reference to other students of literature that are interested in how a regional body of work is shaped. After the interviews with the writers, this thesis concludes with an interview with Mitchell Kaplan, the owner of Books & Books. He is considered a cohesive force in the literary community. His Coral Gables and South Beach stores play host to a variety of authors and he is credited with developing the literary community in the area through organized readings and the yearly Miami Book Fair.

Conclusion

There is a community of crime fiction writers in Miami and this community helps demonstrate Miami crime fiction should be considered as a post-regional literature as well as a sub-genre of crime fiction. There is a certain amount of synergy between the authors, brought to light by the Naked Came the Manatee collaboration, but occurring more subtly all the time in the many book readings,

Florida International University creative writing classes, personal appearances and discussion panels that the authors participate in. This writer took various approaches to crime fiction based on their own gender and ethnic orientation. The White Anglo male writers all had like protagonists with the exception of Elmore Leonard, whose heroes ethnicities are a little harder to pin down. The women writers featured female protagonists in most of their work. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, a Cuban American, was the only writer to offer us a Hispanic heroine. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of like-mindedness among the authors. For instance, all agreed that the geographic location of South Florida and the topography here play an important role in their storytelling.

There is a feeling among the writers that they are in the right place at the right time. Les Standiford made five interesting points that help explain the number of crime fiction writers in South Florida: 1)the way the press influences Miami crime fiction; 2)the confirmation that there is indeed a literary movement in the region; 3) the affect of Miami Vice on catalyzing interest in the area; 4) the cultural changes taking place here with a focus on immigration; 5) and finally the notion that Miami is a frontier town.

Standiford explained that the contemporary press had formed a general agreement that there is a South Florida school of crime fiction and there are many reasons for that consensus. First, in a very short time, a number of authors based in South Florida came to prominence, writing material in and about Miami that publishers found worthwhile. That event "created a kind of locus literary energy" that made other writers say, , "Well, geez, if these people

could do it, so can I. If all of those people are being published, maybe publishers are really interested" (Standiford Interview). Of course the other necessary ingredient to the literary success of Miami crime fiction was the audience. Readers enjoyed discovering the post 1970's Miami. The contemporary world's attention was drawn to South Florida in large part, by Miami Vice, the television program which may have used up all the easy plots, the drug running stories and the "sleaziness has come to paradise" story. Since television did not have the time or the motivation to deal with more in-depth characters and themes, there was a window of opportunity created for crime fiction writers. These writers perceived that there is a lot of crime and intrigue in South Florida because the area is undergoing enormous cultural changes, primarily triggered by immigration from the Caribbean and Latin America. The frontier characteristics discussed above continue to influence the creation of crime fiction set in Miami.

The crime fiction form, or genre, lends itself to telling stories about South Florida. There are several interview questions concerned with the nature of the form to explore how or why Miami is the site for so many of these novels. Again, Les Standiford, who is a college professor as well as a great crime fiction writer, explained that the crime fiction form, rather than detective fiction, most appropriately reflects the culture of South Florida. Traditional detective fiction provides a moral paradigm, where society as a whole is injured by the actions of a criminal and a clever detective acts as a modern knight who, through method and deduction apprehends the evil individual and sets right what was made wrong. Society is safe, until the next episode of course. No one can write to that medieval

code anymore since nobody can set society right, not even the most dedicated police detective. The world is too troubled, and this affects the detective novel in a profound way. In my mind, chaos theory probably best explains the differences in the way the audience approaches the detective novel now. There was a time, not too long ago, when it seemed that scientific method would right all the wrongs and provide the means for utopia here on earth. Throughout the twentieth century, beginning with World War I, and accelerating rapidly during and after the Vietnam War, we have lost faith in science providing the answers to society's ills, having viewed the evil science is capable of enabling. The unexpected element, the chaos that science has named a theory, is embodied in the villains of Miami crime fiction. The audience knows to expect the unexpected here in South Florida. Now, if the code of good versus evil is offended, the hero can live in defense of the code, but cannot do much more than that. The protagonists of Miami crime fiction do not even pretend that they can set society right. They either voluntarily live on the edge, mostly the case of the female heroes, or represent everyman caught in a vortex of trouble that they must contend with. That is the theme that we see in most Miami crime fiction these days, a refrain that strikes a chord in the audience.

According to Cawelti crime fiction uses certain literary devices, such as suspense, identification, and creates a slightly removed, imaginary world (17). Each of the novelists was asked if South Florida was an ideal model with its lack of history—or its ability to create its history as it goes along. It seemed to me that South Florida was an ideal model on which to construct this imaginary setting. Elmore Leonard did not go along with that notion, explaining that his work was

based in reality and he actually developed plot ideas based on newspaper stories. For instance, Out of Sight is based on a real prison escape from the Glades penal institution. Many of the authors, however, did confirm that South Florida's historic malleability is part of the appeal of writing about the region. Barbara Parker provided the following observation about the imaginary Miami:

Of course, it's the little quirks that make us different. I don't see South Florida as a totally separate universe. I couldn't sell books to the rest of the country if it were. There has to be some close identification if you're going to read the book in Phoenix or if you want to pick it up when you're in Seattle it has to resonate somehow...but I think that because South Florida...has been...especially in the 80's and 90's, pointed to...a spotlight was turned on, truly it had the image of being unique and weird and so on and when the reader takes part in that process of being unusual, weird, twisted...then we really enjoy it.

I started this work with the suspicion that Miami crime fiction might be the regional literature of South Florida. This implies two important points for students of literature. They can read Miami crime fiction as more than examples of the genre and that the kind of literature being written in and about South Florida differs from any other regional literatures because Miami crime fiction takes into account a lack of history, a multi-cultural society, a shifting political power base, and a natural environment unique in the United States and the world. There is no city positioned as Miami is positioned. There is no city with as shiftless and corrupt a political system, at least no one getting the national and international press that Miami has

the privilege or chagrin to receive. The writers took various positions on the question of whether or not South Florida qualifies as a literary region, leaving this question to be more definitely answered at a future date. I think Barbara Parker offered some good advice about finding the answer, "I cannot say it's a distinct regional literature. See if it hangs on for another ten or fifteen years and then you'll see if you're on to something."

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¹ Hal Foster, editor of The Anti-Aesthetic, put together a collection of essays by renowned theorists including Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard, to discuss the meaning and imperative of postmodernism. In his preface, Foster explains, "that the project of modernity is now deeply problematic..." and that "Originally oppositional, modernism defined the cultural order of the bourgeoisie today, however, it is the official culture" (ix). Postmodernism defines a movement away from modernism. In this essay, the term is used to take into account a society in South Florida that exists as a pastiche of cultures, aesthetics, economic and social incongruities in a geographic location that resurrects the frontier, not in the wilderness, but in spite of modernities development of the region. Portes and Stepick, authors of City on the Edge, preface their historical and sociological look at Miami with this description, "Miami is not a microcosm of the American city. It never was. From its very beginnings a century ago, the Biscayne Bay metropolis possessed an air of unreality, a playground divorced from its natural habitat by the deeds of Yankee developers (xi). What they mean is that Miami is based on a fictional construct. Miami crime fiction writers are only doing what developers have always done, taking the raw materials of the region to feed consumer desire for adventure, mystery and romance, all sentiments traditionally associated with life on the frontier. Furthermore, they are doing this work in a region that embodies the elemental characteristics of postmodernism as Hal Foster defines, "postmodernism is best conceived as a conflict of new and old modes—cultural and economic..." (xi). Sheila L. Croucher, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Miami University of Ohio, wrote Imagining Miami: Ethnic Politics in a Postmodern World. In making a case for studying Miami because of its bellwether status, she also offers this description of the city's' postmodern status. She says, "There are factors that make the Miami case unique, but given predicted demographic, political, and economic trends, Miami is likely to serve as a model for future social and political relations nationwide. Some analysts have gone so far as to argue that the rapid quantitative and qualitative changes taking place in Miami over the last several years have resulted in a political and social system that in many ways is more akin to that of "new" or developing nations than to the established patterns of more advanced states. Finally, postmodernism, as an intellectual current that seeks to expose the elusiveness, dynamism, and "intertextuality" of social phenomena, resonates well with metropolitan Miami's image as a city of illusion" (20).

² Identification of the reader with the hero of the story and occasionally with the villain

³ The concept was borrowed from the 1969 *Naked Came the Stranger* by Penelope Ashe, a pseudonym representing a collaboration of 20 journalists who fooled the nation with their trashy sex novel, which, even after the hoax was revealed, sold phenomenally.

⁴ The thirteen writers include; Carl Hiaasen, Dave Barry, Elmore Leonard, Edna Buchanan, Les Standiford, James W. Hall, Paul Levine, Brian Antoni, Carolina Hospital, John Dufresne, Tananarive Due, Evelyn Mayerson, and Vicki Hendricks. The crime fiction writers who were involved in Naked Came the Manatee are; Carl Hiaasen, Elmore Leonard, Edna Buchanan, Les Standiford, James W. Hall, Paul Levine, and Vicki Hendricks. Barbara Parker and Carolina Garcia-Aguilera also live in South Florida and write crime fiction about the region

⁵ As an aside, we also see Janice in the role of the burdensome but beloved woman also typical in the western form as discussed previously.

⁶ The writers can mine a solid historical foundation stemming from American social unrest of the 60's, Batista's despotism and the revolutionary betrayal by Castro as well as Latin America's totalitarian governmental persecution. Distrust of controlling institutions such as the police, elected government and judicial systems weaken the ability of anyone to control the disparate population of the area. Each group has its own ethical and moral boundaries but there is no shared moral index. Crime and crime fiction flourish here in part because each group perceives those unlike themselves as the Other, somehow less worthy of the respect their moral code may dictate. Residents find themselves negotiating their own moral boundaries and agreement between cultural pockets is only coincidental.

⁷ According to the historian, Michael Gannon, wrote: "The most recent estimate, based on a resailing of the voyage, is that Juan Ponce [de Leon] made his landfall south of Cape Canaveral, at or near Melbourne Beach. The date was Eastertime of 1513, and he named the place *La Florida*—"the Flowery Land." In the next fifty years, six expeditions, one of them French, either traversed the land or attempted to settle it. The last of these, directed by Spain's most experienced admiral, Pedro Menendez de Aviles, succeeded in Founding St. Augustine, which today proudly wears the mantle of the first permanent European settlement and oldest city in the continental United States. The year was 1565" (4).

⁸ Hard wood hammocks are mounds of dirt and shells that can support the growth of hard wood trees such as Dade County pine. They are found primarily in the Everglades, though there are still some hammocks left in Miami-Dade County's settled areas. Barnacle House, the inspiration for James W. Hall's Hard Aground, is said to contain one of the last hammocks in the county. The Parrot Jungle, featured in Hall's Gone Wild, also contains part of a hammock. These areas are significant because they were the only dry, cool, inhabitable land in Miami for many centuries.

⁹ The Nights of December is a terrorist group in the novel.

¹⁰ Thomas Pynchon wrote The Crying of Lot 49, considered by some to be one of the first postmodern novel. It is concerned with immigration in California, along with the encroachment of consumer society on the consciousness of Americans.

¹¹ The sketches were done after the Civil War.

¹² David Rieff, author of Going to Miami, writes about Kaplan and his book store:

Books and Books is an admirable store in Coral Gables. I used to go there frequently during my stays in Miami, feeling a bit like a serviceman who after a long tour of duty gets weekend R and R in some longed-after fleshpot. I would dawdle in this haven for hours, staring covetously at the long, kempt shelves of poetry fiction, and history. It was a place to decompress, to chat with the owner, Mitchell Kaplan, or just to avoid thinking about Miami. Kaplan does not, obviously stock the "Tell-a..." series, which did not, as it turned out, mean that his customers didn't ask for it, or more frequently, for somewhat tonier manuals for communicating with their "help." One could get blind-sided by these requests, as when a well-dressed man strolled in, asking for a book with which to teach a child to read the alphabet.

"What age, sir?" Mitchell asked him, reasonably enough.

The fellow blushed, replying, "Oh, no, it's for our housekeeper. She's a Tamil, you see. The problem my wife and I have is that she doesn't know how to read our letters" (112-3).

A Tamil is someone from southern India or Ceylon. I include this anecdote by Rieff, and the references by Mitchell Kaplan, because Kaplan is such a central figure to the Miami literary community. Carolina Garcia-Aguilera and James W. Hall refer to him and the book signings sponsored by Books & Books in their interviews.

¹³ Jameson's notion of nostalgia and postmodernism is discussed in the context of pastiche, "blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor" (CS 114). Jameson said, "One of the most significant features or practices in postmodernism today is pastiche" (CS 113). He uses the nostalgia film to illustrate his understanding of how postmodern society has a "nostalgic desire to return to" an older period and "to live its strange old aesthetic artifacts through once again" (CS 116). In his example, Star Wars, represents the pastiche of the old Buck Rogers type movies popular in the 1930's through the 1950's. They featured "alien villains, true American heroes, heroines in distress, the death ray or the doomsday box, and the cliffhanger..." (CS 116). Star Wars offers this experience again, not as a parody, but as straight adventure for younger viewers and as nostalgia for adults "by reinventing the feel and shape of characteristic art objects of an older period (the serials), it seeks to reawaken a sense of the past associated with those objects" (CS 116). Postmodern nostalgia, through the use of pastiche, is not concerned with representing the past in a historically accurate

way like George Lucas's *American Graffiti*, "which in 1973 set out to recapture all the atmosphere and stylistic peculiarities of the 1950's United States" (CS 116). Rather, like the *Star Wars* example, it reuses past forms to satisfy a societal "longing to experience them again," even if they never knew that era in the first place. Miami crime fiction uses the murder mystery form, included in a group of genres that Jameson calls "paraliterature, with its airport paperback categories" in the same way that *Star Wars* borrows from *Buck Rogers* (CS 112). The form attempts to satisfy an audience yearning to return to a time when heroes and heroines had a chance against random acts of violence, even though they never knew such an era.

¹⁴ Multimillion-dollar mansions can be found only blocks away from traditional Bahamian style 2 room clapboard houses in Coconut Grove.

¹⁵ A *quince* is the fifteenth birthday party thrown for a Cuban or Latin American girl. It is a coming-of-age event, marked by elaborate evening gowns, tuxedos, formalized dance routines, fine food and music.

¹⁶ One hundred sixty-two of the three hundred sixty-eight voting residents were black," according to David Rieff (168). The early presence of the black community started by settlers from South Carolina and the Bahamas during the early 1900's has done nothing to insure a firm economic or political advantage to. Most of them settled in Coconut Grove, "which even today, as development has transformed the Grove into...a Fortress Yuppie on the shores of Biscayne Bay, retains a substantial black population" (Rieff 169).

¹⁷ In 1920 Miami had the largest population of Black immigrants in the United States, with the exception of New York. Blacks have consistently accounted for 15-20 percent of the population in Dade county. This constituency is composed of people from varied, "regional, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds and has been a source of fragmentation within the black community (Croucher 26-7).

¹⁸ In spite of resistance from Whites, harassment from the Ku Klux Klan and the police, by the mid 1950's blacks were achieving a measure of economic success and community in Overtown. In fact, Overtown was compared to the thriving Harlem of the 1920's. Unfortunately, government programs that were aimed at improving the living conditions in the black community had the opposite affect. Croucher writes, "Federal housing reforms launched during the New Deal era became a tool with which the local elite in Miami could clear the downtown area for further expansion of the business district and relocate blacks to a housing project six miles from the city core (31). This area became known as Liberty City, **where on May 18 1980 the McDuffie riot began**. The highway renewal program that funded the expansion of Interstate-95 in the 1950's also destroyed

the homes and much of the remaining cohesiveness of the Overtown community."

¹⁹ There is one building that features a square cutout in the middle where a palm tree waves in the tropical breeze from Biscayne Bay. The Villa Regina uses yellow, purple, aqua, red and orange on the many balcony's towering over the banking street. Still another building is shaped and painted like one of the cruise ships waiting to depart with tourist from government cut each weekend.

²⁰ Croucher relays the statistic that, "passing through the Port of Miami, Miami International Airport, and other terminals was an estimated \$7.5 billion worth of Latin exports and imports" (42).

²¹ Episode #001 Air Date 16 Sep 1984 (NBC) Anthony Yerkovich Writer. Alternate title: Brother's Keeper. Information about Miami Vice is available on several Internet web sites. The following is courtesy of <http://eagle2.eaglenet.com/frank/vice/>

Plot Summary; Miami police detective James "Sonny" Crockett reluctantly teams with New York bred newcomer Ricardo Tubbs to solve several murders connected to a mysterious Colombian drug lord.

Featured Music ; Music Composed and Conducted by Jan Hammer.

Phil Collins, "In The Air Tonight", Cyndi Lauper, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun",

Rockwell, "Somebody's Watching Me", Rolling Stones, "Miss You"

Lionel Richie, "All Night Long."

Created by Anthony Yerkovich , Produced by John Nicolella, Executive

Producers Michael Mann and Anthony Yerkovich

Don Johnson as Detective James "Sonny" Crockett

Philip Michael Thomas as Detective Ricardo Tubb

²² Raphael is a New York City vice cop. Ricardo, is also a policeman who has been working robbery in the Bronx. He forges paperwork and impersonates his brother to garner cooperation from Miami vice.

²³ Lt. Lou Rodriguez is in charge of Miami Vice in this first movie. Left unresolved is whether or not Rodriguez is on the take since he has deposited \$18,000 into his checking account and enrolled his son in a very expensive Catholic private school.

²⁴ In 1998 the United States Southern Military Command relocated its headquarters from Panama City to Miami making Tubbs' remark rather ironic in retrospect.

²⁵ a 22 year old Hispanic City of Miami police officer

²⁶ Cawelti calls this figure the Enforcer because one of the most popular versions of the character is the professional assassin (65)

²⁷ Jean Baudrillard concerns himself with the meaning of representation in a postmodern world (i.e. one of computers, genetics, and nuclear science) in his essay, "Simulacra and Simulation," written in 1981. He contrasts the ancient meaning of simulation as map making of an existing natural territory to the current situation where we create representations based on synthesized models: "It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (166). He explains that the territory no longer either precedes or survives the map; the map is without a basis in natural reality. The references to cyberspace are inescapable in Baudrillard's notions of simulacra and simulation, though the World Wide Web, or Internet, did not exist in the form it does today. He says that simulacrum is "the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (167). Baudrillard began his exploration of the separation of symbols from natural objects in 1972 when he explored the need to burn the sign in his essay, "For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign." He says that the sign masquerades as the "real" misleading people into believing that it is reality rather than the simulacrum of the symbolic (92). He finds in the system of signs defined by Saussure "All the repressive and reductive strategies of power systems... as well as those of exchange value and political economy." According to Mark Poster, the editor of Jean Baudrillard's Selected Writings, he explores the role of simulacra and simulations, finding they are constructed out of models that are grounded only in their own reality. Baudrillard's simulation goes beyond a fiction or a lie to a world of self-referential signs (6). Where more traditional definitions of simulacra say it imitates a natural object in order to transform it, Baudrillard asserts that there is no longer a natural object to act as referent, only the simulacrum.

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The Interviews

Each of Miami's crime fiction writers have distinctive protagonists and antagonists. In some of the interviews the authors compare their work to other South Florida writers including Carl Hiaasen and Edna Buchanan. Mr. Hiaasen did not have time to participate in the interviews and Edna Buchanan did not respond to several requests to participate, but both are important to any discussion of Miami crime fiction so some of their novels that seemed particularly relevant to this work are discussed in this section.

What follows herewith and in the individual interview introductions is a convenient guide that is part bibliography, part book review and literary analysis that accounts for key characters, scene, plot, and significance of the novels mentioned. In all cases the audience is the academic community, though the writers describe their audience in a variety of ways as we shall see.

Naked Came the Manatee, as discussed in the introduction, serves as a focal point because it brought many of the South Florida crime fiction writers together in a way that validates the observation that there is a literary movement in South Florida who's nexus is crime fiction. So, before we continue to the individual interviews here is some more information about this unique novel.

Naked Came the Manatee was written by Carl Hiaasen *, Dave Barry, Elmore Leonard *, Edna Buchanan *, Les Standiford *, James W. Hall *, Paul Levine *, Brian Antoni, Carolina Hospital, John Dufresne, Tananarive Due,

Evelyn Mayerson, and Vicki Hendricks *. (*Crime fiction writers). The following passage from the American Library Association, copyrighted in 1996, provides a concise description of the book.

Dave Barry, Elmore Leonard, Brian Antoni, and nine other South Florida writers joined Hiaasen to author this quirky, engaging novel. Like the childhood game in which one person writes the first sentence of a story and the next person writes the next sentence and so on until "And they lived happily ever after," this novel is a series of chapters by different authors. Booger is a manatee inhabiting Biscayne Bay; his best friend is the 102-year-old Marion, who uses Booger to help her protect the bay from harm. In Chapter One, Booger witnesses some disturbing business in his waters, which begins a chain of events involving Castro imposters, Cuban hoodlums, murders, and longtime love affairs. The reader will enjoy each author's distinctive style; Hiaasen's and John Dufresne's contributions are particularly enchanting. Expect demand.

Philip Gambone with The New York Times Book Review wrote;

Naked Came the Manatee is a deliciously twisted paean to South Florida, to its color, corruption, cacophony and Cubano culture. Originally published as a serial novel in the Miami Herald's Tropic magazine, Naked Came the Manatee resembles a literary game of telephone, with each writer contributing a chapter and passing it on to the next, who then makes the most

of what he or she is given. The result is a novel with wildly fluctuating styles and more crazy plot curves than a daytime drama, but thanks to these 13 masters of the craft this roller coaster of a book is almost as much fun to read as it obviously was to write.

Naked Came the Manatee is a novel like no other; a wickedly funny Florida suspense thriller, written serially by thirteen of the state's most talented writers. Among them they have penned bestsellers and hit movies, created top-rated television shows and won Pulitzer Prizes, but never has any of them tried anything like this--and with such stunning results. In November 1995, a baker's dozen of Florida's finest writers began a serial novel for The Miami Herald's Tropic magazine under the guidance of Tropic's editor Tom Shroder--one writer passing the completed chapters to the next--and with each chapter, the excitement grew. Florida was hooked on Naked Came the Manatee. And now it's the rest of the country's turn.

While Naked Came the Manatee served to draw attention to the number of crime fiction writers living and working in Miami, authors like Edna Buchanan and Carl Hiaasen have been enjoying successful individual careers for a decade before it was published.

Edna Buchanan is a Pulitzer-Prize winning reporter at the Miami Herald before she began her career as a crime fiction writer. Her

issues center on women in the workplace. Britt Montero, the protagonist in most of her novels, is a newspaper reporter assigned to the police beat in Miami. Britt is supposed to be relatively young, 20's, and beautiful, but her interest in performing well on the job and being accepted as a woman professional indicate a more mature outlook. She pines over a police lieutenant who dumped her in favor of his career. She has almost no social life, spending every waking minute pursuing stories.

Britt's father died when she was three, fighting Castro's Cuban takeover. Britt exhibits minimal Cuban characteristics. She likes to eat at La Esquina de Teha, a popular Cuban restaurant on SW 8th street. She drinks Cuban coffee and has an aunt, Odalys, who is a practicing Santeria worshipper. Other than these particulars, she exhibits none of the typically Cuban concerns over politics or family values until Act of Betrayal. The antagonist in this novel is an old Cuban compatriot of Britt's father. Through her investigation of the disappearance of several teenage boys, who look alike, she comes to know Juan Carlos Reyes, who fought with her father in Cuba. He owns a large mansion on one of the islands between the City of Miami and Miami beach where he keeps his yacht, the Libertad, ready to cruise into Havana Harbor as Cuba's next president (112). Like so many bad guys, Reyes has the backing of the United States government. It turns out that he killed her father, almost kills her, and is responsible for the murder of the teenage boys. Britt uncovers the truth during a violent hurricane that

destroys the island home and reveals the dead bodies of the boys. Could this have been set anyplace else but Miami?

Britt's mother has a slight presence in the novels. She comes from an old Miami family but has to work as a fashion consultant in one of the department stores. She tries to get Britt into a new dress or a trendy purse and offers tips on when the sales are coming up. Contrast Britt with Lupe Solano, Carolina Garcia-Aguilera's heroine. Lupe interacts extensively with her immediate and extended family. Her concerns include social position and Cuban politics, particularly her father's nostalgic desire to return to the island, free of Castro and the communistic regime. Lupe's description of Cuban cuisine and the importance the eating plays in Cuban life is vivid and adds a real flavor to the prose. Britt Montero's food lacks aroma.

Britt Montero elects to place herself in the center of the Miami maelstrom of crime. She is an excellent investigative reporter, offering realistic sounding descriptions of police procedure within the different jurisdictions, primarily the City of Miami and Metro-Dade County police departments. She takes us into a finely equipped morgue, capable of storing 350 bodies and a forensics building capable of containing an entire aircraft if need be. What's missing is the exploration of the reasons behind South Florida's daunting crime rate. The Mariel boatlift is referred to, and Marielitos as criminals figure in Miami, It's Murder in the character of the Downtown Rapist. This cross dressing, impotent, venereal diseased antagonist came over on a boat. Elmore Leonard's homicidal sexually ambiguous male

stripper, Cundo Ray, also comes to Miami via the Mariel boatlift, but he arrives with his past baggage. His character is developed more than Edna Buchanan's Downtown Rapist and so his being in Miami, his terrible crimes and his ultimate downfall are more satisfying. In addition to the smarmy Cuban villain, the good old boy developer appears in many of the novels as the antagonist.

Carl Hiaasen offers up different protagonists in each of his many Miami crime fiction novels to do battle against environmentally insensitive bad guys. To get a sense of the good guys in Hiaasen's novels we can turn to Native Tongue where Joe Winder is a Miami native handling public relations for a less than scrupulous tourist attraction in the Upper Keys.

He'd spent most of his childhood outdoors, cutting paths to secret hideaways in the hammocks, glades and swamps. At a young age he had become an expert woodsman, a master of disappearing into impenetrable pockets where no one else wanted to go (125). Like John Deal's father in the Standiford novels, Winder's father was also a developer.

Every time his father bought a new piece of property, Joe Winder set out to explore each acre. If there was a big pine, he would climb it; if there was a lake or a creek, he'd fish it. If there was a bobcat, he'd track it; a snake, he'd catch it.

He would pursue these solitary adventures relentlessly until the inevitable day when the heavy machinery appeared, and the guys in

the hard hats would tell him to beat it, not knowing he was the boss's kid (125-6).

Joe Winder is very concerned about the irreplaceable South Florida resources ever under attack by developers in the region for a fast buck and the attendant recreational pursuits they encouraged. For instance he, "fished in manic motion because he knew time was running out. Before long, this fine little bay would be a stagnant ruin and the only fish worth catching would be gone, spooked by jet skis, sail-boarders, motor boats and plumes of rank sewage blossoming from submerged drainage pipes (125)." One cannot help drawing parallels between Winder and James Hall's Thorn, who you will read more about in the coming interviews.

The chief antagonist in Native Tongue is from out of town. "Like many wildly successful Floridians, Francis X. Kingsbury was a transplant. He had moved to the Sunshine State in balding middle age, alone and uprooted, never expecting that he would become a multimillionaire. And, Like so many new Floridians, Kingsbury was a felon on the run (46)." He is joined by a muscle man called Pedro Luz who is deeply addicted to steroids, so much so that he invents a contraption that will allow him to carry out his security duties at the amusement park with the medicines feeding him intravenously as he lumbers along. Luz cultivates the park security force by hiring crooked cops that have lost their police jobs, insuring that they will go along with any scams Mr. Kingsbury comes up with. Unlike some of the more sinister crime fiction novels written by James Hall or Les Standiford, Hiaasen's plots, while very

assertive of the importance of environmental protection, have the flavor of farce running through them. Look for further reference to this in the interviews.

Introduction to Carolina Garcia-Aguilera Interview

Garcia-Aguilera is a particularly interesting writer in relation to the area of exploration for this thesis in that she is both a female and an Hispanic in a group dominated by male and Anglo writers. I asked all of the authors how their protagonists compared to them. Lupe Solano, Carolina's heroine, most resembles her creator. They are both conscientious of grooming, manners, polite society. While Lupe is still a private investigator, Carolina has retired from that profession, one she entered and stayed with for ten years, just to be able to write realistic crime fiction. Her background as a Miami detective is discussed in the interview. Like Lupe, Carolina's parents fled the Castro regime. Lupe's father has his boat ready to return to Cuba when Castro falls. One of her sister's is a nun who carries a portable telephone and enjoys skinny dipping off the families Cocoplum estate.

Lupe Solano is referred investigations from lawyers that need her help to defend their clients and locate missing persons. She conducts business out of a free standing office building in Coconut Grove. The office is staffed by her cousin Leonardo, whose dubious sexual orientation and interest in body building, yoga, and unusual health food cocktails adds both humor and Coconut Grove local color to the narrative. Lupe herself is a character in sharp contrast to the other male and female protagonists found in Miami crime fiction.

Lupe Solano is the only Cuban hero in the field and she provides a unique insiders view of Cuban life in Miami which includes information about

social customs involving everything from dating to parental position in the family and the appropriate Cuban cuisine for different occasions.

Garcia-Aguilera's antagonists are just as likely to rise from the Cuban community both in Miami and in Cuba as they are to be of varied nationalities and backgrounds. For example, in her first novel, Bloody Waters, the villains are on both sides of the Gulf Stream engaged in a baby selling scheme between Cuba and Miami.

Garcia-Aguilera also offers us an intimate glimpse of the Miami good life, from the estate of Lupe Solano's father in Cocoplum, to the fabulous fashions she wears even on the most grueling of stake outs. Lupe favors excellent restaurants and highly successful professional men as dates. As you will learn from the interview, Lupe, like her author does not care to dwell on the seeder side of Miami, and while Garcia-Aguilera's novels are definitely crime fiction, the author and her hero gloss over the indelicate activities of human nature, like explicit sexual descriptions, contraceptive or going to the toilet. While Lupe surely does all these things, they are not chronicled.

Interview with Carolina Garcia-Aguilera 2/19/98

Alvarez: Do you rely on the moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved and the guilty are finally identified and captured?

Garcia-Aguilera: The bad guys are not always punished but they are always identified. Sometimes I don't know who it will be until I get to the last 4 chapters. In Bloody Shame I didn't decide it would be Silvia until then. Then I go back and leave some clues for the reader. I do not believe in cheating the reader.

Alvarez: Crime fiction uses certain literary devices such as suspense, identification and creating a slightly removed, imaginary world. Is South Florida an ideal model with its lack of history—or its ability to create its history as it goes along?

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes. It is a land of refugees and everyone makes up their pasts. By refugee I mean that they had a reason to leave something behind, so people are always reinventing themselves when they get here. It makes it harder to check on people's backgrounds.

Alvarez: Especially Cubans, since Cuba is a closed society?

Garcia-Aguilera: You can try to leave your past behind but different echelons of Cubans know each other so the past will always catch up to them. I'm going to tell you a story to illustrate this. I grew up in New York and I was in my last year of high school or first year of college. I was at a party and an attractive man was introduced to me. The people at the party were told that his family had a large sugar plantation in Cuba implying he was from an upper class family. When most of the people had left the party he came up to me and thanked me. I knew him as the son of the lifeguard at the pool in Cuba. He thanked me for not giving away his lie. He was very good looking. I had no reason to say anything. People come to Miami and make up their pasts all the time.

Alvarez: Does South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?

Garcia-Aguilera: That depends on what you consider literature. If you consider crime fiction literature, then definitely. There is a whole community of crime fiction writers here. Mitchell Kaplan from Books & Books has been instrumental in bringing crime fiction to the fore in South Florida.

Alvarez: What has Mitch Kaplan done to encourage this blossoming for you? Did he help you after you wrote your first book?

Garcia-Aguilera: I knew him before that. He told me ten years ago that if I ever finished my book and got it published he would do whatever he could to help me, and he has. When people call him for speakers, he sends the crime fiction writers. He is very involved in the Book Festival. He put me on a discussion panel next to Edna Buchanan and moderated by Paul Levine.

Alvarez: What characteristics of South Florida attract you to both live in the area and place your stories here?

Garcia-Aguilera: Well I live here because of family. I write about it because they say, "Write what you know."

Alvarez: The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?

Garcia-Aguilera: Just pick up the paper and there are ideas for ten stories.

Alvarez: Miami does not comply with the traditional definition of regional characteristics. Can you help me with a definition and characterizations of Urban Regionalism and to determine how Miami does and / or does not conform to that definition?

Garcia-Aguilera: Miami does

Alvarez: Do you concern yourself with right and wrong when you write crime fiction?

Garcia-Aguilera: No. Just to further the story.

Alvarez: How does Miami as setting support the important role of sex and violence in crime fiction?

Garcia-Aguilera: I have very little sex in my books, very very little because I don't want to put sex in it. I find it a distraction.

Alvarez: The suggestion is there.

Garcia-Aguilera: The suggestion is there but there's no black and white, you know, he did this and she took off her T-shirt.

Alvarez: Regarding violence, in Bloody Shame Lupe doesn't actually get into trouble with violence until the last few pages.

Garcia-Aguilera: Right, right, right, when her life is in danger. I do tend to shy away from that mostly because I don't like violence.

Alvarez: Do you depend primarily on the plot structure to heighten suspense?

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes. I've been told that in my first book, Bloody Waters, that it was more plot driven and that Bloody Shame is more character driven. The new book, Bloody Secrets, that is both character and plot.

Alvarez: Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Garcia-Aguilera: As far as my books, escape, it's sort of education about immigrants to show that they work hard because it's not all illegal immigrants. I feel that in a way other crime fiction primarily portrays immigrants as the criminals. I want to get the message across that there are all kinds of immigrants. Some have education.

Alvarez: I have started to form an opinion that we have a lot of Anglo male writers and...

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes.

Alvarez: I was looking at their antagonists and noticed that a lot of them are Hispanic...

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes. Right. Right.

Alvarez: I asked some of them about it and they say, "No, no," that they are equal opportunity employers of the villains.

Garcia-Aguilera: It's not true. I don't think so. But of course I'm much more sensitive to it, much more sensitive. Even Paul Levine's last, I like his books and I like him too but if you go through the books you could pick out where it's really not balanced. I don't think it is.

Alvarez: There is another antagonist that comes up a lot in the male writer's books are the good old boys, the red necks. They might argue well those are Anglo WASPs but I would argue that they are another sub-culture.

Garcia-Aguilera: In my books there are elements of Cuba in every page so I do try to educate.

Alvarez: In one of your books the housekeeper makes Cuban bread in the home. Is there a special oven for that?

Garcia-Aguilera: No. In fact Cuban bread is very easy to make. Somebody once asked me if I would have a regular meal that Lada would cook, like a cocktail party with the conch fritters and all the stuff that they serve.

Alvarez: How do you pick your villain's characterization?

Garcia-Aguilera: I think betrayal. For example in the second book, Bloody Shame, I couldn't decide who was going to be the bad guy until four chapters from the end. That's what I do. In the first one I did the same thing. I set up the possibilities, even for myself, so anybody could be so I figured the reader would also be in suspense. If I as a writer am in suspense so will the reader, and then I decide who's it going to be.

Alvarez: Do you actually go back?

Garcia-Aguilera: I put in a couple of clues because I think you're cheating your reader if you don't give them a chance. I can't stand cheating your reader.

Alvarez: The next two questions are about your hero. In your case it's your heroine, Lupe Solano. She's Cuban American.

Garcia-Aguilera: Right.

Alvarez: What flaws does Lupe have?

Garcia-Aguilera: Actually, none. She's perfect. No, she's my baby, she has no flaws.

Alvarez: I know you don't write sex scenes, but Lupe enjoys sex.

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes she does. Yes she does.

Alvarez: She does sleep with several of the characters.

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes, but it's always the same guys.

Alvarez: Is she careful? We don't hear about her using a condom or worrying about AIDS.

Garcia-Aguilera: She's a Catholic girl.

Alvarez: She could get pregnant?

Garcia-Aguilera: Oh no. I don't talk about that. My characters also don't go to the bathroom, not in my books. My emotions are not part of my books. That's an escape.

Alvarez: How do you compare to Lupe?

Garcia-Aguilera: Oh gosh, I get asked that all the time. Yesterday, I was interviewed for a show called *Deco Drive* and on the shoot he was calling me Lupe, not Carolina. He said, "You have become Lupe to me." We spent seven hours together and I did a few things for the shoot that Lupe would do. He said, "You look so straight and here you are doing all this stuff." As far as Lupe and I, in some things we're interchangeable and in some things we're way apart.

Alvarez: What are the similarities?

Garcia-Aguilera: Well, both of us tend to lead a little bit with our hearts, not so much with our common sense. We would approach a case in the same way. The mechanics of the case would be the same (Carolina was a private investigator for 10 years). I don't know what the differences are.

Alvarez: The most obvious difference is that she's single and you are married with three children.

Garcia-Aguilera: Yes, I'm much older than she is so she has time. She's very family oriented as I am. I always get asked the question, "Is this book biographical?"

Alvarez: How do you answer?

Garcia-Aguilera: No, not really, no. We're both Cuban American.

Alvarez: What made you decide, after ten years as a private investigator to try writing?

Garcia-Aguilera: I became a PI to write. When my father was dying I got tired of reading so late at night in the hospital so I wrote

two hundred pages more or less, with a different heroine totally different from Lupe. The story line was quite good I thought except the mechanics of being a PI was sort of missing although I had read an awful lot about it. I contacted a criminal defense lawyer I knew and he told me the name of the firm he used for investigation. I was hired by the firm and I was the only girl in this room of all men.

Alvarez: So that's the pit?

Garcia-Aguilera: I got the worst cases. I got the missing persons cases. I got the dog cases, you know, the worst cases in the world. I mean you have no idea the cases I got. I had only intended to do this for six months max and then go back to writing but I sort of got carried along with this thing, and it was good. I got my license and with a partner who was a former FBI agent we opened up our own firm.

Alvarez: Were most of your clients lawyers?

Garcia-Aguilera: Oh, ninety percent of the business, and we started doing fine.

Alvarez: During that time did you try to write?

Garcia-Aguilera: No. The manuscript sat at the top of my closet in a box. I hadn't even looked at it. After awhile the stress started to get to me. It's a dangerous thing and I used to have to testify a lot in court. Then I wrote Lupe. That's how it started. That's why I became a PI. When I read other people, and they shall remain nameless, they have their characters do things that when I was at work we would never do. I've worked it and I know how things work. I've sat in parked cars. I've shot. You know I carry and have done jailhouse interviews. You have to have done all this stuff. I have a friend who is a policeman in New York. He said, "I get so upset with these writers. Sometimes they call us and they ride with us one night and the next thing I know they've written this book based on riding with us for eight hours. They know everything. They've been there." And that's true. I get annoyed too because they don't pay their dues in a way. I'm not saying everyone should go out and become one. I don't know, to feel it in a way. The whole thing is research.

Alvarez: Carolina, thank you. We've gone through all the questions. I would like to be able to call you again.

Garcia-Aguilera: Oh, sure. I hope I've been helpful.

Alvarez: Yes, very helpful.

Garcia-Aguilera: With a totally different point of view from the guys.

process of creating suspense? If you want to address them completely separately, I'm going to follow up on this.

Hall: Well, let me take the moral fantasy thing first. I would say that the way I see what I do is—because, I don't use police, by and large. You know, I have some police in the work, but the police are really peripheral to what I do. There is a little episode in *Tropical Freeze*, I believe it is, where Sugarman and Thorn are talking, and Sugarman says something about when people are playing sandlot basketball—just pick up basketball—and they have to call the fouls on themselves, they tend to be more honest than when they play—when there is an official referee. If there's a referee, and they can get by with something, and the referee doesn't catch it, then it's O.K. They're not going to call it on themselves. I see that as an image that I use as a paradigm, in a way, for the moral universe I'm describing. And, this is a universe in which the players know what the fouls are. And, to bring in an external authority is unnecessary and too complicated, and sometimes would create unfairness in some regard. The problem is with that world view is that it includes Bernard Getz. It includes a vigilante view of justice. And, you know, that is a very worrisome picture of the world, when you just say, "Well, I give over—I believe that people should give over the working out of justice to the parties involved, rather than to try to keep that in the hands of the police and judicial system. So, that I am constantly conflicted about that one issue in the stories, and the moral difficulties that that raises for me, and raises for Thorn in the stories. And, my other characters is one of the things that keeps me interested in these stories, because I'm on both sides of this feeling. I've had my encounters with the judicial system. I know how crazy it is, and how unfair it is, and difficult it is to actually use the judicial system to get true fairness. On the other hand, leaving everything to gun-toting Bernard Getzes is anarchy, and it's crazy.

Alvarez: I noticed that you have one of your characters from Hard Aground talk about lawlessness in Miami. It goes like this: "I'm trying to tell you that's no threat. Nothing to worry about there, just a little burglary is all that is. Nobody's going to come looking for anybody in this town, for a little breaking and entering. Shit, Miami, you've got to kill yourself or 4 to 5 people if I'm looking seriously for you." So, I see where you bring in some of this frontier mentality.

Hall: Right.

- Alvarez: It's just liking speeding, or traffic violations. The cops aren't going to really pay any attention.
- Hall: Well, there's a theory about it that sociologists have of scofflaw view, that when the percentages reach a certain number--and I think that's like 25%, 30% of the people stop obeying this particular law, then it just flips over. It goes from 30%, suddenly to 70% or 80%, that if people just say, "If it reaches this magic number where 30% of the people say, "Oh, 55 miles an hour is just too slow. I'm not gonna go 55 miles an hour," then all of a sudden, it goes to 70% or 80%. It doesn't go anywhere in between. So, in a way, that's the kind of universe that we've got in Miami, is that it just went from a town that where 20% of the people were disobeying the laws, to creeping up higher and higher, until it just flipped over, until a much larger percentage were lawless than were before. And, I think it's--we've crossed an important boundary line there, and things got anarchic, which they still are, to a large extent.
- Alvarez: Let me follow up with this next question. Crime fiction uses certain literary devices such as suspense, identification, and creating a slightly removed imaginary world. Is South Florida an ideal model, with its lack of history, or as you put it the other day, where its history is more like a television show, like Miami Vice--or its ability to create its history as it goes along?
- Hall: Well, yeah, Miami is a work in progress, and that's what makes it interesting, that it's not a town like New York, or Chicago, or a lot of others, St. Louis, or you name it, Washington, in which there is a fairly clear, defined character of personality to the area, and that there's a certain makeup, demographically, of that region, and of the people who live there and their values, and they're all fairly constant. The issue in Miami is that--I think this was, uh, somebody said this in Hard Aground, that we don't have any basements in Florida. Nobody has any roots, nobody is anchored, nobody is really here for any duration, and that sense of anonymity, and not having a sense of family history and connecting us with a place, or not having a body, a social group, which has a long-term investment in a place, creates a sense of disagreement, let's say, about what the moral center is. And, that makes them very interesting. It makes it a very interesting place, because a lot of us think that we know what the moral middle-C is or should be, and a huge percentage of people who live here don't agree. You know, they come from other moral

constructs altogether, and they see the--say for instance, one of the things that is going on right now in Miami life is this pattern of ripping off the city government of Miami. It's over \$68 million in debt. Well, where did that happen? Where did that come from? Sure, politicians of all stripes have had a long history of graft and kickbacks, and that sort of thing. But, my experience with Spanish culture--because I lived in Spain for a year--is that a lot of what we consider to be just normal business practice, as you call up the phone company to get your phone hooked up--in Spain, you call up the phone company, and unless you know somebody, or unless you can pay somebody off in Spain, you don't get your phone hooked up for six months. And, that's just the way it operates. And, that's not immoral, unethical. That's just the way it operates. And, to us, to a middle-class, midwestern American perspective, that seems offensive and wrong. And, in Miami, where that is one of the operating principles has been in the government for a long time--I'm not saying it's ethical, but it's a clash of one set of standards with another set of standards. That's what makes Miami interesting, is everybody's got--just look at the driving in Miami. Look at the highways. What you've got is people following driving practices that they learned in Egypt, you know, and using them in Miami, as though everybody else drives that way. And, they're not adapting. They're driving to Miami, they're just bringing the driving methods that they learned somewhere else. And, I think that's one of the things that makes this an interesting place to write about, and a very useful place, because people are not modified by the place. They modify the place.

Alvarez: Are you familiar with Thomas Pynchon?

Hall: Sure.

Alvarez: From what I understand of his philosophies, he believes that the country needed immigrant energy to continue forward. If we didn't have it, we would stagnate. So, do you believe that as well?

Hall: Oh, sure. That's a very basic idea. I think it probably hides a very ugly reality, which is that we need immigrants to do the slave labor in the democratic--in a capitalistic society, that others have bored with doing or think they're too good to do anymore. And, that's the way we have traditionally used immigrants. That's one of the the frustrations Anglos have about Cubans in Miami.

Alvarez: Can you explain?

- Hall: Sure. One of the frustrations Anglos have about Cubans in Miami is that Cubans came to Miami, and didn't want to stay in the service jobs and in the lowest economic echelon. And, they wanted to move very quickly up the ladder, and that's not the way, you know--you do that over two or three generations, in American history. The Italian father educates the son, and the son has a middle-class job, and he educates his son. And then, eventually, they work themselves up the economic ladder. So, there's a certain tension that's come in Miami, because immigrants don't play by the same rules, supposedly, that immigrants have elsewhere.
- Alvarez: David Rieff, an historian, says that the Cuban immigration did take a lot of the jobs that American Blacks would have had. And, before you knew it, they were in middle management, and they were hiring their cousins. And, that's also left us with a segment of--
- Hall: Disenfranchised Blacks.
- Alvarez: Another thought-- the part you're talking about where we don't have cellars, we don't have roots. I got an impression that we end up with residents here, who really don't care sometimes, when you talk about environmental issues, and the bulldozing, where you describe it very clearly, you know, where you turn around one day, and you're driving down 87th Avenue, before there was a forest, and it's cleared.
- Hall: Yeah, right. That is another issue, is that when you--it's related--all these issues are really related to the transient culture here, that we have based Florida on. Tourists, snowbirds, who are just longer tourists, here for longer periods of time. And, those people have no sense of the history--or long-term needs of the region. They are here to basically rip off the good weather, and leave as few dollars behind as they can get away with. And, we have--this is the seed we've sown as a state, to create an economy that's based on people who take advantage of the environment, basically, "Come on down." And, we have become the prostitute of America. We rent ourselves out by the hour, by the week, by the day, whatever. "Come on down and use us, and then go away. And, deposit your trash here, and go away and back to your own homes that you care about." And, the results of that are what we're facing. That's been an attitude, from the very beginning, of Florida. That's built into Florida history, that this is what Flagler saw in Florida, is a way he and his millionaire pals could have a retreat, and be warm in the winter. And,

anything that he did to construct Florida was really for that purpose, not for any long-term advantage for normal working people that were needed to live here.

Alvarez: Keeping these things that we just talked about in mind, do you think it's possible for South Florida to be considered a literary region?

Hall: Well, not in the usual sense, I don't think so. No, because the usual sense is that a person that mines the cultural vein that's unique and specific to the region, and explores that as with Mississippi or with Georgia, and finds what's unique about the local color issues of the place. But, also, what's mythically significant about the place to the rest of the country. And, I think what's happened in Florida, so far anyway, Florida writing, is that the first half of that's happened, but not the second half. The first half has happened in that people are writing about the splashy, colorful, exotic aspects of Florida. But, the deeper issues that are more pertinent to people outside of Florida, that are the mythical elements, I don't think have been discovered yet. People are still writing about Florida as though it's a foreign planet, as though it's outer space, and reporting back to the rest of the world, "Look at this weird, exotic, bizarre place." And, the literary culture in Florida is really still in its infancy, adolescence. But, in a way, that makes sense because so is the state.

Alvarez: What if I suggest to you that we go beyond traditional definitions of regionalism, whether they're country or urban regionalism, that rather than being in an infancy, we've gone past it? The lifestyle down here is never going to grow a regional literature where we're homogenous, where we share the same morality or ethnic backgrounds. We'll certainly be different in 15 or, you know, 150 years, but we're never going to have that old sort of regionalism.

Hall: Yeah, well, maybe that's true. Maybe that is true, that there is no long-term cultural center that Florida will have. I don't know. I'm not sure about that. But, whatever it is right now, the literature is really reflecting the more superficial elements of the culture that's here. And, if there is any deeper culture, any more meaningful culture that can be mined literately, it hasn't been discovered yet. Or, it's been discovered by people like Fowler, who writes about North Florida, and writes about old time Florida, and kind of a different Florida, altogether, than what South Florida represents. South Florida is really so different. The kind of literature that comes from South Florida is really so

different than the literature that could possibly come out of North Florida, which is much more like Southern literature. It has to do with family and history, and backgrounds, race, and issues of that kind, where South Florida has to do with just random, quick-changing behaviors and flash. Flash and glitz, but not, you know, traditional values.

Alvarez: The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?

Hall: Well, I think it's true that I, and others who write these kinds of books, pay attention to the news and are aware of the news. But, when we go to write, and use--and say, incorporate aspects of real life news situations in our work, we still have to transform them into fiction. We have to find their fictional place and their fictional power. You can't simply re-tell what the journalists tell, and report what's already been reported, and put it into a story, and make that story meaningful or useful. So, the writer's job still remains the same, wherever they find their material, which is to transform that material into something that is coherent and meaningful, and beyond just the raw data that the material comes from. Yet, that's one of the differences between the types of writers that we have in South Florida. I think the difference between say, Les's work and my work versus Paul, Edna and Carl, who all have journalistic backgrounds, their tendency is simply to report these exotic things, as though they are fancied-up news stories. I've heard Carl say several times that he'll write something, and then find something on the evening news that's even more outlandish and crazy than something he wrote. Well, that would never happen to me because I'm not competing against outlandish reality, in trying to outdo outlandish reality. I'm trying to figure out what the meaning of these events is, not just try to outdo--

Alvarez: To one-up them?

Hall: Yeah, to one-up the news stories. To me, that's counterproductive, and in the long term, it's just cartoonish. You know, you're going to create these superficial models that mock and imitate what's on Channel 7 every night. That goes nowhere, eventually. That's not literary. That's basically satire, you know. That's not really literary, I mean, not in the sense that I believe literary is. But, I don't think that's the right way to picture what it is we do, that we're not in competition with the news. That's not what a writer does,

is try to compete with the news and outdo the news. But, that's the impression you get sometimes, is that by retelling these outrageous stories that are seemingly plucked from the news here, that you get some sort of credit for that. Well, I don't see that. That's just retelling what everybody already knows here, and passing it on to the rest of the world as though this is--just the novelty of it is worth their time. Trying to find what the significance of the meaning and values of these situations are to the characters involved in them, rather than just to treat them as cartoon people, who are going through "X" situation, "Y" situation, and "Z" situation. That's not what I'm interested in.

Alvarez: Do you concern yourself with right and wrong, when you write violent scenes? And, what aesthetics does the violence satisfy?

Hall: I really don't know.

Alvarez: You're teaching me to interview more cleverly.

Hall: I really don't know. I wish you could tell me what I think, because I don't know what I think about this. It's a very troublesome part of the whole process. I don't like to witness violence. I don't like to participate in violence. I don't like to describe violence. I don't like to write about violence. I do, do it, and this is always an area that my editors and my agent have responded to over the years. You know, my first agent said, "Put more stuff in. You're too coy," you know, "Show it more." And, my current editor wants me to diminish it, to downplay it. The actual graphic portrayal of violence is what I'm talking about. In a way, I think it's morally reprehensible to write about murder in the way some British authors write about murder, in which there is a murdered body--there's a dead body on the lawn.

Alvarez: Like in Agatha Christie--

Hall: Yeah.

Alvarez: --or Dorothy Sayer?

Hall: But, basically, it's just an embarrassment, this bad, impolite thing has happened. Let's clean it up, and then find out who did it. And, then it becomes this sort of intellectual game, and it trivializes the actual, the situation. And, my feeling is that that's the role of violence, is of a role of using descriptive language, to describe violence in a novel is to make its ugliness and its horror real. That's the only purpose in it. And, whether that has a moral weight on one side or the other, I don't know. I don't know. But, it makes you very uncomfortable to do it. I don't have any fun doing it. I don't like the language you have to use. Nothing about

it is pleasurable. But, it is sort of at the heart of what these books are about.

Alvarez: How does Miami as setting work to support the important role of sex and/or violence in crime fiction?

Hall: Well—

Alvarez: Like in Gone Wild, like you do have the love scene, and you don't write many, but the one off South Beach with the neon lights, and the ocean?

Hall: Yeah, that's true.

Alvarez: That works well.

Hall: Well, I feel about the sex the way I do about violence. I don't like to—it's a dangerous area to write about, because there are so many cliches in sexual writing. But, on the other hand, I don't like to leave it out. I don't like to have someone—two people walk into a room, close the door, and then the chapter ends. I want to know—I think it's important that we know what the physical communication between these people is like, if they're important characters in the novel. I don't do it to titillate, but really as a part of what characterizing human beings and human behavior is. That's its role. But, in its relationship to Miami, I don't know. Miami is—well, say, in Hard Aground, for instance, one of the things that I was doing there with sex was that Hap was having all these sexual connections with people, looking for something more, but not looking in the right way, and not being prepared himself to know it when it came along. So, that's really the way that book starts, is that he is like the kind of Spring-break coupling that you associate with Florida, to serve anonymous "slam-bam, thank you, ma'am" contact between people that seems not just Florida, but it is part of that transient culture. And, Hap is a real representative of that type of person. When he gets connected with someone who is rooted, as he is in this place and this time, the relationship is more meaningful. It's difficult, but it's more meaningful than all these other relations he had. So, yeah, I see it as all connected. I see him trying to write about the place— See, I believe, in my case—I don't know if this is true with everybody—that this place, living in this place, has modified me as a human being in lots of serious ways. And, I believe that's true—I want to make that true also, for the characters in my stories. The place has a very profound impact upon them, shaping who they are.

Alvarez: Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Hall: Escape from the drab, day-to-day existence sort of thing?

Alvarez: Yes.

Hall: Well, sure, that's part of it. Yeah. But, I feel like one of the things that interests me about these stories, and reading them, and reading others' work, and in writing them for me, is something a lot more old-fashioned, and maybe more literary than escape. But, sure, entertainment is crucial, and escape is a big part of it. But, why this kind of escape, rather than some another kind of escape, I think the people choose this kind of book, and I choose to write this kind of book because I'm interested in, not issues necessarily to do with justice and law, and crime and police procedure, and stuff like that, but I'm interested in evil, and in the impact that evil has on people's lives. It's in a very old-fashioned, Melville, Poe—I'm not interested in what the procedures that the police use to track people down. I can care less. I'm interested in the way that good people deal with evil, and that evil people deal with good people. And, that interests me. And, I like to get real close—it's not unlike what Stephen King does. His genre is different, but it's also about evil. It's also about showing the horror of facing evil. But, that's also what Conrad did. Heart of Darkness is about evil. A lot of great literature is about evil. I'd say, to me, that's the difference between what I want to do, not what I do do, necessarily, but what I want to do, and what other people want to do, which is to write about the way people behave in the legal system, or the way people behave, when the police come to their door. I'm not interested in that. I just don't have any fascination of it at all.

Alvarez: I really think that you put your finger on important aspect of why people read you as crime fiction, is that people out there a lot of audience that are interested, too, in that, um, good and evil.

Hall: Oh, yeah, I mean, it's like a central human concern. It's not like something we just--crime writers discovered. Basically, that's what a fundamental part of what literature has always been about, is facing the dragon.

Alvarez: I'm glad you tied it in to this particular time.

Hall: Yeah, well, I don't see that as generally true with my peers. I don't think that they're as interested in that as I am. Fine and good. I'm glad they're not. This allows me to do something that's my own thing, which is—one of the things

that people bring up about my books a lot, is that I have these really extreme bad guys. And, to me, yeah, I do, but that's where they come from. They come from this sort of fascination with what is the nature of evil. What does evil look like? What does its face look like? How do they behave? And, one of the things, to go on with this just for a second, one of the _____--

Alvarez: Sure. It goes right into the next question anyway?

Hall: Well, one of the things that I see as a function of evil or danger, is the unrestrained, creative personality. This is what happens here. It wears off.

Alvarez: Yeah. I'd like to get to a place where it wears off, one of these days.

Hall: Well, you know, the thing that--this part wears off. The thing that stays exciting and interesting is the writing. That's what's--the bottom line is, if there's still a lot of--if you're still learning things and getting pleasure, and exploring new territory in writing, then that keeps you alive. But, this stuff, this really just becomes kind of part of the business. This is the job. This is what you've got to do to keep things moving ahead. I'll probably wind up, if she asks me anything, I'll probably wind up saying the same exact things I've been saying to you. But, actually, this was a good conversation. I've enjoyed this. It helps me. It reminds me of the sort of fundamental beliefs that I--and why I do what I do, and where I am, and what my territory is, and that sort of thing. That's an important thing, unless you want to go back to first principles, and remember that stuff. These are different questions, by the way, that I get asked when I'm on the book tour and stuff, because these are much more academic kind of questions, and more interesting to me than the kind of questions you get out on the book tour, that are just dreamed up by the publicity department at the publishing house. They say, "Well, how are we going to pitch this book to the magazines and newspapers, and so on." So, they come up with, you know, like 12 questions. And, those questions go out in advance, in front of you, you know, when you go out on the book tour. So, everywhere you go all the radio people, all the TV people, all the newspaper people ask you those same 12 questions, over and over and over again. And, it's incredibly tedious.

Alvarez: That makes a lot of sense to me now, because when I do see authors out, and they hit like all the talk shows in New York, it

seems like they are answering the same question, if I end up catching them.

Hall: Yeah, right, that's exactly what happens. Yeah, they send out those 12 questions. That's what Rosie O'Donnell sees up on her prompter to ask, and that's what Jay Leno sees up on his prompter, and this is the question that the PR people dreamed up, and this is the one that the writer has the pat answer to.

Alvarez: The whole idea is to get exposure.

Hall: It doesn't matter whether it's a--you know, you hope it's a catchy question, and something that will stick in someone's mind when they hear you answer that question. But, it becomes very mechanical, and very repetitive and boring.

Alvarez: We have a couple more questions, and you were leading me right into the next one, which is, how do you pick your villain's characterization?

Hall: Well, I do it very much by sort of what--well, two things. One thing, what scares me at the moment. You know, what do I consider a frightening situation and a type of person.

Alvarez: We were talking about the villain's characterization. So, you were saying what scares you?

Hall: Oh, yeah, what scares me. I get them--it's really their voice, when they start to talk, and I hear how they talk, what they say, what their--the pattern of their voice. That's when I know who they are. And, they have to be interesting to me. I said before--what I was saying before was, one of the things that all my bad guys, more or less, have in common is they're all very creative. And, I think that sort of suggests to me that there is an element of the creative personality, the id, the deep, unconscious animal sort of part of your personality, that's a little scary for a writer. It's the part that's a little crazy, a little unpredictable. And, so, I kind of assign that creative job to the bad guy. In fact, that is--that's the way I look at evil, anyway, in the world, is the--on the good side of evil is--it causes change. Without the Saddam Houssain's of the world, things wouldn't be different. And, they're not necessarily different, good and improved by Saddam Hussain, but they are changed by these active agents. And, they create drama. They have their own sense of what the universe should be like. And, it sometimes seems crazy, but most of the time it has its own logic to it.

Alvarez: That--it seems, to satisfy a need in humans, too, that drama.

Hall: Yeah, I think so.

Alvarez: When the scud missiles were dropping from the sky, we are all absolutely entranced.

Hall: Yeah, absolutely, you're right. Yeah.

Alvarez: Can you tell me a little bit about the ethnicity of your antagonists? Do you think that there's any kind of pattern there?

Hall: Not that I'm aware of. Why?

Alvarez: Well--

Hall: Got them all over the place.

Alvarez: I'm not sure that there is, either. But, there seems to be a little bit of a predominance of Hispanic villains.

Hall: Really?

Alvarez: --not in your work, in particular, but--

Hall: I don't see that. You know, I have them all over the place. I've got Blacks, whites, southern rednecks.

Alvarez: A lot of that, too, southern redneck, or corrupt politician type character.

Hall: Dougie in Bones of Coral is just a kind of mentally disturbed kid who feels no pain. Irv and ...are--I don't even know who they are, they're just sort of--I don't know that they have any ethnic. I don't see it. I don't see an ethnic bias, one way or the other. The bad guy in Gone Wild was from Borneo.

Alvarez: Right.

Hall: Yeah, I mean, he was like an Asian. But, let's see, the bad guy in--there were so many bad guys in Hard Aground. There was Alvarez, who is Hispanic. There was Hollings, who is a redneck. There's Martinez, who is Black. It's like the whole social--

Alvarez: Equal opportunity?

Hall: Yeah, the whole social range. The whole ethnic range in Miami is there in that one. And then, Martina was male and female, too. So, you have a guy who's also a woman, you know.

Alvarez: Yeah, that was cool.

Hall: I cover all the bases.

Alvarez: Do you think that your antagonists intentionally stimulate fears such as encroachment or lack of understanding for your audience?

Hall: What do you mean? Clarify the question.

Alvarez: I think I have to ask you the next one first. Do you know who is reading you? Is it across the board, or do you--does the fiction appeal to people like you, who are Anglo sort of middle Americans. For example, what kind of people do you meet when you go on a book tour?

Hall: I have men and women, about equally divided, from what I can see. I haven't noticed a lot of Black readers. I have Hispanic readers here, but they're probably, by and large, middle class. But, that's true with—that's just the demographics of book buyers in general, because hardback book buyers are almost always educated, middle class, upper middle class, you know, because they can afford a \$23.00 book. That's already a special group. I don't know--

Alvarez: Who's reading the paperbacks?

Hall: I don't really know. The paperbacks, I don't see the readers of them, and I don't—I hear from—I get fan letters all the time, but I don't know who they are. I don't know what—they don't tell me anything about themselves.

Alvarez: I'm going to try another question again, and maybe it's not a good question for you. But, the villains, the antagonists in your stories, do you think that you use them to intentionally stimulate fears of encroachment, like—

Hall: Stimulate fears of encroachment?

Alvarez: You said that you were interested in what scared you.

Hall: Well, encroachment isn't one of the things that I would say—uh, I wouldn't say that's one of the things on my list.

Alvarez: What about a lack of understanding?

Hall: In specifically what way?

Alvarez: In the way that South Florida is very much multi-cultural right now.

Hall: Oh, oh, oh, I see what you mean.

Alvarez: And, you have Haitian Blacks and American Blacks. And, you have Cuban Spanish...

Hall: Yeah, see, I don't see that as a big part of what I do. I'm not really concerned about those melting pot issues, and that aspect of what Miami is are the least interesting part of it to me. There was some of that in Hard Aground. I did that in a very conscious way. You know, my bad guys were multi-racial and multi-ethnic. But, I really have not consciously played with that one way or the other in the past. So, I really don't have a feel for that.

Alvarez: O.K. A scenario I wanted to cover, maybe just to take it out. You know what I'm saying?

Hall: O.K.

Alvarez: Could you tell me, please, about how you create your protagonist characterizations, your heroes, and what flaws do they have?

Hall: Well, Thorn started out as someone who is haunted by a bad thing he had done in the past, and that's still with him

'till today, even though it's not a subject matter in future books. It's someone who has not worked out all their sense of history and their sense of the past. He also is someone who I see as a representative of the person who has highly sensitized a place, that where he cares very much about where he is, and is influenced very much by the feel of the air and the amount of light, and you know, all those things. He's very much a product of Florida, the Keys. And then, Hap is anchored in a historical--he's caught up in problems that have to do with his past as well. You know, he's shaped by a history that is larger than he is. And, that sort of undermines his own sense of self. In the course of this book, he has to find himself, find his sense of identity, amidst a family of overshadowing personalities. And, so, yeah, I see my protagonists struggle--generally struggles with the past, struggles with time, a Freudian type of struggle, almost always, in my--and in my bad guys as well. They're almost always dealing with some unresolved thing that, it's not just a single-minded pursuit of money or something of that kind. Although, there is a lot of that in Hard Aground. But, with Hollings, say, Hollings emerges as a character of some meaningfulness to me, and he was working out problems. He was trying to find--when you first see him, he's trying to find something buried under the sand, you know, or trying to find treasure that's buried, the things that are buried in the cellar that isn't there, the cellar of the psyche. So, I think that's been a feature of almost all of my novels, is people who are trying to investigate the past.

Alvarez: How do you compare with your own protagonists?

Hall: Oh, I'm not nearly as anything as Thorn is. I mean, Thorn is far better than I am at almost everything. I'm a little better than Hap at some things. But, I see the writer as the dreamer. And, the dreamer is all the characters in the dream, not just the protagonist. I mean, I parcel myself out over all the characters. So, I wouldn't say that the protagonist is the one I most frequently identify with. Sometimes that is another character altogether. In some of the books, it's been the bad guy whom I feel the most kinship for. I've got a couple other people who are waiting to see me.

Alvarez: O.K. Um, one more, O.K.?

Hall: Yeah, one more.

Alvarez: One more. This is an easy one. Can I follow up with you, if I have several--a couple of more questions?

Hall: Sure, of course.

Alvarez: Very good.

Introduction to Vicki Hendricks Interview

Vicki Hendricks has a Masters degree in Literature as well as her MFA from Florida International University and a job teaching writing at Broward Community college. Her interview reflects her own free spirit when she discusses the kind of people that choose to migrate to South Florida particularly from the mid-west and points south. You will learn about her new passion, sky diving and that she finds the warm South Florida weather freeing both in what she writes about and how her she and her characters behave. Crime fiction for Vicki is an incidental of her real interest in character development and putting her characters in extreme situations in which they are certain to jump out of the law, much as she jumps out of planes. Vicki mentions several different writing projects in the interview. She is writing more crime fiction.

Vicki Hendricks Interview, 3/11/98

Alvarez: Suspense relies on the moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved and the guilty (are) finally identified and captured. Could you comment on this—both the idea of moral fantasy and the process of creating suspense?

Hendricks: First of all in Miami Purity the guilty weren't captured so that isn't really how I see things and I don't have any moral fantasies if that means somehow to make things right re: balance whatever has become unbalanced. I really have no feelings about doing that at all. I think I like chaos and things that are out of balance and that's really what I was trying to do in my book. My kind of fantasy is more of a fantasy of passion and obsession and allowing the people to get away with it because with the end it's possible that she could have been captured but I really sort of leave it up in the air so that she has to live with her own guilt and she doesn't like that but as far as somebody else taking control and punishing her I didn't really want that to happen.

Alvarez: Some of the other guilty are punished by her, right?

Hendricks: Sort of except how do you consider them guilty. They didn't really commit any crimes. She killed Brenda because well there was a, if you call it a crime, a sexual thing between her and Payne which I suppose most people would, I didn't think about that. (Note: Payne is her son)

Alvarez: Child molestation is in the book. He's grown up when we meet him and this has been going on.

Hendricks: Yes, we assume this has been going on since he was much younger but that's such a personal thing that I didn't really think of that as a crime. She probably wouldn't be arrested for it, I don't know. She's punished by Sherri, I guess for that so you could say that's true but it's really Sherri using that as a rationalization because she wants to get him away from his mother in a sense. I don't really think she knows why she's doing it. She doesn't even intend to do it, you know, and it just sort of happens and she lets it happen.

Alvarez: What about when Payne kills the other guy.

Hendricks: Payne kills Brian and of course Brian hasn't done anything at all so then you could say that Sherri kills Payne because of that but I don't think she killed him because of that really.

That just her to kill him. She probably just decided that he was evil for being with the other woman mainly.

Alvarez: So that was more the motivation?

Hendricks: Maybe. I don't know. (Phone rings) Let me get that. (Vicki comes back). I wanted to go on a little bit more about Sherri.

Alvarez: Sure.

Hendricks: I think that any real reasons that there seem to be for her committing murder probably don't have so much to do with it because I think of it as more of her psychological problems that she's had over the years and her problems with men and the fact that she thought that this was going to be her, you know, change. This was going to be her finding what's real and good in the world and then it turned out not to be. It's almost like she just goes on a rampage because of her own psychology I think

Alvarez: The second question: Crime fiction uses certain literary devices such as suspense identification and creating a slightly removed, imaginary world. The definition of suspense is "the writer's ability to evoke a temporary sense of fear about the fate of a character we care about, according to one of the people that study the form, Cawelti.

Hendricks: Aha.

Alvarez: Is South Florida an ideal model with its lack of history—or its ability to create its history as it goes along? South Florida as backdrop...

Hendricks: OK, that's the question. So the suspense part, we're past that right now?

Alvarez: We'll leave it alone, unless you want to say something about it.

Hendricks: To me South Florida is a good backdrop because of the variety more than anything, of people and then the opportunities to use nature also which I didn't really do very much in Miami Purity but I've been doing in my other writing which has only been seen by a few people at this point so I can't really refer to anything anyone would have seen. I have a story coming out called "West End" in a collection called Murder for Revenge that uses sailing so I guess you would call that part of the natural atmosphere. Right now I'm working on a book that has sky diving and a veterinarian at Lion Country Safari so this is all having to do with what you can have in South Florida that maybe you couldn't have in other places. So, I see it as an opportunity just to explore many different things in nature as well as have a variety of people who all have come here for

basically the weather. It's a group of people that maybe didn't have any firm roots in the first place so therefore they could all just pick up and leave. The weather was enough to bring them here. That's what brought me here. Maybe they have some sense of freedom that other people don't have. I don't know. There has to be something that accounts for the weirdness down here.

Alvarez: Where did you grow up?

Hendricks: In Cincinnati.

Alvarez: Was it a suburban or urban upbringing?

Hendricks: Suburban, little neighborhoods, and it was very dull. I had just a very dull, average kind of childhood so I think it's much more exciting to have a life in South Florida and I'm sure it's probably not so good for children but I think they turn out to be different sorts of characters from people you would have in the Mid-west and it's all good for imagination.

Alvarez: Does South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?

Hendricks: Regional phenomena... I feel like I already answered that in the preceding question.

Alvarez: OK...

Hendricks: I could add scuba diving which is in another book I've been working on and all the possibility for drugs and murder, everything we see on the news every day. I think we have it in larger proportions than say the Mid-west.

Alvarez: Are all the new books that you're working on all going to be in the crime fiction genre?

Hendricks: I've finished a couple that haven't been sold yet. I don't know if they're completely finished or not but they both have crimes in them. The way it works for me, I don't really want to have a crime and have it solved and have police procedure and detectives and mystery. It's the characters that are to the point where somehow that's the way they deal with life, by going over the top, committing murder, going too far. They're not out to hustle or anything. It's just that they boil over and these things happen so to me that's just reaching a peak of emotion when it gets into the crime area.

Alvarez: Are they sociopath? In other words, they can't tell right from wrong or their moral compass is not working?

Hendricks: I think they're probably pretty amoral but I wouldn't go as far as a sociopath. That sounds just extreme. They always have reasons for what they do that seems to make it right

to them even though anyone else could look at that and say "that's sheer insanity."

Alvarez: I'll have to see if that fits the definition.

Hendricks: They have their own morals. They just might not be other peoples'. They might be screwed up.

Alvarez: Fair enough. The next question, I'm sure you answered. I'll just say it for the record. What characteristics of South Florida attract you to both live in the area and place your stories here?

Hendricks: Well, I already mentioned the weather and it used to be scuba diving which now I don't do very much but only on vacation when I go other places (laughing) and now it's skydiving.

Alvarez: Are you a skydiver now?

Hendricks: I'm just getting my certification. I'm in the AFF training, the accelerated free fall, which is eight jumps and then you're qualified to do it without anybody helping you. I've only done one because it's been so windy that I haven't been able to get onto my second one yet. I only started about a month ago.

Alvarez: How did it feel?

Hendricks: Oh, it's incredible. That moment of being out of control when you just fling yourself out of the plane. You just feel like you're falling into nowhere, just what it looks like, that's just how it feels. You do that for awhile because part of the training you're learning how to move yourself and get around in free fall and then when that canopy opens it's like "Ah."

Alvarez: And then you regain some measure of control.

Hendricks: Yeah, yeah, if you know what you're doing. You're supposed to guide yourself into the proper formation and then land into the wind but it's not as easy as it sounds.

Alvarez: I can imagine.

Hendricks: I've only done it once and I didn't land on the target. It was a really windy day and I was blown back. I didn't turn soon enough because I didn't know it was going to blow me back so you've got to do all this calculating of the wind which you just get more and more experience as you go along.

Alvarez: Sounds like it will be thrilling to read about.

Hendricks: It should be interesting. I did a tandem last week because it was too windy for the students so I just went up. They attach you to some guy on your back. I told him to do everything he could think of. So we did all these backwards, forwards, upside down, and what he calls the vomitron, where he whirls you around (laughing). Didn't

phase me at all. I have the strongest stomach in the world. Anyway, that's my most recent excitement and you could do that up north of course but we have the warm weather and I don't want to...it drops three degrees every thousand feet if I have it right, so I don't want to go up in twenty degree weather and sky dive just like I don't want to scuba dive in that and it also probably makes it better for anyone who's out committing crimes because they don't have to freeze.

Alvarez: That's right.

Hendricks: I really think that you have so much more freedom here than someplace with cold weather. You just don't huddle in the house and so people get out and do things whether they're good things or bad things or crazy things. It's all material.

Alvarez: The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?

Hendricks: I don't think I have much to do with that because I'm really just concerned with the psychology of the characters and I hate to really think about plot although, you know, you have to put one in so I think once in awhile something occurs to me that I could use. It could come from the newspaper, the headlines or something. I can't recall anything that I've taken from there but you're always aware of everything around you and I think it gets in there somewhere so I don't see how it could take away from it. If anything, it could add something which contradicts what I said about it not influencing me at all.

Alvarez: You're saying that on some level the headlines do help to fuel ideas?

Hendricks: I don't consciously look for things but I'm sure they get in there somehow.

Alvarez: Miami does not comply with the traditional definition of regional characteristics which include local pride, defensiveness, condescension, superficial presentation of local lore, homogenous cultural and ethnic qualities. Can you help me with a definition and characterizations of *Urban Regionalism* and to determine how Miami does and / or does not conform to that definition?

Hendricks: The definition above, you're saying how Miami does or doesn't conform to that?

Alvarez: Right, the traditional definition of regionalism, regional literature. Since you do have an academic background, I thought maybe you could tackle that one.

Hendricks: Well, academically...I don't know what that has to do with it. I would say again going back to the variety we're just the opposite of the homogenous cultures.

Alvarez: That is what's underlined to you?

Hendricks: Yes, that's what Miami is, just a variety of every kind of people and getting more so all the time. That silly thing about "the rules are different here," well I think that's really true. We just have a million different rules. Everybody has their own rules from wherever they came. It makes driving crazy, confusion otherwise sometimes.

Alvarez: Can you think of some other examples?

Hendricks: One thing I notice when I go to other places, actually two things. First of all when you go into restaurants the people that serve you all speak English and can understand your questions and things like that which really bothers me. After a couple of days in some city in the mid-west it's so boring. I just feel like something's missing and I think you just get cut off from the rest of the world. I never felt cut off when I lived in Cincinnati but somebody with an accent in the same restaurant, everybody would be amazed. Maybe it's changing there too. I don't know if other people are moving. I hardly ever go to any place in the mid-west anymore. The variety of language and everything you learn not even noticing that you're learning it is to me one of the best things about Miami and that whole area. Also, another thing I'm noticing is that the clothing is so much different. I'm sure this is true of places like California and whatever also. My mother now lives in Colorado. Whenever I go out there I never have any clothes that I can wear in the summer. Everything is too short, too tight, too...you know. She'll point out women in the grocery store and say, "Look at that dress," and I'll think, "Yeah, I have a couple of those at home. What about it?" It's just like you pack to go someplace cold. You think you've got warm enough clothes but you've forgotten what it's like. And then you get there and you're freezing to death and you haven't even come close. You think, "OK, this is what it's like. Next time I'll remember." But then you come back home and you forget again.

Alvarez: You become comfortable?

- Hendricks: Yes, and you go back off and you haven't brought a heavy enough coat or whatever. You get used to having all of these variety of people, languages, and the freedom to walk around with almost no clothing and then you go off and you find out the rest of the world isn't like that.
- Alvarez: Getting back to this idea of a regional literature, do you think that is even fair to say now, that crime fiction is the regional literature of South Florida?
- Hendricks: I don't think so. At least I hope not. There's so much other stuff. I personally don't read very much crime fiction at all and I haven't for a long time. I think in high school I used to read more. We have all the other, the Latin American influence, and all that so I hope that it wouldn't just be pinned on crime fiction. We can have many varieties of things again, combinations and we do. We have Judith Ortiz Copra's [sp?] a good friend of mine. She was here for a long time. Now she's in Georgia but she had her combination of Puerto Rican and New Jersey, then South Florida. My roommate from a couple of years ago, Lisa Alvo [sp?] is a poet and she has her combination of Cuban and South Florida and many other people like her. I would hate to think that we're just thought of as crime and mystery.
- Alvarez: So you see us as being able to support a regional literature but it would be a mixture of different genres.
- Hendricks: Yes. I don't think we really have anything right now that could be said to be our regional literature but I would think it would be something international, some kind of international combination. That would be much more interesting than just crime. The crime of course contains international characters.
- Alvarez: Next question. Do you concern yourself with right and wrong when you write violent scenes, and could we talk about sex scenes at the same time? The sub-question is what aesthetic does violence satisfy?
- Hendricks: These are tough.
- Alvarez: Take your time.
- Hendricks: I'm trying to decide whether I think about right and wrong when I'm writing a scene of violence or sex. I think the kind of violence I use I don't really think about it being right or wrong because usually to me it doesn't seem that realistic. The violent part to me just— it's some point that they've reached that has to come when I've gotten to that place in the plot, and it doesn't feel. It just feels like a plot device. I

don't think I really think about right and wrong and I don't think of its affects on the world because I don't think people would take it that seriously.

Alvarez: So, in other words, the violence satisfies the aesthetics of the plot?

Hendricks: Yes, yes.

Alvarez: You're saying it's necessary to move the story along?

Hendricks: At some point I get there where they have become heated to the point of violence or needy to the point of violence or something. I guess it's more of a choice for the art thing.

Alvarez: This next question, you have already touched on. Let me know if you'd like to add anything. How does Miami as setting work to support the important role of sex and violence in the crime fiction form? You mentioned things like the weather and that people are freer to do...

Hendricks: Right, and the drug trade and we seem to have our share of weapons around. People are interested in weapons. Not only do we have the international group. We seem to have a combination of, oh, redneck groups and you know, sort of misfits from all over the country. They come here looking for good weather.

Alvarez: Would you include the Cubans that are exiled here and would like to train and take Cuba back over as part of the international group that you mentioned?

Hendricks: I suppose they would be. I don't tend to get into many political issues in my writing. It's more psychological I guess.

Alvarez: How do you prepare for that. Is it just observation or do you have a background in psychology?

Hendricks: No, I actually thought of going for a degree in psychology because it's just so interesting to me so I guess that's why I'm more interested in human nature than anything else. My sister actually is getting a Ph.D. in experimental psychology but that's all biological really. It's MRI's, looking at chemistry in the brain, and all that. To me that's very interesting so that's what I like to explore with people. I just want to see where things lead me personality wise.

Alvarez: Next question. Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Hendricks: I'm sure it must be. Since I don't read much crime fiction I don't know.

Alvarez: You wrote a little.

Hendricks: I know. I don't know how that keeps happening. I guess I escape when I write it so that would be the same thing I would do if I was reading it. The sexual part, I guess that's

an escape also. I would have to say that escape is the major reason. I certainly am not getting across any philosophy or trying to tell anyone how to live...

Alvarez: How not to live?

Hendricks: Yeah, anything moral. I can't really see any other reason to read it other than that and if you enjoy writing, I read for mostly technique anymore. I don't really read for a story. I don't remember how to do that.

Alvarez: So you actually read to see how other people put it all together?

Hendricks: I don't sit down to do that but that's what always happens. The plots going at the same time and I'm somewhat concerned with that but I don't really care what happens at the end, I just am interested with how it's being done. I just finished Ian McEwan's new novel, Enduring Love, which was great but I don't even think ahead wondering what's going to happen to people or really getting involved with the characters to that degree. I just am looking at how he's doing it. It was really interesting how he was doing it.

Alvarez: How do you pick your villain's characterization?

Hendricks: Pick it?

Alvarez: When you sit down to write, you probably think that you will write about a protagonist and an antagonist.

Hendricks: I don't think when I first start I know what the person is going to be like, either one, and I think the villain develops as I'm going along. Probably, I just had an idea of what the villain is going to have to do. I maybe know something that they're doing that is wrong or something that they've done that is wrong or something in their psychology that's going to cause them to go wrong but I don't have a villain that's out really to commit a crime so it's not the kind of villain that say Jim Hall might have who has a past history of crimes and extreme kind of living. My people, I was going to say, more normal (laughing). They're abnormal in their thinking but they live more normally, usually.

Alvarez: Would you equate Payne to the villain in Miami Purity?

Hendricks: I would have to say that he would be the villain but he doesn't other than finally comes to murder. He doesn't have that tendency. Somehow he's able to do that because he reaches a point of fear. That's why I thought he killed Brian, because of fear. He didn't set out to commit a crime in the first place like most of the crime novels where somebody is in it for the money or they're setting forth a plan to go on a crime spree or they have a plan for

murder. He just gets to the point where he thinks he has to commit that murder.

Alvarez: Can you tell me a little about the ethnicity of your antagonist, Payne, the villain?

Hendricks: Well, he's Irish, right? That's about all I remember. I think I just picked that because I knew a lot of Irish people and I thought it was kind of interesting how they make such an important thing out of being Irish because I have a Northern European background which is part German and part this and that. I'm not exactly sure what all, and I don't really think about that but I notice that friends that I have that are Irish, they constantly talk about that.

Alvarez: It's a nationalist feeling?

Hendricks: Yes, and also it seems to be a family thing. "We're Irish, and we're the best," kind of thing. I thought that would work well. I put that in a little bit. I don't remember that much about it now.

Alvarez: It's not emphasized, right?

Hendricks: No, it's just that you have to give him a background so that's what I gave him. I could have picked something else. I just know that better. I had a past boyfriend who was Irish so I had things to draw from there.

Alvarez: I'm going to ask the same thing about Sherri, the protagonist in Miami Purity. Could you tell me a little bit about her ethnicity?

Hendricks: I don't think she knows it, does she? Her last name is Parlay, which I made up out of the word, parley, which sounds a little bit French, I guess, so I suppose she has French. I don't think she ever mentions it and I don't think that's important to her.

Alvarez: Wasn't there something in the book about her making up her name?

Hendricks: I don't remember. She was called Cherri at some point and in Baltimore she shortened her first name to Cher. I don't remember anything about the last name.

Alvarez: So, I'm getting the sense that ethnicity doesn't play a big part in your characterization.

Hendricks: No. I did have the Cuban college student who worked at the dry cleaners but that was just because I thought, "Well, that might be a natural thing." Anything to do with ethnicity isn't really important to me.

Alvarez: Even though there is a large ethnic mix in South Florida it doesn't influence your work?

Hendricks: No. I think it's interesting to live around but I'm not really pro anything. I'm not really patriotic or anything like that so

I really don't have feelings about groups of people, just individuals. I'm really more interested in the individual so I just put that in as realism. I just try to add it as more detail that you need to know about people that are in the story.

Alvarez: Ethnicity aside, could you please tell me more about how you create your protagonist's characterization?

Hendricks: I would say that probably part of it is a mixture of maybe some people that I know. Considering Sherri, she was probably a mixture of maybe two women and a couple of men.

Alvarez: She did have masculine characteristics, definitely.

Hendricks: I have a hard time telling the difference between masculine and feminine characteristics but I've been told that.

Alvarez: One thing that remained in my mind, and I read Miami Purity a couple of years ago, is the way Sherri referred to her bones...back bone, hip bones, bones in general in a sexual context¹

Hendricks: Maybe that's in there and I just don't remember it or I put it in there without knowing it. I don't remember that. Well I think that people might consider her extreme interest in sex as being masculine. I don't think that's masculine but I guess some people do and she is kind of on the tough side and takes action when she sees the need in a violent way. But, there were, I had a couple of men in mind and a couple of women. The drinking the Schnapps, that came from somebody. Oh, she had something written on her car, that was from a real person, the initials. Just little tid-bits and then the other part of her personality just developed as it went along. I start with some things and the book I'm writing now, which is so far called The Cub, but I think it's going to be renamed, I have my ex-roommate from college in mind. She's a veterinarian and a very strange person so I'm sort of setting her in the Okeechobee area. I'm moving her from one place to another. They're part real people and then part of them just evolves as they go through whatever they're going to do.

Alvarez: What flaws do your protagonists have?

Hendricks: Oh, I guess a lack of control over themselves is the main thing. Control is always something that I'm dealing with. How much freedom do you have and how much is already set down for you by your environment and your past experiences and your brain chemistry. The flaws are things that I don't really consider them being able to fix. They're things that they're born with, mainly.

Alvarez: That goes back to the idea of Greek tragedy. Certain things are predestined and you unfold the story.

Hendricks: Yes, and that's why in the end she pretty much ends up the way she was in the beginning.

Alvarez: A stripper.

Hendricks: She's given her all and it didn't get her anywhere.

Alvarez: Do you think we'll see her come back.

Hendricks: No. She might have used that gun by now. One way or another. Oh, well.

Alvarez: How do you compare with your own protagonists? Isn't that something that came up when you went on the book tour for Miami Purity?

Hendricks: No, what did you hear?

Alvarez: When you were on the talk show circuit people were identifying you with Sherri.

Hendricks: That did happen a little bit, yes. I think that's a normal thing that people do anyway. They always want to think that the writer is the character and I'm definitely not that character. Now, maybe I have some stripping fantasies somewhere along the line, or maybe some murder fantasies. I doubt that. Writing the book frees you to do things that you would never do. I'm sure that's true for everybody and then people just want to think...well, I guess it is a side of you that's in there. When I did some of the little TV things that you're talking about they wanted to take pictures in some of the strip clubs. I ended up...not many strip clubs will really let you in because they don't like the looks of those cameras. Most of the men in there don't really want to be on TV you know or have their picture taken in a strip club. We could only get into one place and as a result of that I think I had to go back there four times for various things.

Alvarez: Here, in South Florida?

Hendricks: It was in Pompano. What's the name of that? I can't remember. Something on Powerline. It was very strange because I had been in those kind of places maybe a couple of times previously in my life, with a date, looking around. Then, after I had done the book mostly just making it up or from a little bit of observation. After that I had been in that same place so many times I got to know people. I started to feel like I was then becoming what I had written, somehow. I never danced except when one of the dancers grabbed me once and threw me around and I couldn't get down. That was amazing. She just picked me up under the hips and twirled around.

Alvarez: A female dancer?

Hendricks: Um hum. And my hair was whipping around. I had to get this on video for that show "7:30" It was pretty much of a riot. She was trying to pull down the zipper on my dress 'cause I had that Miami Purity pink and black dress made to look like the book cover. So, you see me there holding my zipper and twirling around. It was very strange. And then, when I went to the dry cleaning convention, that was another thing, it's like, "Am I going to live this book?" On the research, the first dry cleaner I went to to do some research, which Jim Hall had recommended to me, I went in there and I had already named my characters and I was introduced to Brenda² immediately. Strange coincidences happened all the time.

Alvarez: James Hall recommended the dry cleaner?

Hendricks: Yes. He said he knew someone who owned the dry cleaner that he went in North Miami so I went there. He said the guy was interesting

Alvarez: So, your fiction became reality?

Hendricks: Not quite, but more so than I ever dreamed and it was a little creepy too because there were a few people that I had talked to in some way for research about the book who died in the meantime as well. By the time the book was out there were two people who had died that I had taken some information or characteristics from.

Alvarez: Strippers?

Hendricks: No, just a woman who I took some characteristics from and a guy that explained the use of the gun, with the different barrels, that I gave Sherri. His death was a suicide and the other was cirrhosis of the liver.

Alvarez: Is there a Hispanic or Black audience for crime fiction?

Hendricks: Let's see, I'm thinking of Tananarive Due. There is for horror. And then Carolina³ has the Cuban female detective so I guess there must be but I wouldn't have the knowledge to be able to do that myself.

Alvarez: When you go out to book signings, what does your audience look like?

Hendricks: A lot of little old ladies, that I always feel very nervous about being there. Very young people. I suppose there isn't much of a mixture, an ethnic mixture. I have had some Black people in the audience, some Latin, but I can't recall that many. A lot of men do read it though. It's not just women and with a female narrator I'm glad that's not the case.

Alvarez: I've been told by several authors that the demographic of people who read are 35 to 55 year old White women. Do you think you have more men in your audience?

Hendricks: It seems pretty half and half to me, but maybe I pay more attention to the men (laughing). I have what I call the peripheral male that stands off to the side, doesn't really sit down at a reading, just sort of stands there and watches so I keep seeing this movement out of the corner of my eye and then kind of wanders up at the end to chat. I just notice the men because they seem to be in that position.

Alvarez: Encroaching a little bit?

Hendricks: Yeah, yeah.

Alvarez: Do you get asked out a lot?

Hendricks: Occasionally, yeah, and mostly by creepy people.

Alvarez: Well, say no. Have you sold the book in Europe and Japan?

Hendricks: I have France, Italy, Netherlands, Korea, Japan, Israel, a couple more, Brazil.

Alvarez: Is it possible that crime fiction is only of interest in the Anglo culture?

Hendricks: Well, no, I don't think so. Probably more so than other cultures but apparently...well my book was translated into Portuguese but not Spanish. Japanese, Korean, I guess it's a wide variety of cultures that are interested but maybe in the United States it's mostly Anglos.

Alvarez: Do you think this could represent the Anglo population as coming to terms with a multi-cultural society?

Hendricks: No.

Alvarez: I'm going to ask you the first question again. Suspense relies on the moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved and the guilty are finally identified and captured. Could you comment on that, the creation of suspense, especially in light of the fact that the way you create your mystery does not rely on a moral fantasy of the bad being captured?

Hendricks: Right. I think maybe that makes it more difficult for me because I don't know where I'm going. Most people, they know the ending is going to be somebody captured, somebody brought to justice where as I have no idea what my ending is going to be. It's just a working out of psychology and a person trying to get somewhere, trying to live in the way that they think is best for them and not having a clear view of what is best for them or what's best for other people. As far as doing something, and then having the police come in and set them right, I never have that in mind. That isn't the kind of suspense that I build up.

Alvarez: You actually rely on the audience, if not identifying with, at least caring about your main character to take them through to the end.

Hendricks: And it's a problem because I don't like to make really nice main characters either, so Sherri is a hard person to like and most people do just because she's so determined. They see her strength of determination and perseverance and maybe she gets some sympathy because of her background but some people really hate her and cannot stand anything about her, a few. Most people do like her but the few people that don't are really outspoken.

Alvarez: They're passionate about it, but they do finish the book?

Hendricks: Well, I haven't talked to too many people that disliked her, but the couple of people that I did have read it in a book club where they were going to discuss it so maybe they just would have finished it anyway, no matter how awful it was.

Alvarez: Maybe they were hoping that the moral fantasy would kick in.

Hendricks: Maybe so. If you're reading to have the world put in balance then I don't think Miami Purity is going to do it for you.

Alvarez: There is a certain poetry of the dry cleaning establishment, the way it gets the dirt out and the way she adopts that as her career...

Hendricks: Um hum.

Alvarez: to expunge herself of the dirt.

Hendricks: I know. When I thought of the dry cleaner's I knew it was perfect. I actually got the idea from one of my students at BCC ⁴ just telling me that she worked in the dry cleaners and mentioning that they find the strangest things in people's pockets. That's when I decided to set it there and then the whole metaphoric value of it gradually evolved throughout the book.

Alvarez: How did the FIU Creative Writing MFA program influence the way you shape your fiction?

Hendricks: It influenced it in every way because before I started the program I really had no idea of how to begin a novel or a short story and the idea of having to get a conflict in there, of having to get someone in there who was actively pursuing something and would then run into trouble, I hadn't even thought about it. I was always considering characterization and nothing else. I had considered writing for years but never really started because you think of something and then don't know where to go with it so really having an idea of structure is what got me started.

Alvarez: Do you think that because Les Standiford and Jim Hall write crime fiction that colored the way you were going to go about your prose?

Hendricks: No, actually I took one class with Les and a couple of classes with Jim, but only one workshop class, and I took most of my workshops with Lynn Barret and she doesn't write mystery or crime. Well, she has some mystery stories, short stories, but I think the main thing was that I had never read James M. Cain before and she introduced me to James M. Cane and I just immediately fell in love with his work, The Postman Always Rings Twice ⁵ and Serenade has become my favorite after that. From that point on I went through all of his work. I read everything. I was immersed in it. The way that he conveys passion, emotion, obsession, animalistic kind of behavior, was what I really loved about the books. That's what I wanted to do and that's what I still want to do. That's why I keep ending up with something criminal just because the characters go too far in their obsessions. I guess I'm really interested in obsession overall.

Alvarez: Well OK, that's the end of my questions. Is there anything you'd like to go back to before we conclude?

Hendricks: The idea of cuisine as being part of South Florida. I guess that most major cities now have a variety of cuisine but I'm very interested in food. I find that comes out in my work. I'm not sure so much in Miami Purity because I can't remember. Yes, they were eating Chinese food at one point and I think she ate a grouper sandwich somewhere. I recently have finished a book where the characters go to Key West and they are planning to live for a year on her inheritance and commit suicide after that but of course they run out of money before the year is up and they start robbing gourmet restaurants.

Alvarez: For the food or for the money?

Hendricks: For the food but then accidentally somebody hands them some money and they decide it's easier because the carry-outs are just getting cold and ruined on the way home anyway so they end up into some crime and using weapons so it kind of goes that direction. But, again, the cuisine is something else to work with. It's not the old mid-western meat and potatoes around here. I think that's valuable as another variety that you can use in your work.

Alvarez: It's another characteristic of Miami or South Florida?

Hendricks: And getting more so all the time. That's something I'm very interested in, eating.

Alvarez: OK! Thank you for the interview.

Introduction to Elmore Leonard Interview

One might imagine that Elmore Leonard would be the most difficult author to arrange an interview with since he is, in my estimation, the most famous of the South Florida crime fiction writers and his book, Get Shorty, had just opened as a movie starring John Travolta. Surprisingly, he was quite willing to give me a telephone interview from his home after I met him at the Naked Came the Manatee book signing on South Beach.

Mr. Leonard speaks quickly, or maybe he just packs a great deal of information into each sentence and it is not all reflected in this interview. La Brava is very representative of South Florida in the early 1980's when most of the writers agree, everything changed for the region politically, economically and socially. A chapter of La Brava appears in a short anthology called Florida Stories that is used for some Freshman Composition and Literary Analysis courses at Florida International University. The students generally are dissatisfied with one chapter and want more Leonard, more of 1980's South Florida and more of the quirky characters that drive Leonard's fiction.

Elmore Leonard is one of the first male authors to set a number of his crime fiction novels in South Florida. This thesis will look at LaBrava, published in 1983 and set on Miami's South Beach during its transition from an old peoples park into a chic vacation spot at the time when the seeder elements of the Mariel boat lift called it home. LaBrava is a photographer who used to be a secret service agent. He takes pictures of people as

described by his friend Maurice talking to Evelyn, a Coconut Grove gallery owner;

"He shoots people. Here, the old Jewish broads sitting on the porch--sure, you're gonna get some of the hotel (art deco). The hotel's part of the feeling. These people, time has passed them by. Here, Lummus Park. They look like a flock of birds, Uh? The nose shields, like beaks."

"Old New York Jews and Cubans," Evelyn said.

"That's the neighborhood, kid. He's documenting South Beach like it is today(2)."

Like his character, LaBrava, Elmore Leonard is also documenting the neighborhood. He explained that he had an interest in setting his stories here because South Florida has a wonderful mixture of people. LaBrava is set on South Beach because the Mariel boatlift dumped a bunch of criminal drug dealers in the midst of retirees on South Beach. They mix and mingle among the art deco hotels and broad beach parks planned long before either the old people or the Cuban drug dealers were imagined. Naturally sparks are created when mixing disparate entities. His plots are as likely to come from the newspaper headlines as his own imagination and his characters are in many instances real people he glimpsed in a newspaper story set in a fictional story line. Leonard has enjoyed recent popularity through films with two other novels set in South Florida, Get Shorty and Rum Punch (called Jackie Brown in the movie). He is always fresh because his books provide

visual and auditory snapshots of rapidly changing times through characters that are trying to cope.

Joseph LaBrava, now a photographer, displays this same quality. "He's not pretentious like a lot of 'em either," Maurice said. "you don't see any bullshit here. He shoots barefaced fact. He's got the feel and he makes *you* feel it (2)." LaBrava also has many of the incongruities that correspond to South Beach in the 1980's. He is an Anglo but he has a Hispanic last name that translates into "The Brave." Leonard does not explain how he got it. Before he was a secret service agent he was an IRS investigator. His friend Maurice says, "He is one of those quiet guys, you never know what they're going to do next (4)." His background makes him perfectly suited to negotiating a crime plot. He is the hero with the most qualifications for his role. The other male protagonists discussed below do not have crime fighting backgrounds and have to find the strength and attributes to overcome their foes from within. LaBrava has long ago shed his secret service suit and skinny tie. Now he dresses in fruit print shirts and doesn't get his hair cut making him appear to be an ordinary guy.

LaBrava's hometown is Detroit, like the author's, indicating a street smart middle American background. Maurice asks LaBrava to tell him about his secret service experience which leads into the boring political speeches LaBrava had to endure. Maurice brings the story back to South Florida; "You should a heard William Jennings Bryan, The Peerless Prince of Platform English, Christ, lecture on the wonders of Florida--sure, brought in by the real

estate people (10)." This cynical observation strikes at the heart of the marriage between exploitative businessmen, famous promoters, and the fragile paradise of the region.

Leonard brings the past alive through Maurice. He is at least 79 and tells LaBrava about how South Beach used to be in the 1950's when Frank Sinatra and Edward G. Robinson were making a movie there and bookies buttoned the top button of their sport shirts so people would know where to place a bet (6). South Beach's past has the ability to excite the reader with images of gambling and mob activity. Before you know it the reader with an active imagination and some historical background is seeing the thrill of 50's movie making and illicit gambling layered on the current plot. "There were lighted windows along the block of three and four-story hotels, pale stucco in faded pastels, streamlined moderne facing the Atlantic from a time past; each hotel expressing its own tropical deco image in speed lines, wraparound corners, accents in glass brick, bas relief palm trees and mermaids (6)." There are only three or four pockets of grouped art deco architecture in the world and only the South Beach example reflects the tropical environment as Leonard observes. "Go outside, all you see is color and crazy lines zooming all over the place. God, hotels that remind you of ships...(29)."

The villain in LaBrava is a woman called Jean Shaw. She was a movie star who tried to get a part in that Sinatra movie. She was too young for the role, met a wealthy lawyer on the Beach and got married. In typical Leonard fashion we don't know she is the villain until the end. The beads are an

unlikely duo. One is an ex-cop, ex-security guard not too bright blond redneck and the other is a sexually ambivalent gay nightclub stripper and Marielito drug dealer. The first, Richard Nobles, is a, "Homegrown jock-- pumped his muscles and tested his strength when he wasn't picking his teeth (19)." He has a back-country drawl that greased his words. *Picture* was pronounced *pitcher* for instance. Cundo Rey is the other accomplice to an elaborate plot directed by Jean Shaw to bilk Maurice out of a large sum of money. His partner sees Cundo as a "...Cuban hotshot with wavy hair and little gold ring in his ear...the first nigger Richard Nobles had ever seen with long wavy hair. It was parted on the right side and slanted down across his forehead over his left eye. The hair and his gold chains and silk shirts gave Cundo Rey his hot-shit Caribbean look (33-4)." These antagonists will appear in similar form in several of the books under consideration. The redneck and the Cuban play Jean Shaw's henchmen. Cundo and Richard are motivated by a combination of greed and sexual attraction. Cundo expresses a latent fascination with the boorish Richard;

Was he a queer? At first, usually when they were sitting in the Plymouth looking over a car dealership, Nobles had half-expected Cundo to reach over and try to cop his joint; but he had not tried it yet and he did talk about ass like he got his share of it; so Nobles decided Cundo was straight. Just weird.

But why would a man, even a Cuban, act like a queer if he wasn't one(35)?

Cundo Rey danced gogo from Palm Beach down to South Beach for ladies night and occasionally for a gay bar called Cheeky's where he would have to stuff his nose with cocaine to work up his nerve. So, Richard tolerates Cundo and is manipulated by the middle aged but still striking movie star.

LaBrava is led around by his sexual attractions as well. He was a pubescent teen when he fell in love with Jean Shaw in the darkness of the movie theater. These next lines summarize his thoughts of Jean Shaw right before he meets her in Maurice's apartment for the first time. They are also included to portray how the South Beach setting affects the characterization in a way unique to this region;

Wait. He moved to one of the front windows, stood with his hands resting on the air-conditioning unit. He thought he knew everything there was to know about time. Time as it related to waiting. Waiting on surveillance. Waiting in Mrs. Truman's living room. But time was doing strange things to him now. Trying to confuse him.

What he saw from the window was timeless, a Florida post card. The strip of park across the street. The palm trees in place, the sea grape. The low wall you could sit on made of coral rock and gray cement. And the beach. What a beach. A desert full of people resting it was so wide. People out there with blankets and umbrellas. People in the green part of the ocean, before it turned deep blue. People so small they could be from any time. Turn the view around. Sit on the coral wall and look this way at the hotels on Ocean Drive and see back

into the thirties. He could look at the hotels, or he could look at Maurice's photographs all over his apartment, be reminded of pictures in old issues of *Life* his dad had saved, and feel what it was like to have lived in that time, the decade before he was born, when times were bad but the trend, the look, was to be "modern."

Now another time frame was presenting pictures, from real life and from memory. A 1950s movie star with dark hair parted in the middle, pale pure skin, black pupils, eyes that stared with cool expressions, knowing something, never smiling except with dark secrets. The pictures brought back feelings from his early teens, when he believed the good guy in the movie was out of his mind to choose the other girl, the sappy one who cried and dried her eyes with her apron, when he could have had Jean Shaw (41-2).

It is the tricks of time that keep LaBrava blind to Jean's machinations until the conclusion of the novel.

Elmore Leonard Interview, 2/6/97

- Alvarez: Suspense relies on the moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved and the guilty (are) finally identified and captured. Could you comment on this—both the idea of moral fantasy and the process of creating suspense?
- Leonard: I don't know how the book is going to end. Maximum Bob doesn't change. I don't want him to change. I don't go along with the suspense school. I am influenced by writers outside of the crime story, which relies primarily on plot. My books are more character driven. Swag, Gold Coast for instance.
- Alvarez: What characteristics of South Florida attract you to both live in the area and place your stories here?
- Leonard: I have been visiting Florida since 1950—I've always been there, so familiarity encourages me to place some of my stories there. Florida is not an imaginary world. It contains a contrast of different kinds of people that live in South Florida, Palm Beach County. Palm Beach and Okeechobee contrast. Name the place and what's going on. Out of Sight is about a Glades prison escape. It's based on a real escape. My books are anchored in reality.
- Alvarez: Does South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?
- Leonard: Any region can be a literary region.
- Alvarez: The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?
- Leonard: I use what I'm able to use. A news story might provide back story for a character. Pictures in the paper inspire a character. In Out of Sight the woman marshal was inspired by a picture I saw in the paper. Stick comes out of prison and goes to South Florida. I got that story out of the paper.
- Alvarez: How does Miami as setting work to support the important role of sex and violence in the crime fiction form?
- Leonard: South Florida has a wonderful mixture. It is a great area to set a story. The Mariel boatlift...LaBrava is set on South Beach when drug dealers move in on the old residents of the area.
- Alvarez: Do you concern yourself with right and wrong when you write violent scenes?
- Leonard: "He shot him," and that's enough, the unexpected element.

Alvarez: Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Leonard: Entertainment is my purpose. I want the reader to get that feeling of reality.

Alvarez: How do you pick your villains' characterization?

Leonard: I'm never sure.

Alvarez: Can you tell me a little bit about the ethnicity of your antagonists?

Leonard: I don't pick a villain's because of their ethnicity. Riding the Rap has a Puerto Rican and a Bahamian. The one from the Bahamas is not afraid. The other has a sense of humor. I'm more interested in contrasts. The antagonists are set up as bad guys and human beings.

Alvarez: Do your antagonist's intentionally stimulate fears such as encroachment and lack of understanding in your audience?

Leonard: The villains don't stimulate fear, exactly but I wouldn't want to meet them. They're not purely evil. They have a human side, mothers, like Freaky Deak (sp).

Alvarez: Please tell me about how you create your protagonists' characterization.

Leonard: I don't start out that way. Chili Palmer, his background and name are based on a real person. His background is in crime. He was a loan shark until his boss was killed. Now, he's a private investigator, a good guy. Stick tried armed robbery in Detroit. He goes to work as a chauffeur.

Alvarez: What flaws do your protagonists have?

Leonard: My heroes can go either way. They might break the law, but you hope they will be good.

Alvarez: How do you compare with your own protagonists?

Leonard: None of the good guys jog. I don't drink.

Alvarez: Do you know the demographics of who is reading your crime fiction?

Leonard: My demographics are like all the best sellers. They're read in penitentiaries, more educated Blacks like non-fiction and westerns. Indians, Pakistanis read. Lawyers who have met all my characters.

Alvarez: Thank you. Can I follow up later if I have any more questions.

Leonard: Yes.

Introduction to Paul Levine Interview

Paul Levine's interview took place at Borders, a book store in Kendall. He was there with some of the other authors of Naked Came the Manatee for a book signing. He spoke to me in a lull after a question and answer period between the authors and the book buyers who had come out to see them.

His interview differs from those of Hall and Standiford as Levine expressed a certain disdain for the academic approach to investigation and the basis of literary allusion, though he uses both freely in his novels. I based Mr. Levine's interview primarily on his 1997 Jake Lassiter novel, Flesh and Bones. Jake Lassiter has appeared in Levine's series of crime fiction novels. He jokes that he is so out of fashion that some of his tastes come back in, like Art Deco (4). Lassiter's friend and confidant, Charlie Riggs, is a retired medical examiner, and extremely well read. For instance the two have this exchange at the beginning of Flesh and Bones:

"Patricide," Doc Charlie Riggs said with distaste, "A crime of biblical dimensions."

"And mythical," I added.

"Oedipus, of course," Charlie said. "And let's see now..."

Talking to the retired coroner is like playing poker with ideas, and today it was my turn to deal. "Orestes," I told him. It isn't often I get the upper hand on Charlie, so I milked it. "Orestes beheaded his mother, Clytemnestra, for plotting the death of his father, Agamemnon."

"Yes, of course. Very good, Jake. Very good, indeed (10)."

Charlie is prone to slipping into Latin proverbs to point Jake in the right direction,

"*Veritas simplex oratio est*," Charlie said. "The language of truth is simple. But lies, prevarications, calumnies, they'll catch you in their web (14)."

Paul Levine delivers an erudite crime fiction novel with an number of insider references, but he hides Jake Lassiter behind a facade of an old jock who's been hit in the head one time too many. At the same time that Jake and Charlie are trading quips, Lassiter is looking out the floor-to-ceiling windows on the thirty-second floor of a tower "that overlooked the bay, Key Biscayne, and the ocean beyond...I could make out tiny triangles of colorful sails on the waters just off Virginia Key. Windsurfers luxuriating in a fifteen-knot easterly. Beats murder and mayhem any day (14)."

The above is a good example of how the natural environment in Miami heightens the sense of suspense in the crime fiction novel. Horrible crimes seem more so when they take place in paradise.

In addition to contrasting the beauty of nature with the depravity of humanity, Levine delves into questions of morality through Lassiter's choice of clients. For instance, Lassiter defends Roberto Condom, a thief that specializes in stealing living things such as lobsters, cattle, tropical fish, sea turtle eggs, water spider orchids and live ostrich chicks from Lion Country Safari. Roberto looks like a gigolo from a 1940's movie; "He was in his mid-

thirties, toreador thin, with slicked-back black hair, a pencil mustache, and long curling sideburns that resembled the blade of a scythe (17)." Jake is more comfortable defending Roberto Condom than sympathizing with the Vegan Society since as he describes, "I pictured a bunch of skinny busybodies, eating their tofu and raising hell with your basic steak-and-lobster guys such as my very own carnivorous self (16)." Unlike a lot of the Miami crime fiction novels discussed in this thesis, Levine's villain in Flesh & Bone, is strictly Anglo. Roberto Condom, while a thief, is not the villain of the novel, and only presents a laughable picture of Hispanic fashion gone too far.

Levine's work is in fact more concerned than most with right and wrong, defending the underdog, and railing against foes of the South Florida environment so I asked Levine about strong similarities between Lassiter, and Travis McGee, especially since Jake reads John D. MacDonald novels (98). I think you will find Levine's views on crime fiction, Miami, and regional literature interesting, even if they are not in complete harmony with the hypothesis of this thesis.

Paul Levine Interview, 2/21/97

Alvarez: I have a few questions that are very specific to your work. And, after that, I have some that are more generic. The first one is this. Jake, perhaps more than any other hero in Miami crime fiction, speaks to issues of morality, although as a defense attorney he acknowledges that he does not always uphold the moral fantasy of detective novels, where the bad guys get punished and society is made safe. Are you more interested in the aesthetic form, or in issues of right and wrong?

Levine: Well, let me answer it this way. Jake is very interested in issues of right and wrong. But, I don't think that justice is done a lot. I, somewhere, quoted Clarence Darrow, who said, "There is no such thing as justice in or out of court." So, frequently, justice doesn't get done, endings are bitter sweet. Even if a villain may be defeated, there still may be a wrong that has been perpetual.

Alvarez: O.K. To follow up on that one a little, you're more interested in the realism of our situation, where you really can't put all the bad guys away, and you express that through Jake?

Levine: I'm sorry, you can't do what? You can't do what?

Alvarez: You can't really put the bad guys away, and if you do, they get out in a couple of months of the crimes.

Levine: Well, I haven't used that particular example, but--and there always is a resolution, which is at least partially successful, that morality will try impartially. I just don't believe--I don't think there are clear-cut solutions, often times. So, even--without giving away the ending--in too many of the books, there will often be, with an upbeat resolution with a villain who is defeated, there still may be something left hanging. I don't believe in tying up every loose end, for example, because I don't think life is that way. And, that violates the mystery's genre a little bit. But, I do that. So, these are questions--yeah, I am interested in realism.

Alvarez: Charley, speaking to Jake, said, "You have to find fulfilling work, what Joseph Campbell called finding your bliss."

Levine: Right.

Alvarez: O.K. Joseph Campbell defined the myth of the hero, and suggests that by plugging in to any of these characteristics, an author can

awaken accord in the audience that is essentially instinctual. Do you purposely imbue Jake with some of these characteristics?

Levine: No.

Alvarez: O.K.

Levine: No, because I'm writing entertainment.

Alvarez: Campbell talks about uncertain parentage. And, Jake's parentage, although you do give him a mother and a father there is certainly a peculiar situation... but, the answer is "no", you don't pay attention to it?

Levine: No. I have --read Joseph Campbell, but-- But, I have not patterned anything against the myth, the heroic myth. I think that, for certain conventions that come out of literature for 2,000 years--and we probably hit some of those beats without knowing it.

Alvarez: O.K. Charlie speaks Latin. You make references to the myth of Orestes. Do you have a classical education?

Levine: I have a--I do not have a classical education. I have a liberal arts education.

Alvarez: Did you study literature, creative writing, prepare in any way for a career change from successful lawyer to writer?

Levine: None of those things. I did not study literature. I never took a creative writing course. I am not as well read as I wish I were.

Alvarez: O.K. Then, Jake Lassiter reads John McDonald's Travis McGee novel. Do you perceive your work as following a regional literary tradition, and if so, how would you characterize it?

Levine: Well, I think every Florida novelist who has a male protagonist is probably, one time or another, going to be compared to John D. McDonald, who's going to want to be compared to John D. McDonald. Travis McGee is sort of a touchstone character for the strong, male figure who helps other people. And, that's what Jake does. I think it's a mistake for any author to sort of pattern himself or herself on someone else. But, there is a certain, natural similarity, it seems to me, between say the cadences and tone between McDonald's writing and my own, so that it's a much more natural voice for me, than say Raymond Chandler. But, there is a beat that I hear in McDonald's voice that, to me, is very similar to my natural voice, which is not to say that I think I'm as good a writer as he is, because I think he was the best in his genre.

Alvarez: Do you think there is any similarity having to do with the fact that you're both writing in South Florida, about South Florida, as opposed to say Raymond Chandler, who was in L.A. at the time?

Levine: Well, we both have concerns with the environment, and they're in Florida. I don't know what else to say on that.

Alvarez: O.K. Well, then we'll move on. You discussed the difference between historical truth and narrative truth through the character of Millie Santiago?

Levine: That's a psychological concept.

Alvarez: Well, the question is this: Aren't all attempts to record history, whether orally or in text, narrative?

Levine: I don't understand. I mean, I don't understand the question.

Alvarez: Well, somebody writes a history book, it's still a person who's telling a story.

Levine: You're saying they have a point of view?

Alvarez: I'm saying they have a point of view.

Levine: Oh, yeah, of course. That's obvious. Yes. There is no question about it.

Alvarez: O.K. The follow-up was, how does it affect your writing, knowing that?

Levine: It doesn't have anything to do with it. I make up stories. There's no truth to what I write.

Alvarez: O.K. Last, uh, specific question. You mentioned one of the Edna Buchanan characters--

Levine: Britt Montero.

Alvarez: Right.

Levine: Mm hm.

Alvarez: Why? Why introduce another fictional character in the book?

Levine: Oh, it's just a hoot.

Alvarez: Just for fun?

Levine: And, it's just for fun.

Alvarez: O.K.

Levine: Um, and then, she put--Edna put Jake in one of her books. It was just to--it's a way of telling an inside joke, for readers who read both of them. And, they kind of like that because they know that they get it, and they know that a lot of other people don't get it. So, it makes it kind of cool for them.

Alvarez: Do you consider South Florida an ideal model, with its lack of history, for a setting for your books?

Levine: What?

Alvarez: Because, people come here and they invent themselves?

Levine: Well, I consider Miami an ideal setting for this genre, because it has so many different facets to it. It has crime, it

has corruption, it has Brian Antoni (Another Miami writer who was at Borders bookstore for a Manatee signing). It has so many things that are so different than the way most people in the country live, that people can read about it, and it transports them here. It transports them into a different life, which makes it fun. O.K.?

Alvarez: Yes. Do you think South Florida qualifies as a literary region, and if so, why?

Levine: I think every area qualifies as a literary region, if they have people writing and reading there. We clearly do have a huge number of writers here, just as they do in New York, just as they do in Los Angeles, just as they do in Seattle, just as they do in a number of places.

Alvarez: The daily news headlines appear to compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?

Levine: Well, I get most of my ideas from the newspapers, as do a number of other crime writers. So, I think it enhances it. I think it gives us our raw material, our seeds.

Alvarez: And, then what?

Levine: From real stories, from the news. We steal our ideas from the newspapers, to the germ of the idea.

Alvarez: How do you pick your villain's characterization?

Levine: I don't know what that means.

Alvarez: Well, when you create the bad guys, what do you think about? Um, what do you concern yourself with, their backgrounds, their motivations?

Levine: Yeah. I mean, I treat the villains the way I would treat anyone else. But, one thing I would do is, the villain very often drives the story in crime fiction. The villain, next to your hero, is the most important character. So, I want to have an interesting villain. I want to have someone who you don't think you've seen 100 times before on television, in the movies, and other books. So, my challenge is to come up with a different villain. And, yeah, it's good if you can do full characterizations and all of that. I strive for that. I strive so people don't say, "Oh, what a thin character."

Alvarez: When you created Jake Lassiter, he's your hero; right? Um, the question is this: What flaws does he have?

Levine: Oh, my God, he's got so many. I wouldn't know where to begin. He chooses the wrong women all the time. He's not the world's smartest lawyer, by any means. Uh, he has flexible ethical standards. He is incredibly flawed. But, his

heart is good. And, in the end, he will always try to do the right thing.

Alvarez: How do you compare to him?

Levine: Me?

Alvarez: Yeah.

Levine: Well, that's not for me to say. In many ways, sure, he is my alter ego, but he's not me. But, I've given him, in his voice, when I did--when he has thoughts about things unrelated to the plot, when he's talking about government or the growth in Florida, or corruption and that sort of thing, he gives me a soapbox to stand on.

Alvarez: Are you from South Florida, like he is?

Levine: No, I'm from Pennsylvania, but I've been here 27 years.

Alvarez: And what's his ethnicity? I mean, what is Lassiter?

Levine: He has none. He has none. He's an American.

Alvarez: One of the things that I'm interested in are the demographics of who's reading Miami crime fiction.

Levine: I have no idea, no idea at all.

Alvarez: When you travel around the country, and you go to your own book signings, is it a mixture, all different kind of people?

Levine: All different kinds of people, young, old, men, women.

Alvarez: Is there anybody at your publishing house that might have that kind of information?

Levine: No. They've never done a study on that.

Alvarez: Last question. If I need to follow up with you on some of this later, is it O.K.?

Levine: Just call me. Yeah, just call me.

Introduction to Barbara Parker Interview

Barbara Parker and Vickie Hendricks both agreed to give me interviews at an FIU reading series called "Writers By the Bay." The theme of this reading was authors that had graduated from the FIU creative writing program. Both Hendricks and Parker are alumni of the program. Students of the program make up about half of the forty or fifty who turned out to hear three Miami authors, two of them crime writers.

Barbara Parker was a lawyer and had already had one book published when she joined the creative writing program ⁶. She gave me a mini-interview before the reading and directed me to Blood Relations because it contained a lot of material that was particularly relevant to a discussion of Miami's role as a setting for crime fiction.

Parker's work is truly rooted in Miami's geography, much more so than most of the residents of the region, and this passage expertly describes the quick changes of geography that influence life in South Florida;

The expressway rose high over the Miami River, over the rusty freighters and boatyards and small white houses with tile roofs. Far to the west, heavy gray clouds were forming over the Everglades, where the sprawl of asphalt and concrete finally ended in wetlands (Blood Relations 115).

Additionally, Parker comments on the politics of the region through her characters. For example a jaded lawyer named Frank Tolin observes, "You know Dade County politics. Anything bad for the tourist industry, it's going to

disappear (Blood Relations 88)." Parker elaborates on Miami's reverence for famous people and that is also reflected in Blood Relations through the character of Caitlin, a former model and struggling photographer; "In Miami no one cared that her career was in decline; the town was hungry for any kind of celebrity...At the clubs she kept it down to an occasional line of coke with her friends. She drank too much. She thought seriously of suicide (119)."

That night before the Writer's on the Bay reading Parker herself directed me to this quote from a club promoter, the same club that hosted the Ruffini / Lamont rape scene that the novel revolves around, "He had heard some say, *You go to L.A. if you want to be somebody, the New York if you are somebody, and you're in Miami if you used to be somebody* (255)." She said it was a metaphor for where the whole country may be going. In other words, people feel exiled from everything, exiled from meaning, where everyone is separate and shallow like a strangler fig tree, people want to cling to something. You will come to find that Barbara Parker is far more the optimist when you read her interview.

In the interview Parker and I discuss her villain's characterization and she refers several times to Klaus Ruffini, a world famous fashion designer who is implicated in a sordid crime committed in one of the South Beach nightclubs. It is his misconduct that the local politicians are attempting to hush up. His accomplice, Marquis Lamont, is a famous Black athlete. While no author admitted to purposely using Black, Hispanic, generally foreign

antagonists, it does happen more often than not, that the bad guys fall into one of those categories.

Barbara Parker Interview, 3/5/98

Alvarez: The format of the interview is to go through some questions that I ask all the authors and then I have two or three that are more personal. First question. Suspense relies on a moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved and the guilty are finally identified and captured. Could you comment on this, both the idea of a moral fantasy and the process of creating suspense.

Parker: In P.D. James' last book, A Certain Justice, we find out who did it, but they get away. I don't know if that's P.D. James' way of reflecting on things the way they are however I don't think she could get away with that in more than one book and I wouldn't try it either. I take that back. In one of my books the guilty party does get away with it. I won't tell you who, well you could edit this part out. Have you read my books?

Alvarez: I haven't read your latest one, Suspicion of Deceit.

Parker: Have you read Blood Relations?

Alvarez: Yes.

Parker: Well then you know that the guilty party gets away, sort of. It's a gray area. The question I consider is "Is it a moral fantasy, fantasy that the guilty are apprehended and punished. Let me see that card again. I forgot the question. I'm trying to come up with something intelligent. I don't even know what the question means.

Alvarez: Well, the first part I think you already tried to answer very intelligently about moral fantasy and that the writer or the reader are trying to tie the world up into a neat package and you hit right on it when you say that people get away with the crimes both in the real world and occasionally in the fictional world.

Parker: Yes, I think that why I did it in Blood Relations ...the questions of guilt and innocence runs very strongly through my books so even in Blood Relations the question of who was really guilty goes to the heart of the mystery. So when I say the "guilty" party got away with it, I don't know if that's really true. You'd have to read the book to understand what I mean but the party that the law, the law written in black and white would consider "guilty" got away with it. But in my universe guilt is not just a matter of the dry letter of the law. It's more a matter of ethics and motivation, intent. It's a very personal thing, guilt and innocence the

way I look at it. And I think that's the way it really is in real life. The law tries to keep up but there are gaps. It's that gap between the law and the law and the human interpretation of the law that I like to play with. So that in my book, Blood Relations, the technically guilty party got away with it. The truly guilty in my books never do. They always get caught, if not by the system at least they are punished in some other way.

Alvarez: The second part of the question, about suspense, I have some follow up questions, so we'll continue.

Parker: Sure.

Alvarez: Crime fiction uses certain literary devices such as suspense, identification and creating a slightly removed, imaginary world. Is South Florida an ideal model with its lack of history—or its ability to create its history as it goes along?

Parker: Let me look at your card. It's too long. All right. Now, identification, I don't understand that one.

Alvarez: Identification goes toward the reader identifying either with the protagonist or even the antagonist.

Parker: That's true in most fiction. You don't want in crime fiction to have your reader identify with the bad guy. They can often be interested by the bad guy like Hannibal Lector who is not really a bad guy.

Alvarez: Why do you say that?

Parker: Why is Hannibal Lector not really a bad guy?

Alvarez: He is pretty monstrous.

Parker: He is really on the side of Claris Starling. He's outside the system. The real bad guy is the psychiatric institution. That's the real bad guy. Hannibal Lector, so O.K. he eats people, (laughing) he has a little foible. But I think readers admire some degree of panache and intelligence and so by his daring and his sense of humor, which he does have, and the brazenness of it and the enjoyment of it, Hannibal Lector sets himself apart from your ordinary run of the mill criminal who is generally humorless, plodding, can be very stupid, often violent and anti life. But Hannibal Lector in his, I mean, I think his way of devouring people is his way of devouring life. But because we are not allowed to do that then we will be put in jails or psychiatric institutions. But eventually he will get out and devour his psychiatrist which I think is telling. And we root for him to do that so for us good and bad, guilty and innocent, I always put these things in quotation marks. Let me have the question back. I really think we are digressing here.

Alvarez: O.K. You're the only author that has asked for the cards.

Parker: The others pretend they know what you're talking about. O.K. here we go...suspense...is South Florida an ideal model with it's lack of history? You're leading the witness aren't we? Or it's ability to create its history as it goes along...Oh, sure, I'd agree with that. I suppose you did ask all the writers how they see South Florida?

Alvarez: Yes, I have more follow up questions.

Parker: Well, O.K., we'll get to the follow up. There is South Florida and then there is the South Florida of the imagination.

Alvarez: They're separate?

Parker: Yes, oh yes. I mean if you go outside and you stand in the middle of the street and you look up one way and look down the other way and there's the high school...this could be Stockton, this could be Buffalo, New York, accept for the tropical plants. But on the surface the way that most people conduct their lives is no different than anywhere else. I don't just mean basic human values. We get up in the morning, we go to work, that's universal. Of course it's the little quirks that make us different. I don't see South Florida as a totally separate universe. I couldn't sell books to the rest of the country if it were. There has to some close identification if you're going to read the book in Phoenix or if you want to pick it up in when you're in Seattle it has to resonate somehow. You see we all think we're unique, don't we, even readers in Chicago, readers in Demoin, readers in Columbia, South Carolina. We all live in the most important place in the world but I think that because South Florida, or has been, especially in the 80's and 90's, pointed to...a spotlight was turned on, truly it had the image of being unique and weird and so on and when the reader reads that and starts to identify with the protagonist then the reader takes part in that process of being unusual, weird, twisted, and so forth. They say that readers don't like to read about "boring" places and that's why, because each reader thinks that he or she is very unique but when we read about a place that really is then we really enjoy it. We put ourselves at center stage but I never thought that South Florida is as weird as people make out.

Alvarez: I know that you do a lot of research for some of your characterizations. Do you think it's true that we have a lack of history?

Parker: The history of South Florida is preserved like a little museum downtown on Flagler Street and then you get the exhibits under glass at the Coral Gables library or the little history center down in Perrine. We don't really participate in history, do we? It doesn't seep through our lives. It's not in our consciousness, the way it would be say in Boston or even New York. I think with the Miami centennial in '95 we recovered history as a way of recovering some sort of unity.

Alvarez: Do you think that South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?

Parker: I got the question. I just have to think about that. What existed in South Florida literature before the mid 80's? There's Willeford⁷ and that's it and I don't think that's enough to make a regional literature. So the "regional literature" in South Florida has really been in existence, if you want to call it that...the identifiable...possibly, since, well probably for no more than ten years and is that enough to qualify it as a distinct regional literature or as a fad? I don't know yet. I can not say it's a distinct regional literature. See if it hangs on for another ten or fifteen years and then you'll see if you're on to something.

Alvarez: We'll see. Next question. What characteristics of South Florida attract you to both live in the area and place your stories here?

Parker: The wide variety of people. I'm going to name some negative and then I hope also some positive qualities. The classic things that go into crime novels, you know, pretension, greed, violence are larger here than they would be in Kansas City...I don't know, I don't live in Kansas City. I'm sure it has its own weirdnesses. In its newness Miami also has a sense that things are possible. This is a frontier town. People come here hoping to make it, and they can. You can make yourself what you want to be and we are not hampered by history. History gives a sense of place but on the same token if you don't fit in then you could be burdened by history. History, or a lack of history, is both frightening and liberating, but that's life.

Alvarez: Excellent. The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Does this tend to diminish or enhance your efforts?

Parker: My crimes tend to be very personal. I don't write the strange and violent crimes that you see so much in the headlines such as the Hungarian couple who were killed

and their bodies were hacked up and cemented into fifty-five gallon drums. Is that how it went?

Alvarez: Yes.

Parker: My crimes tend to be more personal than that and generally the murders happen off stage and it's usually a gun shot or a knife wound. It could happen in Oklahoma City or wherever. I guess there are some things that are distinctly Miami. Aside from the heavy Hispanic element in my books as many of the characters, you get people like Klaus Ruffini in Blood Relations.

Alvarez: Yes, in Blood Relations the rape scene in a South Beach nightclub...

Parker: Couldn't happen in Des Moines.

Alvarez: You might put it in a nightclub in New York or LA but probably not in Kansas City.

Parker: I know that Carl Hiaasen and James Hall specialize in inventive crimes. So does Paul Levine. In fact all of them do, don't they have a lot of inventive crime? Of course Edna Buchanan's tend toward the street crime, the gritty, things like that.

Alvarez: We were talking about the daily news headlines and whether you think they help you or diminish what you're doing or really have no effect.

Parker: I do read the Miami Herald every day and I cut out clippings having to do with many things and crime being one of them, interesting cases and so on. What they tell me is that there is no limit to what I can imagine. In fact what I see in the headlines is often, no, always much worse than I can think of. Much more...my jaw continually drops. Though I sometimes use what is in the headlines too. In Blood Relations I combined a couple of cases, one where the boyfriend threw his girlfriend's son off of the Rickenbacker Causeway and the other where the estranged boyfriend, different set of people, sliced his girlfriend's child's throat and I put those in the book in a sub-plot. I use things. Sometimes I say, "Wow, that's great. I'll have to see if I can work that into a book." I always change them a little bit of course. Since I don't get out much, you know, I rely on the news to give me some good ideas.

Alvarez: Miami does not comply with the traditional definition of regional characteristics...

Parker: I don't know, what?

Alvarez: I have some examples here which include local pride, defensiveness, condescension, superficial presentation of local lore...and I would underline this, homogenous cultural and ethnic qualities.

Parker: Ethnic qualities, meaning what?

Alvarez: It's the same idea as homogenous culture. Take Faulkner's South for instance. On the surface you have the White society and the Black society and then of course Faulkner's success is that he shows what broils underneath.

Parker: O.K.

Alvarez: Eudora Welty is another author who wrote about Southern life in a homogenous society. Most of the definitions of regional literature center on the South, New England or England. It's hard to find anything else that talks about regional literature.

Parker: That's been around for a long time. That's why I don't think that ten or fifteen years is enough to qualify us.

Alvarez: That might be a fair assessment. My question for you, based on what I just said is, Can you help me with a definition and characterizations of *Urban Regionalism* and to determine how Miami does and / or does not conform?

Parker: Urban meaning any urban area, New York, London?

Alvarez: Yes, you could, I mean I'd like you to think about Miami.

Parker: Miami urban literature?

Alvarez: Right. In Miami, sure, we have some rural pockets, but they're only minutes away from downtown.

Parker: You know, Miami's also very suburban. You see, that's the thing. You'd love to have an answer where I talk about Miami as an urban crime center and of course it is and it has its urban area and raises its urban crime but this is a very sprawled community in some ways like LA. New York is totally different. That's urban. This I consider to be a lot of little neighborhoods with a very small center city. Surrounded unfortunately by a pretty wretched poor area. You could drive for miles and miles and miles past communities and communities, Pinecrest, Kendall, all that. Miami may reside more there, the concept of Miami is more suburban for me than it is urban. Of all of us probably Edna Buchanan is the most urban writer. Standiford is definitely suburban. Paul Levine is more urban. Hiaasen is almost suburban or rural and James Hall is also suburban. I think it might be a product of the times in which we were raised cause we're all about the same age and we were brought up in the suburbs. Bet you a dollar all of us were. So, for urban literature I suggest you go to Boston, New

York and Chicago, but not Miami. I don't see it as an urban city.

Alvarez: You may not have said what you think I wanted to hear but it was pretty good. Miami / South Florida life goes beyond both traditional and urban definitions of regionalism which I think is what you were just summarizing, that we are suburban, so it doesn't fit either a traditional or urban definition of regionalism.

Parker: Well, something that I should have added to that last bit is that not only are we suburban with housing developments one after the other, but there is overlaying this or underlying it, whatever, that I don't think academicians are catching at all, the Hispanic half of this community. Now are you concentrating only on literature written in English? Now there is no Spanish crime fiction in Miami. I don't know if there's any Spanish crime fiction at all, but to ignore the Hispanic element of this community is to miss the point.

Alvarez: I'm glad you brought that up.

Parker: It's like reading Faulkner without the Black and the White and also to miss the Black portion of Miami is to miss the point too; however, I would say that probably except for Edna Buchanan we all miss the Black part of this area. It is again because we are all white middle class, educated and I would bet you that none of us have any extensive experience with the Black community so we ignore the Black community just as this community ignores the Black community.

Alvarez: I'd like to return to that issue, because it is something I do want to explore.

Parker: I bet you half the people in this neighborhood are Hispanic.

Alvarez: Yes.

Parker: But the Hispanics are suburban too. The second generation Hispanics are suburban. The first generation, the older ones, you get concentrated in pockets in Hialeah, in Little Havana and so forth. To spite what you hear in the media, people like Oswaldo Soto and so on, all this screaming and yelling, and Clarence Roto [sp?] and all that they're on the wane. The Hispanics in Dade County are the guy next door to me who is a YUCA (Young Upwardly-mobile Cuban American) and the one next door over here who has three kids who probably don't even speak Spanish. That's the modern Hispanic, that's the modern Latinos in Miami, they're suburban as anyone else.

Alvarez: Is there a Hispanic or Black audience for crime fiction.

Parker: No. For my crime fiction?

Alvarez: For crime fiction in general.

Parker: In general?

Alvarez: Yes.

Parker: Probably not a large one. I mean, there are always people-
-there are not a lot of people in general who read, I hate to tell you, which you probably know about but I would say that due to education, culture, demographics or whatever in the Black community there is not a large community of readers for crime fiction or for anything else. Walter Mosley⁸ has done a lot for that. Terris McMahan Grimes wrote a book called Somebody Else's Child which is actually suburban experience in Sacramento, California. She won the Edgar award for best novel of the year. It's a Black woman who's writing this, a wonderfully written book so it's that sort of thing that is helping. Robert Greer, who is a doctor in fact, writes a mystery series. So it's coming. I'm glad to see that but in general "is there a market for Black crime fiction?" It's small, but growing and Hispanic fiction? Carolina Garcia-Aguilera in this community, but she writes in English. I don't think that traditionally mysteries are a Spanish form of literature, I don't think. I've never seen any.

Alvarez: Who is your audience? In other words, do you know the demographics of who is reading your crime fiction?

Parker: Generally? Well it's pretty varied. It has to depend on which books I write, which books we're talking about. The Suspicion of series...probably my average reader is a 35 to 55 year old woman, but then again that's your average audience for fiction in general. Men like them too and with Criminal Justice and Blood Relations, which both had male protagonists...I don't know the answer to that. I would say it pretty much cuts across everyone. I had a Black woman tell me she really liked my character, Anthony Quintana, because he wasn't just your pretty boy blond haired, blue eyed hero. He's part Black and she picked up on it.

Alvarez: I didn't pick up on that.

Parker: Well, you'd have to go back to Suspicion of Guilt where I mention it briefly. His father's people are ex-slaves. It's not something I play up in the book but I love to play with ethnic differences. Most of the literature in Miami wouldn't buy people who speak Spanish in what we call mainstream

literary fiction. Mystery fiction is, I think, a white phenomenon.

Alvarez: Listen to this question. Is it possible that crime fiction is only of interest in the Anglo culture? If so, does this represent the Anglo population as coming to terms with a multicultural society?

Parker: Crime fiction is probably most of interest, I would say...if you want to call Anglo, O.K., I'll use that term too...probably more Anglos than other ethnicities are interested in crime fiction. I think it's a cultural thing because it's inherently...because more Anglos write it and they reflect their own experiences. If you talk about Hispanics in this country, they're more apt to write in Spanish and it's (crime fiction) is not a Spanish form. Among Hispanics that have been here for awhile, including Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, she's writing in English and she says she's one hundred percent Cubana but that's not really true since she went to school here. Some Norwegian guy wrote The Laughing Policeman, I think it was. I've got all my books in boxes. I can't get it for you. Or he's Swedish, I'm not sure. Then there is Smilla's Sense of Snow by the Danish writer, Peter Hoeg. There's German crime fiction. My novels are translated into every European language and Japanese. I think what you're getting really...it's kind of a product of development, of economic development, and those countries that are developed tend to develop a crime fiction in which we address issues of inequality and justice. I'd like to be even more articulate.

Alvarez: That's an interesting thing to think about. In England if you trace the roots of crime fiction in England you would find that it parallels the development of the industrial age.

Parker: Yes. Go back to Wilkie Collins.

Alvarez: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Sherlock Holmes is the first to use scientific method.

Parker: Crime, crime fiction may be a product of western thought because we are inheritors of Cartesian Dualism. We want to look at things and have yes / no answers to things...black, white, but it isn't that simple. So modern crime fiction isn't your English parlor dramas anymore. It's very messy.

Alvarez: South Florida is a unique backdrop because of the mixture of architectural styles, cuisine, social interactions, political machinations such as the City of Miami mayoral problems right

now, the environment's effect on people here and our effect on his environment such as the weather, the Everglades, the coastline. Could you comment on this notion as it might relate to Miami crime fiction?

Parker: What we've got here is a fragile place. It's a sense of being fragile. A hurricane could come along and blow everything away. The waves of immigrants that come in and change our demographics so quickly. Urban riots...suburban riots. But everybody is looking for a toe hold and it makes a wonderful environment for crime fiction. There's always an undercurrent of fear here which comes from the insecurity. "Is my group going to be supplanted in this place with very little history and is my identity going to be erased?"

Alvarez: Do you concern yourself with right and wrong when you write violent scenes?

Parker: What do you mean?

Alvarez: You mentioned before that most of the violence happens off stage...

Parker: Yes, I shot somebody in Criminal Justice actually, three shots with a .22 and we didn't see much blood. Do I concern myself with right and wrong?

Alvarez: Does the violence satisfy an aesthetic?

Parker: In my own or in the demands of crime fiction?

Alvarez: The demands of crime fiction.

Parker: I have found myself saying that in this book I will have to bump at least two people off to have the requisite amount of drama in this book. Now, let's see, who's it going to be?

Alvarez: That's an aesthetic approach.

Parker: I think so. You could have a crime book with one victim, of course. Look at all the Agatha Christi's. Someone gets bumped off and then you have to figure out who did it. But that's a puzzle. That's not a modern crime novel, really. The modern crime novels reflect a modern world and we have a perception of rampant violence so if I don't bump at least two or three people off I'm not keeping up, am I? In what I'm doing now, the one I'm planning, we stumble across one body that I know of and some other girl is going to commit suicide, which hardly counts, does it? And now, I'm sort of looking around for someone else to bump off because I think I need another one. Then you get the dénouement, the chase, with the bad guys chasing the protagonist and of course it always comes out well in the end. That's a requisite of crime fiction.

Alvarez: How does Miami as setting work to support the important role of sex and violence in the crime fiction form?

Parker: This is a very sexy place because of the weather for one thing. We just can't wear a lot of clothes. The outdoors are so seductive with the soft breezes and the warm sunshine. When you look outside you see the beaches and the beautiful people, their tanned bodies and so forth is very primal here as well. The rap. The Hispanic kids living next door to me...every time they come home from school in the afternoon, they're playing rap which is very telling of modern life. It's a young community. I know there are a lot of retirees down here but I get the sense of it being a young community and that probably precedes from Coconut Grove and South Beach. We react to images as well as to reality. As I said, I go outside and look at my street, there's nothing much happening and there's certainly not much sex and violence going on in my street...

Alvarez: but behind the hedges...

Parker: You see, that's what we want to think. We want to think that. Most of us aren't getting nearly as much sex as we think the other person is.

Alvarez: Next question. Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Parker: Oh, I've got to make a little addendum to the last question.

Alvarez: Sure.

Parker: I read some dismaying news in The Herald this morning, dismaying for all writers of South Florida crime fiction, that crime is continuing to drop in South Florida and I wonder if this is going to deprive us of our raison d'être because if this is not known as the capital of crime, what are we going to do? We've still got sex. O.K. what was that other question?

Alvarez: Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Parker: You don't mean the protagonist escape from the bad guy, do you? No, I don't think so. No, I think engagement is. People say, "Oh, I just want to read some good escapist...it's not. They want to have fun. That's the primary motivation but you don't have fun with anything you're not interested in. Follow the syllogism here. You're not interested in anything that does not engage you or speak directly to your life and so when they say, "I just want to escape," that's not true. I think people who read crime fictions like moral puzzles.

Alvarez: That leads us back to the question of whether you concern yourself with right and wrong.

Parker: I concern myself with right and wrong throughout the whole book. If you mean in terms of morality, the morality of the whole book is central. I'm looking for a moral compass. That's why I write.

Alvarez: And that's why the readers become engaged?

Parker: Yes, because in modern society, you hear it said quite often, that we have lost our moral compass. We've lost our standards. We don't know what to believe in. Faith is dead so where do we find it now, except crime novels? And we try to deal with that. To me, I don't know how other readers feel, but it is an unsatisfying novel of any kind, particularly an unsatisfying crime novel, that does not give me some kind of guidance. I won't say, answer, but some kind of assurance that the world makes sense. That's why I write. I write to try to make sense of the conflicting images, messages. I want to make sense of them and so I write crime fiction.

Alvarez: How do you pick your villain's characterization?

Parker: Can you give me more?

Alvarez: Could you tell me a little bit about the ethnicity of your antagonists?

Parker: Ethnicity?

Alvarez: Yes. The bad guys.

Parker: You mean are they Black, white, Hispanic, Chinese...

Alvarez: Yes.

Parker: It doesn't matter to me. I'm trying to think have I ever done anything but an Anglo villain, hum...I don't think I have.

Alvarez: So, they're all Anglo?

Parker: Yes, and the reason, I think, if we're looking for psychological background here, the reason is that for me the antagonist is the flip side of the protagonist and the protagonist and the protagonist in my case being generally white, female...the antagonist has to come from the same background, I don't mean white male but that same...it's sort of the dark side of the same issue I'm grappling with in the book, whatever the issue is, then the bad guy has to be relevant to that and has to illustrate the injustice, the inequity, the insanity. Now, I'm not getting that. I have to think how to phrase that exactly. Say in Suspicion of Innocence the question for our protagonist was "who killed my sister," and her struggle, the protagonist's struggle, is one to understand their relationship and it goes to the heart of the family. Now, who's going to be the bad guy?

Obviously, it has to be someone in the family who disrupted, upset, the relationship between the sisters, obviously. That's the most obvious example I can get you. In Criminal Justice I had a couple of bad guys. One of them was a Hispanic guy that was into the drug trade but the other, who may be as equally guilty in some ways, was the DEA agent who was not Hispanic and the issues guilt of innocence crossed, come up for the traditional bad guy and also for the one who's supposedly within the law. I think that's been my only Hispanic bad guy, Miguel Salazar. That's the only one that actually shot someone on stage too.

Alvarez: Returning to what you said early about the appeal of Hannibal Lector to the reader

Parker: Hannibal Lector got away and we wanted him to get away and it's not because we want the bad guy to get away but because we want balance. First of all he earned our respect and our interest and then we thought the guy that was even worse was his jailer, the psychiatrist was even worse than he was. The real bad guy--of course the serial killer, but he was insane, but the real bad guy was the psychiatrist.

Alvarez: So are you looking at the real bad as somebody or something that is already institutionalized, part of the system, that goes against society from that position of power?

Parker: The real bad guys in my novels and probably in a lot of crime fiction is the person with power who abuses power. Maybe that's one of the reasons that Miami is such a good place to write. Clause Ruffini was a bad guy because he was rich and he came to Miami and was abusing his power. He was pretentious and greedy. We love to see those people fall. Miami has been raped in many ways by people like that.

Alvarez: Was Clause based on Gianni Versace?

Parker: No, not at all. He's a composite of a lot, any ethnicity, and background, rich people who would just settle here, spend money, buy what they want, get what they want, bribery or influence. Klaus Ruffini's lawyer, who has a big law firm downtown, has an interesting comment about Clause Ruffini. It's that people tend to do favors for Clause Ruffini, not expecting any payment, but just because closeness to this money and this glamour might rub off on them somehow. So, here in Miami we kiss up to people like that. If you've ever gone to a party on South Beach one of these

"literary" parties or model parties you see it all the time. It's disgusting and is that where are values are? In my books almost always you will find the people with money and power are going to be the bad guys, villains of one kind or another. Those that abuse the money and the power.

Alvarez: Please, tell me about how you create your protagonists characterization. Tell me a little bit about Gail Connor.

Parker: That series, I don't really consider a pure mystery series. It is more like a continuing family saga. The Perils of Pauline, even or another chapter in the life of Gail Connor. There are mysteries in it. She's old Miami, forth generation Miami which is very rare and she has to deal, through her I deal with issues of changing demographics and I deal with women's issues and the issues of single motherhood. She's a vehicle for me, for capital E everyone. I've had people tell me. One woman came up to me at a signing in Atlanta where she said, "Are you sure she really needs Anthony Quintana. Why does she seem so dependant on him?" Another woman said, "Oh, Yes. Yes. Are they ever going to get married?" And another woman said, "You know, you can't let them get married." She's becoming real for so many people. It's really strange.

Alvarez: I think that is one of the draws for all mystery readers is that they do like the serialization because they identify so strongly with some of the characters that they want to continue that relationship.

Parker: Yes. And in each book I also talk about Miami. Suspicion of Innocence I do a lot with the old Anglo community versus the Cuban community and that theme was not followed so much in Suspicion of Guilt but it was followed there as well. Suspicion of Deceit does spotlight Cuban / Anglo differences. In Blood Relations I do a lot with the rich and powerful who are often too much revered in Miami. Criminal Justice or Blood Relations comes the closest to being traditional crime novels. Quite a bit has to do with the fact that they both have male protagonists. You can't really--I've never seen it done that I recall--you can't really have a traditional crime novel with a woman in it because a woman brings something additional to the role of protagonist. That's why I think a lot of cartoon characters on TV, Bugs Bunny, Donald Duck, are all male. Male is standard. Female is something extra or something different. That perception still holds. Now things are changing. Notice I said traditional crime novel. I didn't say

"crime novel." So, when you get a female protagonist there's always something different or else you have to turn your female into someone masculine like ? V.I. Warshski or Edna Buchanan does Britt Montero. They're both pretty tough.

Alvarez: Do you think Britt's gay?

Parker: I'm not familiar enough with that.

Alvarez: We were talking about creating a female protagonist in crime fiction versus a male protagonist. Do you think that a woman writer can create a male hero more effectively than a male writer could create a woman hero because of the orientation and language?

Parker: I think it depends on the skill of the writer, absolutely, period. It has nothing to do with gender.

Alvarez: What flaws does your protagonist, Gail Connor, have?

Parker: All of her flaws have changed throughout the series. I think she's awfully chilly in the first book. I get some flak for that.

Alvarez: Because she's a workaholic?

Parker: Yes. In Suspicion of Guilt, which is very different in tone from Suspicion of Innocence, it's very strange. I just write according to my mood at the time or what I'm going through. She became almost flighty, but not flighty or silly, but impulsive, but I found that more appealing that the control freak she was in the first one so I sort of continued that with Suspicion of Deceit but with the addition that now she is a woman who cares very very deeply about people that matter to her so that passion for the things that maybe she loves is now part of it too.

Alvarez: Is that a flaw?

Parker: No, but this comprises feedback from reader. As she has changed her flaws have changed. One continuing thing throughout has been her insecurity. It's a great flaw to have in Miami. I think it's in the air. I play on that because it tends to work well in crime fiction. Her insecurity, uncertainty about just about everything in her life, both personal a factual, leads her to seek some kind of certainty and that leads her to solve crimes.

Alvarez: Very clear. That would propel her forward.

Parker: It isn't necessary courage that propels her forward or a sense of justice, although there is that too, she's more impulsive than courageous. Or she would want to have the puzzle solved or she just can't stand it if she doesn't have the answer. And she will get herself into situations not realizing how dangerous they are.

Alvarez: In Blood Relations, Sam is the hero.

Parker: Yes, Sam Hagen.

Alvarez: What are his flaws?

Parker: He's too much of a bureaucrat and lacks imagination. He was a one shot hero. His fault was that he was just too closed. I see him in shades of gray. Too closed and too uptight. When he finally broke loose and did what his heart told him to do, disaster resulted.

Alvarez: Poor Sam. How do you compare with your own protagonists?

Parker: As I have changed, they have changed as well. Writers are always their protagonists but writers are also the antagonists, the villains. We use what we see around us but it's always filtered through our own experience and our own sensibilities. I am not any of my protagonists, completely, and yet I am in each of them. None of them really reflects me as a total person. I'm split among the various characters in the book. I'd hate to think I was like Clause (laughter). Writing the two male characters that I did, they're very different from each other and they're different from me, yet I identified with them very closely.

Alvarez: That concludes the standard questions, but I do have three more short ones.

Parker: Sure.

Alvarez: How did the FIU Creative Writing Master of Fine Arts program influence the way you shape your crime fiction?

Parker: I'm really fortunate. I don't know about other MFA programs so I really cannot compare FIU to theirs but I do appreciate the freedom that they gave me to write whatever I wanted without regard to genre. They don't mind genre fiction as long as you write good genre fiction. I also liked the literature course that I took with the English department. They gave me a lot of background in literature and the structure. I learned a lot about the structure of the story particularly from James Hall and Les Standiford.

Alvarez: Was Les the director of your thesis?

Parker: Yes, my thesis advisor.

Alvarez: And your thesis was Suspicion of Innocence?

Parker: Yes.

Alvarez: When I heard you speak at an FIU Writer's By the Bay reading last September Les Standiford introduced you. He mentioned that you wrote one novel before you entered the MFA program. Was that a romance or crime fiction?

Parker: No, it wasn't crime fiction. It was what you call "main stream", which means it's not romance, it's not crime, it's not anything identifiable. It's the story of a woman who is

going through some stuff in life, but there happens to be some mystery and some romance in it, OK? That one was sold just as I was going into the program and it was published the following Fall and I rewrote it extensively while I was in the program.

Alvarez: After it was published?

Parker: No, no. I was accepted into the program in 1990 and then knew when it was sold that I needed to rewrite it. I had already learned enough, nobody needed to tell me, where it was off so I rewrote it extensively and it was published in its new and improved form in '91. While I was waiting for that one to be published then I was working on my Master's thesis.

Alvarez: What was it called?

Parker: Running Mates was the publisher's title. It was set in Connecticut, a state I've never been to. I didn't really click with my subject until I started writing about my own hometown.

Alvarez: You said last September, "My voice is in the mystery line--all set in Miami." What did you mean?

Parker: It means this is really what I know, what I feel. I can't imagine writing something in North Dakota or even LA because I don't know that place. It's like knowing a language. I couldn't write in Italian or Spanish. I couldn't write Spanish. I kind of speak Spanish, but I couldn't do it because I'm not that familiar with it. Being in Miami there are things I know that I don't have to go look up and sensibilities I have that can fit with my books. If I did write something in another city the protagonist, you can bet, would be a stranger there and it would be just coming to that town.

Alvarez: Have you lived here all of your life?

Parker: No, not all of my life. I've been in Florida since 1960 and in Miami since 1974, with a short hiatus in Broward county, from which I'm just returning.

Alvarez: Welcome home!

Parker: Oh, great! I'm really glad to be back.

Alvarez: Well, thank you very much, Barbara, for taking the time to talk to me.

Introduction to Les Standiford Interview

Dr. Les Standiford was my first interview. He teaches creative writing at Florida International University and he is also the director of the creative writing program. He is a writer, but he is also an instructor and part entertainer. He is known in the crime fiction community for his rye sense of humor. His straight black hair is graying around the temples belying the years he has put in to hone the craft of writing and earn not only his academic degrees, but also the administrative skills it takes to run one of the most successful creative writing programs in the United States. He was wearing a polo shirt with the collar turned up and jeans, his uniform both on campus and his book jackets. He offered to help me meet some of the other crime fiction writers in the community for this thesis and followed through with introductions to most of the writers mentioned.

Dr. Standiford's first Miami crime fiction novel is called Done Deal and it lays out the ground work for a series featuring John Deal as a Miami building contractor who finds himself in extraordinarily dangerous situations. Deal differs from some of the other heroes and heroines we will be meeting through the interviews because he does not seek out personal risk, but criminal situations encroach on his territory in a quite literal way. Deal is left with one piece of land from his father's failed construction company. The land is in the heart of Little Havana, a quaint, but often dangerous part of town. In Done Deal his little piece of land completes the puzzle of a multi-million dollar

land deal for a new baseball stadium. Standiford is always timely in his Miami crime fiction plots as the issue of the Miami Marlins, the lack of a stadium and the wholesale dismantling of the team remain headline news five years after Done Deal was published.

Before the reader meets John Deal, we meet Leon Straight, one of the antagonists in Done Deal. Standiford uses an array of multi-ethnic villains in this novel. Leon Straight works for a Cuban boss, Raoul Alcazar, who is strong arming the landholders into selling to an attorney that heads up a baseball syndicate. Thornton Penfield was an intimate associate of Deal's father from the days of the Miami construction boom on Brickell Avenue, funded in large part from drug money looking for a home. Character's like Penfield, Southern politically connected lawyers and businessman with no noticeable morality, can be found in many of the Miami crime fiction novels. Standiford makes Penfield a driving force of evil in this novel, but he's a white collar criminal. The blood letting is left to Leon Straight and his Hispanic accomplice, Alejandro.

Jack Deal, known mostly as John or Johnny in the Kennedy tradition, is a native of South Florida. He appears to represent an element of South Florida society that can adjust and enjoy the immigrant population, but is not quite comfortable with it. Take this dialog between Deal and Alcazar for example;

"Used to be, Mr. Alcazar, every kid in school learned that old story about George Washington, he cuts down the cherry tree and then

he comes and tells his dad, he did it, he's sorry, but he has to own up for what he did." Deal paused. "Maybe you never heard that story."

"Something like it," Alcazar shrugged. Leon stared at Deal with something between astonishment and disgust.

Deal continued. "I don't have to tell you how things have changed these last few years, Mr. Alcazar. Not that anybody really did what George was supposed to have done, of course, at least not after you got old enough to understand that owning up got you a good ass-whipping. But we, all of us over here, we *pretended* to believe in the story, you know what I mean?"...

Instead, it was Alcazar who spoke. "Every country has its myths," he said. "I grew up hearing about the streets of America, how they were paved with gold." He waved his hand about the showroom (cars), gave Deal his thin smile. "And I have found it to be true (159)."

Standiford, while not intentionally giving voice to a particularly white Anglo male, viewpoint nevertheless does so through John Deal, who is strictly born in the U.S.A.. He would drive twenty miles to avoid buying Japanese nails for his job (Done Deal 37). We learn that Deal did not mind working with Hispanics in the construction business;

No, it wasn't accommodating himself to another language that bothered him. Furthermore, he admired the industry of the immigrants, even those his old man considered, "pushy." As far as Deal was concerned, they had a right. They'd been fucked over at home,

wherever that was, and now they had come over here and were desperate to make it, simple as that. No, he had no problems with that. It was just that it was getting harder and harder for Deal to keep his own little part of the pie (Done Deal 27-28).

The above passage sets up the conflict of the established Anglo culture in Miami as it tries to grapple with a flood of immigrant people that threatened their money making opportunities and their political base while at the same time providing growth and interesting multi-cultural exposure in the region.

Dr. Standiford's interview also helped set the tone for the subsequent ones as he laid out several important observations. He discusses Miami's history and how it has provided the possibility for some sort of regional literature developing here. His remarks are candid about the immigration issues in the area and the ethnic makeup of both his antagonists and protagonist, John Deal. Les Standiford is a remarkably generous person, without a tinge of prejudice. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the ethnic and racial conflicts that exist in Miami help him to shape his crime fiction. The organization of the conclusion of this thesis relies in large part on some of Dr. Standiford's interview responses.

Interview with Les Standiford, 1/23/97

Alvarez: As you know, I'm working on a thesis that has to do with crime fiction in South Florida. And, I have some questions here that relate to crime fiction in general, and then some that are more specific to Miami. I'll bring up some things about your work. The first question is this: Suspense relies on the moral fantasy in which mysteries are always solved, and the guilty are always identified and captured. Could you comment on this - both the idea of moral fantasy, and the process of creating suspense?

Standiford: Those are pretty two diverse concerns as I see them. I think that traditional detective fiction gave us that moral paradigm, where society had suffered some grave injury, and the detective was the knight who set out to sally forth and slay whatever locus, evil, and right whatever wrong, set society back again, much like the medieval knight did. But, I think in the 20th Century that the notion that any man could set society right, even the most dedicated cop or detective could do much to change the essential nature of a troubled society and world, influenced the detective novel profoundly. And, so, you had a vision of the world develop that had very little to do with the capability of anybody, any single person being able to set wrong to right. And, their response to this was, I think, by and large existential. But, the attempt would be in Sam Spade's words, "Somebody kills your partner, you've got to do something about it." If the code is offended, you can live in defense of the code, but you can't do much more than that. You can't set society right. I think that's pretty much the refrain that you see in most crime detective fiction these days, that the James Bond school of thought aside, is going to see very much of that. As for suspense, yes, something bad happens, and the reader wonders whether anyone will ever be brought to account. Where someone's put in danger, the reader wonders whether or not someone they care about will escape danger or suffer or not. I think that's the stock and trade of the detective and crime thriller. Always has been, always will be. That's still in fact, a suspense. In its simplest is what drives the reader through almost any novel. What's going to happen next? What will happen to

this person or these people to whom I've come to care about? And, I think an understanding of how suspense or thriller or detection fiction can be a real asset to someone who wants to write, or anyone who wants to understand how fiction, in general, works, because it's simply more clear cut.

Standiford: I've got a camera crew coming in here. That's why I'm tidying up.

Alvarez: We'll see how far we can take it.

Standiford: O.K.

Alvarez: Does South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?

Standiford: Well, there's certainly an awful lot in the contemporary press. There is general agreement that there's a South Florida school of crime and mystery writing. I think that's true. I really do. And, it has a lot to do—I think there are many aspects to that. First of all, in short order, a number of writers appeared, producing stuff that publishers found worth printing. And, that's, uh, O.K., that, in and of itself, created a kind of locus literary energy, made other people say, "Well, geez, if these people could do it, so can I. If all of those people are being published, maybe publishers are really interested. And, readers, apparently enjoyed discovering this place, a place that—I think the contemporary world's attention was drawn to it by *Miami Vice*. I think the television program had a lot to do with it. I think that *Miami Vice* used up all the easy stuff, the drug stories and the drug-running stories, and the general "sleaziness has come to paradise" story. But, television certainly doesn't have time nor inclination to deal in serious characterization with complex themes. And, so, other writers that came along in a wake may have said, "Yes, there is a lot of crime." And, there's a lot of intrigue in an area like South Florida, which is undergoing tremendous cultural change, with a focus of a great deal of immigration from Latin America. We're a frontier city. We're much like Sydney, Australia in that regard. And, as the general consensus being that the frontier is dead or closed, or the movement westward is over within America, all of a sudden there appeared a new frontier city. And, I think that there's always interest in such a place. And, George Hill was one *Right in Everybody's Own Backyard*, was a place that had always been passed off as kind of a tourist haven, where nothing very interesting or serious took place. And, ever

since the mafia de-camped in the 1950's, you know, it had been a pretty sleepy place where not much happened. And, all of a sudden, with the public's interest and appetite wetted by the television show, writers came along who were using the same backdrop, but treating it in--you know, far more in depth, with characters who were complex. But, it's not surprising to me that this would happen. And, what do I see here, I've already eluded to. But, there's a great deal of immigration, a great deal of political flux. I don't think, as opposed to a city like Boston or New York City, where the power structure is in tact, in place and is not about to change markedly, nothing's been settled in Miami, politically or socially. All is in flux. And, a new wave of immigration every month, it would seem, affected life in Miami, affected greatly by political upheaval in neighboring Latin America, the Caribbean, and Cuba, and Haiti, and in various South American countries. Well, I don't think life in any other American city is affected to any great degree by what happens anywhere else, not like it does in Miami. So, there is an aspect of the mix that makes Miami a unique place. And, finally, I think that Miami and South Florida is sort of the emblem of paradise. It's still very strong in many people's minds. I saw recently that it's still ranked as one of the leading vacation destinations in America, I think the leading vacation destination of Americans, as opposed to California or any other tropical place. And, so, when something bad happens in paradise, it's doubly trouble to, I think, the American psyche. So, there's another reason why it's interesting. And, I'm sure we'll turn, you know, in years hence, we'll have our drawing room comedies, as well, as the cultural. But, for now, I'd say the mystery--yes, Miami is a literary hot spot, and the mystery novel is the natural media to really vie for the concerns of the place, and give the world a sense of what's going on here.

Alvarez: Just to follow up, because I think you've answered this in large part, but, what characteristics in South Florida attract you, personally, to live in the area? The other part was "to place your stories here," but I think you've answered that.

Standiford: Yeah, it's pretty clear. I think there's just so much going on, so many diverse things going on. When I pick up the newspaper, and, every day there's an idea for a potential novel. The living in--as a writer in South Florida, I think you struggle to keep things out of your books, as opposed to looking for interesting things to put in, because sometimes

you'd be accused of making up outlandish stories, just by reprinting what happens on the front page. And, I've seen novels of Edna Buchanan actually start off that way, with a listing that boggles the mind of the previous week's events in crime, almost astounding, impossible to believe in diversity and a bizarre plot.

Alvarez: That leads me into a question I was going to ask you later. But, I'm just going to raise it now. The daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. And, for you, does this tend to diminish or enhance your effort? In other words, when you start writing, and then you see something in the paper that parallels it, does that discourage or--

Standiford: No, I think the headlines--no, it only encourages me. It's more grist for the mill. I think novelists are never really writing about what happens, so much as they're writing about why it happens, why these people did this, what it means to people caught up in such a situation. These are things that the headlines in the newspapers and television can never deal with.

Alvarez: I'm going to keep going back to this idea of regionalism, because it's important to the way I'm looking at the crime fiction. Miami does not comply with the traditional definition of regional characteristics, which include such things as local pride, defensiveness, condescension, superficial presentation of local lore, or homogenous cultural and ethnic qualities. Can help me a little bit with the definition and the characterizations of urban regionalism, and give me your opinion of how Miami does or does not even fit with those definitions.

Standiford: Well, it's a frontier city, as I've said before. It is the American frontier city. It's the key. It is the locus of a great deal of immigration. It is affected by Caribbean and Latin American politics in a very profound way. There is a great deal of jockeying for position in local politics, among diverse ethnic and power groups of one sort and another. Tension is great between American Blacks and almost every Hispanic immigration group, even between Haitian Blacks and American Blacks, fighting for a piece of the pie. I mean, a lot of people have come in here, and this is the place where many of them immediately look for work, and assistance of one kind or another. On the other hand, this also produces a great flowering of culture, many kinds of cultures in terms of art and local theater, and music, and writing, and dining, and energy--you know, just plain old energy. And, in that way, you might argue that it's a lot

like—it's similar in some ways to Southern California, or to New York, to some extent. But, the weather is good, and it welcomes immigration in a way that northern cities don't. So, we tend to get more people, and they tend to stay here longer, I think. So, all of this—you know, we're not just an entry place. We're a place where people enter and stay, like it was in New York. And, in many ways, perhaps like Los Angeles, but newer to growth. And, coping with all the problems in a place like Los Angeles. Florida would be really—aside from the Cuban influx in 1960, didn't begin to be the Latin—uh, as I understand, at least—the gateway to Latin America and the Caribbean until about 1980. It was with Mariel. Mariel marked the beginning of a different Miami. This has all developed. Everything that Miami is today, in large part, is 15 years old.

Alvarez: So, we have no history?

Standiford: Virtually, no history. And, of course, though, something that I like to deal with is how the old-time residents, the vestigial interests, Miami interests, if you call them, try to cope with this, and that's who John Deal is. He's the son of a man who owned a prominent construction company here that began to flourish in the '50's. And now, with his father gone, and the company gutted financially, Deal finds himself in the position of trying to rebuild a life on a foundation that he's learning about as he goes, where his father had the luxury of building upon a foundation that was essentially the same as any other American metropolis, over the previous 150 years.

Alvarez: I'm suggesting that life in the Miami/South Florida area goes beyond traditional and urban definitions of regionalism, that we are in a post-regional environment that is defined by characteristics such as a multi-cultural society, which you talked about, close proximity of urban, suburban and rural lifestyles, saturation by mass communication and mass transportation, a mixture of architectural styles, cuisines, which you mentioned, social interactions, political machinations coupled with more traditional characteristics, such as—these are characteristics of regionalism, such as the environment's effect on man and man's effect on his environment - for instance, the weather, which I know that you're very much aware of - and you're right. The Everglades, the coastline, um, those are natural things we have. Could you comment any further on this notion of post-regional literature, as it might relate to Miami crime fiction?

Standiford: Well, I'm not sure I know what you mean by post-regional. Miami is a lot more sophisticated and complex than a lot of other places one might choose to write about. I think the typical view of regionalism, as it's been talked about in American letters, has to do with, as you were saying before, cultural—a culture that's grown up out of a physical place. Culture and customs that have grown up out of a particular place, that are affected by the weather, by trade, by traffic, etcetera, etcetera. But, Miami is quite definable. But its characteristics—it has characteristics which haven't grown up—grown out over—grown over time. As I say, its characteristics have—now, its present characteristics, in large part, other than its physical beauty and its weather, didn't exist 15 years ago. This is a frontier city, and it has all the aspects of a frontier city. And, another thing about what Miami is, it's in great flux. And, whatever it is now, it's going to be vastly different in 15 more years. Come here in 15 years, and the place will be—I don't know. I can't tell you who—what's going to win out, but I will tell you that it will be markedly different than it is today.

Alvarez: Do violence and sex have a necessary role in the plot development of crime fiction?

Standiford: I think it has a role in the development of almost any fiction. It just may be more vividly drawn in crime fiction, in general, because the questions of life and death are just—that's what we're really talking about, when we talk about sex and violence, in other words, for life and death. And, the life and death issues of all sorts in mystery fiction are just more vivid, more vividly drawn by nature. However, I don't think that gives any writer a license to take advantage—that's not the word I want. But, I know what I'm supposedly privy to as a writer of crime, that my readers are supposedly readers who accept almost any depiction of violence and sexual behavior. But, I always try to err on the side of subtlety myself, because I grew up—went through school studying Shakespeare, and learning what you could—that the power that you could get by having your murders happen off stage, by keeping the blood out of sight of the audience, and the power of suggestion simply was greater than the power of literal depiction, quite often. So, that while sex and violence are eluded to in my books, quite often it's more elusion than graphic depiction, in both cases.

- Alvarez: When you have someone locked in the trunk with vicious dogs, you don't tell us every detail of the injury that they go through, but it's probably more chilling because you leave out—
- Standiford: Once that trunk lid slams down, you never see a thing. And, it's all up to your imagination. And, that's a horrifying thing. But, I believe people do things like that to other people, and it's important to bring such brutality out. But, that's different than what I would call a sadistic or a kind of "peeping Tom" view of certain actions. But, as I always like to say, less is quite often more.
- Alvarez: Good pun, too. Is escape the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?
- Standiford: No, I think it's just the opposite. I think people read crime and mystery fiction for the same reason some people might like to ride terrifying rides at the carnival. It's a kind of practice for your own death. It's a kind of way of getting up close to the awful and unknowable and frightening things in life, in a controlled setting where, when it gets too intense, you put the book down. I really do. It's a way of sort of running your tongue over the jagged edge of pain and fear, in a way that you are, in this case, in charge of. And, also, quite often a way of discovering whether or not you have the moxie yourself to—or would have the moxie yourself to behave in an honorable way, or a courageous way under extreme circumstances. Certainly, when I'm writing, I'm not writing about James Bond heroes, but a guy like John Deal is every man. You're invited to imagine what you would do under the same circumstances. And, Deal is armed with—essentially, he doesn't carry a gun, he's not a detective, he's not a cop. He doesn't have procedural knowledge, and so forth and so on. What he essentially has is the basic seat-of-his-pants wisdom and morals that many of us are brought up understanding, and we get a chance to test whether or not—how those will fly.
- Alvarez: Let's talk about John Deal a little. How do you pick your antagonist's characterization? I mean, Deal, he's every man. But, can you tell me a little bit about his ethnicity?
- Standiford: He's a blossom. He's Mr. Middle America. And, he's living in a place where every value and assumption, just about every value and assumption, taken for granted by a WASP, is challenged on a daily basis.

Alvarez: I'm very interested in knowing about your audience. In other words, do you know who you're trying to reach, and who's reading the Deal books? Are they other male WASPS?

Standiford: I don't know.

Alvarez: Do you know if Hispanics and Blacks are reading them?

Standiford: I do not know. Heidi, I hear that the typical reader of mystery fiction in America today is a 45-year-old woman. But, who am I writing for? I'm writing for half a dozen good friends and myself. And, I'm writing the kind of book that I like to read, that I would like to read myself. And, so, I suppose I'm saying, I'm writing for an audience that's like me. But, then again, I see myself as a person of wide and eclectic interests. And, so I should think just about anybody would be interested.

Alvarez: If I wanted to follow up on demographics, do you think there's anyone at your publishing house that would know?

Standiford: Well, yeah, I think Eamon Dolen my editor, is someone who—he's been at this quite a long time, and must have been to seminars where they discuss these things, because he's a mystery editor—specializes, among other things, in mystery fiction.

Alvarez: How did you develop the character of John Deal, the protagonist in your novels?

Standiford: I worked my way through college as a carpenter's helper, and I worked for a guy named Barton Swapp in Utah. He's still out there building houses, an independent contractor. And, Bart Swoff impressed me as the kind of guy who loved his work, who took a great deal of satisfaction out of it, never expected to get rich, wouldn't walk off a job without having done his best, always gave a day's work for a day's pay, and loved his life, and felt good about himself. And, when I set out to write the first Deal book, I had the notion of what it was going to be about. And, I found memories of who Bart Swoff was, and what he kind of stood for in my memory, working their way into this character of John Deal, as well as parts of me, and just imagination. But, essentially, the question that I'm always sort of testing in these books is, do all those traditional, middle-American values that we're brought up to believe in, do they still hold? Do they still have any benefit? Are they valid? Do they have an application in a world that's changed greatly, and nowhere has it changed more greatly in America than it has here.

Alvarez: Do you think that Deal intentionally stimulates fear, like encroachment and lack of understanding in the audience? When someone is reading the book, and Deal is placed in these horrifying situations--and normally--I think this is fair to say--your antagonists are Cuban, or they're Latin American.

Standiford: Antagonists, yeah.

Alvarez: Or, we've got Leon, who's an American Black, who's also encroached upon, in a way.

Standiford: Yeah, but, uh--

Alvarez: Do you think you're intentionally stimulating that kind of encroachment?

Standiford: Geez, I hope not. The bad guy in the new book is a corrupt televangelist who lives in Omaha. So, I think that--and, in fact, the real villain in the first Deal book was John Deal's father's best friend. Another WASP from the old school.

Alvarez: That's the other kind of villain that I see often, not just in your fiction, but other writers that are writing here, is that you've got this sort of old school WASP, where you call them almost "redneck," in a way. You know, that "good-old-boy" network? They seem to team up with the Latinos.

Standiford: Yeah, the two-- I believe that I've covered the waterfront, in terms of who the villains are, in my pieces. And, I think there have been killer women and killer men. And, I think there's a wide range of characters, and I feel free to do that.

Alvarez: You're an equal opportunity employer of villains.

Standiford: Exactly.

Alvarez: O.K. Just to follow up on this idea of violence and sex, which I agree are, you know, are certainly both necessary to the--building suspense and the plot and so on--

Standiford: It makes the stakes a lot clearer.

Alvarez: I understand that you absolutely don't subscribe to a sort of a pornography of violence.

Standiford: Mm hm.

Alvarez: Right? Uh, but, the violence you use, how does Miami as a background character help you to build both the violent scenes and the--you don't do too much in this --sex scenes?

Standiford: No, I don't. I just think that what goes on in Miami makes it very clear that no conception of violent behavior is too bizarre.

Alvarez: So, we've got it?

Standiford: Yeah. I mean, this whole--the case that we read about--a big article in the week before last Sunday paper about these guys that were going around, preying on established

members of a community, kidnapping them, forcing them to drain their cash accounts, their checking accounts-- then sawing them up into pieces with chain saws, and putting them in steel--hiding them in steel drums in storage. Well, for sadism and outright violence, I have seen nothing in any work of crime fiction, some probably 50 of them published over the last 10 years by various practitioners, that came even close to that. No matter what we dream up, there are evil people out there who will make it seem like child's play.

Alvarez: Does that support your efforts, because whatever you dream up seems to have a basis in what's really happening?

Standiford: In reality. Yeah. And, I suppose to some--in some way, I'm always saying, "Wise up. Pay attention. Don't you realize what's going on--what we're allowing to happen to ourselves, and to our values." I'm not trying to sensationalize.

Alvarez: In formulaic fiction, we are encouraged to form an identification with the protagonist that actually takes the reader out of himself--and I know you said you don't think that kind of fiction is a form of escape, but of testing your own death.

Standiford: Right.

Alvarez: How do you feel about this term, "formulaic fiction"?

Standiford: There's a difference between a form and a formula. And, I don't think any formulaic fiction is good. But, fiction written in a form can be wonderful. After all, Shakespeare wrote in genre, in a definable genre. And, he wrote plays that were very popular, and intended to be popular--didn't stop him from writing great stuff. And, I don't think that any practitioner who takes a form, you know, is bound to anything. In other words, it just makes that job a little easier.

Alvarez: I remember you saying something about that there are 4 billion people in the world, and--

Standiford: Well, there are 4 billion human faces, and they all share the same form. And, yet there's no face that's just like any other face, even in the case of identical twins. For anybody to assume that choosing a form or a genre in which to write, automatically means that, therefore, nothing great can come out of it, would be simple.

Alvarez: What flaws do your protagonists have? John Deal, specifically?

Standiford: I think he's hard-headed, stubborn, believes--you know, has too great of a reliance on his own way of doing things. Not as willing to take advice as he might be. He is so, in the case of his wife, is so smitten, so dedicated to that

union, that it probably keeps him from being able to step back and see that there's things that he could do that would be more likely--uh, and repair some bonds, that he needs some distance, that he's unable to step back from a situation. And he's very passionate, and that sometimes blinds him to an objective view, that leads to impulsive behavior that gets him in more trouble. And, he also, I think, has a certain latent egotism that leads him to believe that if he doesn't take care of a problem, that no one will. But, these are also all characteristics that are handy in keeping a story moving along.

Alvarez: On the other hand, they all give him a certain amount of strength?

Standiford: His strength is also his undoing. And, that's the tragic paradigm, to the extent that I can approach that and make that work, and I think the books are that much better for it.

Alvarez: You mentioned earlier that John Deal was a compilation of different people, and he has elements of you. So, how do you compare with him?

Standiford: Oh, I think he's more impulsive, and at the same time, more physically courageous than I would likely be in similar situations. I'd like to be as certain of myself as John Deal is at times. But, on the other hand, he has a certain vulnerability and desire, and generosity of spirit that I think I'd like to have as well. I think all of us who write get a chance to work out, not only our flaws and our fears, but to project certain aspects that we'd all like to have, in our fictional creation. And, I'm always careful to not idealize to the point where this is pure wish fulfillment being projected on the page. And, in a sense, he may not be me. But, in another sense, he is me. And, I'm saying, "Hm, how would I behave? What would I do under these situation, what chance would I have under these circumstances?" And, if anything that John Deal gets too far away from, literally, what I or any other reasonable human being might be able to do with our bare hands and our wits, and our basic morality, then I failed at what I'm trying to do. The minute he comes to look like a super hero, I'd say I've lost my way.

Alvarez: So, you're very aware of reader identification with Deal?

Standiford: Well, I don't know if other people will see him that way or not. But, I know how I want him to appear. And, I sure hope that they will. You know, you'll have to talk to a reader to find out whether they do see him that way. I got a review the other day which struck me, written by a person I did not know, and never met before. I showed it to my wife,

and she said, "Geez, aren't you just floored?" And, I said, "Absolutely, I am. This is—here is at least one person out there in the world that got it, exactly as I would have like to have it received."

Alvarez: Talk to me about your villains.

Standiford: Sociologically, what I try to do is make the villains more interesting for their humanity. And, quite often, they get to be the most interesting characters in the book, for me, as I'm writing. Because, I try to make them human, not psychopathic. Even if their behavior is psychopathic, or apparently psychopathic, what I like to do is try to trace the shreds of humanity that are in there, that are connected up to that psychopathic behavior. I just find nothing— a) I believe that's the way it is in life, and b) the more human they are, the more chilling they are, as representations of evil.

Alvarez: I have a couple of questions about the *Deal To Die For*. Do you think that there are similarities between British Orientalism at the turn of the 19th to the 20th Century, and our fascination with other cultures—here in Miami at the turn of the 20th to the 21st Century?

Standiford: I don't know, uh, if I understand the question.

Alvarez: Well, if we look at, say, Sherlock Holmes, all these elements of Oriental culture that Doyle puts into the Holmes stories parallel Miami crime fiction inclusion of the Latin culture in the books.

Standiford: Mm hm.

Alvarez: Could you say that with any of your books, there's an interest in other cultures. And, there's certainly a fascination with the multi-cultural mix that converges on Miami?

Standiford: Oh, yeah. But I think that's part and parcel of what I was talking about before, that *Deal*—as an Anglo, *Deal* is Mr. Middle America, and Mr. and Mrs. Middle America is forced to comprehend a way of seeing the world that he never has before, whatever mayhem that he gets himself involved in. And, I particularly wanted to get outside Miami—you know, the connection to Miami in that particular bit of underhanded dealing is almost accidental. It's only because of a person he knows once lived here. That's the only connection. This is a West Coast thing. But, that's me trying to say that this isn't just South Florida. This is the world. This is America as a whole. You know, we talk about entering the global village. Well, let's talk about what that means. That means being ready to give up some of your own cherished values to understand other people.

And, you will not be able to do business and impose your values on these people, just because they are foreigners. You see? So, metaphorically, I present these Chinese businessmen in the way I do, not because I want to scare people about--you know, that all Chinese businessmen are heinous criminals, but to metaphorically say, "When you go to do business in China, don't get any ideas that you're going to go over there and pull the wool over their eyes, and make a ton of money off running the business importing your this, or your percolators or your washing machines to China, because you will find out that it's going to cost you just--you know, they're going to extract from us, or you, just the way that you're looking to extract from them. This is going to be a two-way street." And, I feel very passionately about this. And, it's pretty much the way I depict right-wing politics in Miami. There are Anglos who would like to, "How dare these people come in here and try to take our country away from us." Well, they just want theirs the way the robber barons of the '20's wanted theirs--all those WASPS, when they came down and ripped off the environment of Florida. There's no difference here.

Alvarez: In fact, you draw a parallel between Deal's father and some of the opportunists that are Cuban or Latin, that are here now.

Standiford: Deal's aware of that, and becomes increasingly aware of that. One of these days, I'm going to do a Deal story that essentially has a lot to do with the past. And, Deal's father will become a character in that book, you know, if only through memory.

Alvarez: If you will allow me one more question, and this is almost more like a soap opera fan asking it, but, you mentioned Janice before, Deal's wife. And, in *Deal to Die For*, it seems like you were turning Janice into this other--you know what I mean when I say, "Other" with a capital "O", when she becomes a mental patient, and then she dresses up, and she starts taking on different personalities--and I'm curious to know where we're going with her?

Standiford: In the brand-new book, in *Deal on Ice*, she becomes a--they are, at least temporarily, reunited, then they serve almost like a Nick and Nora team, in following up the thread of that particular mystery. But, again, that's me, I think, metaphorically, trying to talk about how you must not take your spouse for granted. Even someone you think you know as well as your spouse, you must not assume that you know everything about that person. It demeans them, it belittles your life, and it could reach up and bite you, and

sometimes tells you great, uh--you know, as it does in real life, because people do that in real life. They come home one day, and the wife says, "I'm getting a divorce. I'm out of here. It's over." And, they say, "What? Huh? How come I didn't know anything was--" Because, you weren't looking. You weren't paying any attention. And, again, metaphorically, I think, at any rate, that's what's going on there between Deal and Janice. He loves her, but perhaps too much, too intently as to--you know, has always seen--their relationship is never questioned.

Alvarez: So, someone can become foreign, simply by neglecting to look at things.

Standiford: That's right.

Alvarez: Thank you.

Standiford: You're welcome.

Introduction to Mitchell Kaplan Interview

Mitchell Kaplan was mentioned by several authors and professors at FIU because of the role he has played in stimulating the literary community in South Florida. As owner of Books & Books, Mr. Kaplan has brought prominent writers from around the country to lecture, read from their works in progress and newly published books in addition to participating in book signings. While these activities alone might not merit Mr. Kaplan a place in this scholarly work, he has done something more that insures his place. Mitchell Kaplan nurtured the local writing community by giving them a place to gather, to exchange ideas and to be heard. The culmination of this activity occurs at the yearly Miami Book Fair, and Mitchell Kaplan makes it happen.

Mr. Kaplan is positioned to give an insight into the social, cultural, and economic events that have enabled the growth of Miami crime fiction since 1980. The interview questions were devised to solicit his agreement of refutation of my own observations about the unique characterization, plot devices, settings and audience for Miami crime fiction.

Interview with Mitchell Kaplan, owner of Books & Books 8/27/1997

Alvarez: The first thing that I want to ask you about comes up because many of the authors I interviewed mentioned your role in making South Florida a Mecca for crime fiction writers.

Kaplan: Oh, really?

Alvarez: Yes. For instance Carolina Garcia-Aguilera said that you've been a big help to her by calling her for speaking engagements. Les Standiford placed Deal on Ice right in your store. Could you tell me about the history of your store, Books & Books, the Miami Book Fair, and how you have nurtured many of our prominent writers?

Kaplan: Sure. We opened in 1982, fourteen years ago, at about the time that Elmore Leonard wrote La Brava. Charles Williford died but Betsy, Charles' wife, is still around. When you read La Brava today it give you an amazing view of South Beach.

Alvarez: I read it recently after talking to Elmore Leonard. He graciously gave me his telephone number and said call me. I did a telephone interview and he told me to go read La Brava in answer to my question about why Miami is a rich backdrop for crime fiction.

Kaplan: Yes, you can see what South Beach was like and even Miami Blues⁹ talks about a seedy South Beach. When we opened those were the two people working in the genre and I guess a good book store becomes a focal point for writers so over the course of the years a lot of these writers became friends, friends of mine, friends of the book store. If you remember what was happening in Miami in the mid-eighties, turmoil in Central and South America, you had the Nicaraguan situation, El Salvador, Miami was just a roiling..., Mariel happened, Art Deco was being rediscovered. It was this bubbling pot of all different things going on. It was atmospheric in that a lot of writers who were journalists were based here covering Central America, the Caribbean and South America. Given the tenor of what Miami had become at that point of time the form of the mystery genre seemed to be a perfect vehicle to capture the color of what was happening in Miami. The genre has grown in Miami. You have Carl Hiaasen taking the kind of absurdist view of Miami and sometimes he's not even making it up.

Alvarez: That's one of my questions later.

Kaplan: You know art imitates life. Nothing written about Miami is as outlandish as the kind of things that go on. So you have Carl working sort of in that vein. You have Jim Hall taking kind of an historical view of things, exploring different areas. Paul Levine can fit into that realm, even Les...

Alvarez: He has a good sense of humor.

Kaplan: The genesis was that Miami was boiling and bubbling roiling and fortunately it was a lot of fun for me. The store was kind of like the center of this because we would have writers that would come and have readings. The community was a close knit one pretty much. (Kaplan stops to give me a photograph of writers gathered at Books & Books) That's Les. There's Paul and Jim. Some of them are not mystery writers.

Alvarez: Yes, I recognize a lot of them. It's a great picture ¹⁰.

Kaplan: You're welcome to have it.

Alvarez: Thank you. What were you doing right before you opened the bookstore?

Kaplan: I was teaching.

Alvarez: Where?

Kaplan: High school English here in Miami.

Alvarez: Do you write at all?

Kaplan: I enjoy writing but it's such a commitment. I think at one time I fashioned myself as a writer.

Alvarez: Crime fiction uses certain literary devices such as creating a slightly removed, imaginary world. Is South Florida an ideal model, and if so, why?

Kaplan: Yes definitely. It's just the wackiness and events that go on down here. You have the Miami river, the tensions of a port city. There's the drug thing. Atmospherically, it breeds color and the qualities that makes for a good mystery.

Alvarez: This is the part where I could really use your insight. Does South Florida qualify as a literary region, and if so, what regional phenomena exist to encourage this trend?

Kaplan: I don't know what exactly you mean by a literary region. What example can you give me?

Alvarez: I've done research into Southern regionalism and New England regionalism in literature but I'm really having a hard time finding references that specifically talk about urban regionalism. Regionalism historically meant a homogenous culture, that they shared one religion, one language. For example Eudora Welty or Faulkner wrote about the South...

- Kaplan: I would always wonder, I mean I think they're terrific boxes to put things in, and I think there are common themes and I think with any generalization that you really study, you might find strains that you don't find in other parts of the world or other parts of the country, but I think you could find a lot of exceptions with people writing about the South and the same is true in South Florida. For instance Flannery O'Connor is a mixture of religion and guilt. I think there definitely, and I think you're writing about it. I think the mystery genre is probably the genre of choice in South Florida writing right now. Now, whether or not that changes, and it becomes the writing of the immigrants, then the mystery genre might be loosening its ties a little bit to something dealing with a lot of the issues.
- Alvarez: We talked about why the South Florida crime fiction writers are flourishing here. What characteristics of South Florida do you think attract crime fiction readers not just here, but all over the country and the world?
- Kaplan: Homogenous cultures can be devoid of a lot of color. I can understand why the tropics would be really interesting to people. So as diversion, I think it's probably so far removed from so many people's experiences. Then, purely on a commercial level, Miami is in the news a lot. It's always been a tourist destination. The media has set it up. Readers can relate to the city and they are somewhat comfortable knowing what they are going to get, like a brand name.
- Alvarez: You mentioned that the reader is comfortable, that they know what they're going to get. I know from my own experience, that you get into these series, reading mysteries, because it's like jumping into another world and you know what's going to be there. We started to talk about this, that the daily news headlines appear to either compete with or fuel the creation of crime fiction. Do you think this tends to diminish or enhance the crime fiction written locally?
- Kaplan: Let me start with one answer. The best writing that comes out of South Florida, it doesn't diminish it at all. If you're outside of Miami, doesn't matter. But, if you live here and follow what is going on you might think the writers are being derivative.
- Alvarez: Do you think that issues of right and wrong or the aesthetic of the crime fiction form are of greater concern to South Florida's crime fiction writers?
- Kaplan: Good versus evil?
- Alvarez: Or the aesthetic of satisfying that form, the mystery form...

Kaplan: So, are they more concerned with the aesthetic versus presenting something which is socially redeemable?

Alvarez: Yes.

Kaplan: Good question. I think part of the aesthetic is good versus evil in a sense. For instance, Carl (Hiaasen), who's whole thing I really admire. But some people read his stuff and they say, "God, he's not really concerned." I don't think he comes at it because he's doing something for an aesthetic. I think he's doing it because that's what he's feeling. The same with Les (Standiford), Jim as well. I think the aesthetic informs the good versus evil. I don't think that they want to write wholesomely. I think part of the aesthetic demands a certain amount of outrageousness.

Alvarez: How does Miami as setting work to support the important role of sex and violence in crime fiction?

Kaplan: It's Miami.

Alvarez: It's Miami?

Kaplan: Sex and violence. What else could you want? Vicki Hendrick's book is all aesthetic. I liked her book a lot.

Alvarez: Miami Purity? Yes I liked it very much. In fact of all the books I read, that's the one that seems to stay in my mind the most, the actual plot, and every time I walk into a dry cleaner...

Kaplan: You wonder what's going on in the back? But, Vicki was operating certainly from an aesthetic. Basically her book is all aesthetic. She followed James M. Cain's The Postman Always Rings Twice and she admits to that.

Alvarez: Yes, I heard something about that from Jim Hall.

Kaplan: Yes, it was an exercise in that sense. It was really well done.

Alvarez: Do you think that escape is the primary aesthetic motivator in writing and reading crime fiction?

Kaplan: Yes. The books are an entertainment.

Alvarez: Have you observed any trends in the villain's characterization such as ethnicity?

Kaplan: Some of the stereotypes are out there, the Black foes, the Hispanic foes. I don't know if that type dominates necessarily. Take Jim Hall. His villains come from everywhere. Carl and Les too. So, maybe not. Maybe I don't see any real ethnic villains of all different kinds. If the question is, "Is it the trend to have villains of an ethnicity," Yes, there is. Les, had a whole Oriental thing, the Asians. Yes, there are definitely ethnic villains in South Florida's crime fiction. That's interesting. That could be one of the distinguishing factors of South Florida fiction. I don't know

if it plays out that way and that may be because ethnicity is such an issue here.

Alvarez: One thing that has come up in conversations with my professor at FIU is that maybe the antagonists intentionally stimulate fears of encroachment and lack of understanding to tap into that in the reading audience.

Kaplan: South Florida people, do you mean?

Alvarez: Anywhere. Because we're all trying to find our place in a multi-cultural society, much more so maybe here or New York or L.A. than Milwaukee, but people in Milwaukee are also aware that the mixture of society is changing.

Kaplan: So, the ethnic component speaks to a wide audience. I think that's an interesting observation. I could agree with that. It might occur unconsciously.

Alvarez: Well, I don't think that any of the writers are out to slash a group.

Kaplan: Wow!

Alvarez: Are you aware of a Hispanic or Black audience for crime fiction?

Kaplan: Yes, there is. Walter Moseley is a Black writer but I'm more aware of a Latino market and interest than I am a Black market.

Alvarez: Do you have any actual demographics of who is reading the novels?

Kaplan: No.

Alvarez: Have you observed any differences between the way male and female writers approach crime fiction?

Kaplan: Other than Vicki, sex and violence take a back seat to plot. Plot more than atmospherics, more plot driven than stylistic.

Alvarez: I get a feel that the male writer's heroes are more ordinary people negotiating extraordinary circumstances where the women protagonists seem to be choosing to embroil themselves in criminal situations whether they're lawyers, private investigators, crime beat reporter so it's more a conscious choice.

Kaplan: I think that's perceptive.

Alvarez: Thank you for giving me the time to ask you these questions.

Kaplan: I hope it was helpful.

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"Then I dipped my fingers down to the crotch of my jeans and pressed the thick seam so it pushed just right into the center of my bone. I could feel the heat flowing out of there (19)."

"I ground my bone hard into him and I could feel him rock hard inside his pants. He pushed me off and boosted me onto the counter next to the rolls of quarters (19)."

"The only problem was his being tired out from working at the new store. Sometimes my body had to go three or four days without any hard attention--but I was handling it. When we did bang our bones together, they hit strong and solid, with lightning running through. Some of the highs were gone, but so were all the shit-ass lows (154)."

"I turned down my lower lip to look like Payne's and waggled the other hand in front of my crotch. Marisol giggled and I bent my wrist to make my fingers rise up together like a hard on (43)."

There are several more references in the text as well.

² Brenda is Payne's mother in Miami Purity.

³ Garcia-Aguilera

⁴ Broward Community College

⁵ The Postman Always Rings Twice, By James M. Cain, 1934.

Main character Frank Chambers; Period 1930's; Subgenres Hard-boiled; Setting USA(California). Review: Rating 5 (Superb) Reviewer TC from Internet Mystery Guide <http://www.troutworks.com/bkCainTwice.html>.

This spare, steamy, hard-boiled little book was Cain's first novel, and helped secure both his reputation and his notoriety. Said to have been the inspiration for Camus' *The Stranger*, it also joins excellent company in having been banned in Boston. In its terseness and amoral perspective, it was highly influential on a generation of crime fiction writers, most notably Jim Thompson.

As the novel starts, Frank Chambers drifts into a roadside restaurant, having hitchhiked and stolen rides through much of California. The restaurant is run by a Greek man and his much younger wife. The attraction between Chambers and the wife is instant, and it is also established (partly through a series of ethnic slurs) that her marriage is merely one of convenience. Soon she and Chambers are a team, and see the restaurateur as the only obstacle to their happiness.

Some of what follows is predictable, but the detail and cold-bloodedness that Cain brings to the telling are striking. A bonus is the nice courtroom puzzle in the center of the book, which pits Chambers against the wife; a true Prisoner's Dilemma.

Although obscenity is not what it used to be, this is quite a sexual book for the 1930's. You can see why the combination of sex with unrepentant villains might have been a bit unsettling at the time. To more modern readers, the overall impression will be one of extreme directness and even bluntness of style -- while Cain includes everything that is necessary, he leaves nothing in that isn't. The result is a lean (120 pp. in my copy), mean, classic thriller that holds up nearly perfectly after more than 60 years.

⁶ It is interesting to note that South Florida's crime fiction writers fall easily into narrow categories. There are the academics, the journalists and the lawyers with the exception of Carolina Garcia-Aguilera, an ex-private eye and Elmore Leonard, who has been a writer all along.

⁷ Charles Willeford is the author of Miami Blues, a Hoke Moseley novel.

⁸ Walter Mosley is the author of Devil in a Blue Dress 1990, A Red Death 1991, White Butterfly 1992, Black Betty 1994, A Little Yellow Dog 1996, and Gone Fishin' 1997. Walter Mosley, Terris McMahan Grimes and Robert Greer are all African American crime fiction writers. I located them through the Mystery Writers of America web site <http://www.mysterynet.com/mwa/links/>. They are not easily located through Amazon.com unless flawless spelling and exact titles are provided. Terris McMahan Grimes also has a web site that links to the others <http://vme.net/dvm/sister-sleuth/>.

⁹ This is a novel by Charles Willeford. Also by Williford New Hope for the Dead; The Way We Die Now; Sideswipe for example. Miami Blues is available from Amazon Books Internet store along with 23 other Williford novels.

Miami Blues, the film, opens with a shot of an Eastern Airlines jet getting ready to land at Miami International Airport. Alec Baldwin, playing a violent thief called Fredrick J. Fringler Junior, checks into The Grand, a hotel / condominium on North Bayshore Drive, by Biscayne Bay. The architecture of the hotel features a forty-two story atrium and a walkway to the Omni Mall. Contrast these accommodations with those of Sergeant Hoak Moseley, a scruffy police detective with false teeth who lives at the shabby art deco Primrose Hotel, where the lobby is full of retirees watching reruns of television shows. Junior orders up a hooker called Susie, played by Jennifer Jason Leigh. She attends Miami-Dade Community College, South Campus, drives a red Firebird, and wants to live happily ever after. The movie features hot sex scenes between Susie and Junior, but Susie seems more suited to Hoak Moseley's character as they trade recipes for pork chops.

This movie uses all the icons of Miami such as cruise ships, Coral Gables homes, sunrises on the water. Beneath the sex, violence and visual appeal of the place, the dialog echo's traditional values, even from the anti-hero, Junior, who says, "Married people today, they pull together and they get rich," to Susie. He goes on to beat up the toothless cop, steal his badge, gun, blackjack, and false teeth. Armed as a Miami cop, he robs other robbers

for the most part.

There are similarities between this film and the beginning of Get Shorty, a novel by Elmore Leonard, because there is so much illicit activity in the city that both Chili Palmer and Junior can draw on to make a living. After that, the similarity ends since Leonard's work has much more of a sense of humor and while Chili is capable of killing to protect himself, he has an array of other methods to do so that do not resort to murder.

¹⁰ Picture Mitchell Kaplan with Les Standiford, James W. Hall, Vicki Hendricks, Edna Buchanan and Paul Levine along with some other Miami authors, taken at Books & Books.

