

“SPEAK SOFTLY AND CARRY A BIG STICK”:
FEMALE APPROPRIATION OF THE PHALLUS IN SARA PARETSKY’S V.I.

WARSHAWSKI SERIES

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: GENDERED POWER: VOICE VERSUS ACTION

“Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.”

—*West African proverb*

“For me the true heroes are those who speak, more than those who act, those who can speak above the silencing clangour.”¹

—*Sara Paretsky*

The above West African proverb has become inextricably linked to the twenty-sixth president of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt—so much so that he is often cited at its originator. As the proverb centers on the possession and exercise of power, it is no surprise that Roosevelt was fond of the saying or that it has continued to be associated with him today. As the leader of arguably the most powerful country in the world, Roosevelt stood at the center of authority and control. A look at his accomplishments highlights this power. As the blurb on the back cover of *Carry a Big Stick*, a biography of Roosevelt, describes him: “Theodore Roosevelt stands out as one of the most exceptional leaders in American history. He was a devoted husband and father, an editor, a cattle rancher, a scientist, an historian, a writer, an athlete, a hunter, and a diplomat. ... Theodore Roosevelt was a hero” (Grant, back cover). Roosevelt was truly a man who did “go far.”

¹ Paretsky, “Sexy, Moral and Packing a Pistol.”

A feminist reading—one that examines the assumptions inherent in the text that undergird a system that disempowers women—of the proverb adds greater insight into its enduring association with Roosevelt. As president, Roosevelt represented all the power of the patriarchal society that he served. The West African adage, when appropriated by Western society in the person of Roosevelt, reveals the source of this power: the “big stick,” i.e., the phallus. While the adage itself uses neither male nor female pronouns, the maleness of its referent is indicated in his possession of the phallus, which, by its nature, excludes a female possessor. The adage does invoke both non-gender-specific and gender-specific physical attributes (for the former, the voice through “speaks”; the latter, the phallus through “big stick”). Yet, it locates the ultimate power in that which is gendered, the phallus. Although the male subject speaks, his power lies not in what he says or in his voice itself, but in what he does, “carry a big stick.” The voice and its soft tone only serve as window-dressing for the power embodied in the “big stick.” The person wielding the stick, then, does not have to speak with force to command the power that is inherent in the phallus. The phallus “speaks” for itself.

In seeking to appropriate this power, many feminist theorists have rejected the power structure outlined in the proverb. Instead of using phallic imagery, they focus on voice, transferring power from that which is gendered to that which is non-gendered. In the adage, speaking functions solely as a mask for the physical violence embodied in the big stick, which looms, threatening to forcibly bring about the possessor’s wishes. For many feminist scholars, however, speaking functions to reveal, rather than to mask. Describing the widespread use of *voice* in feminist discourse, Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackwitz write: “Virtually every discipline of the academy ... [has] used the concept

of voice as a methodology to recover women's experiences, meanings, and resistance to their subordinate positions" (94). To emphasize the importance of voice in feminist writings, Rakow and Wackwitz cite M.J. Hardman and Anita Taylor's claim in *Hearing Many Voices* that "coming to realize we had voices that count and struggling to exercise those voices is in many ways 'THE' story of this modern women's movement" (qtd. in Rakow and Wackwitz 93-94).² Often in feminist writings, finding or having a voice means being able to use words to express and give meaning to your experiences and to interject your thoughts, knowledge, concerns, and experiences into the male-dominated discourse that envelops you. As Leslie C. Dunn and Nancy A. Jones explain in *Embodied Voices*:

Feminists have used the word 'voice' to refer to a wide range of aspirations: cultural agency, political enfranchisement, sexual autonomy, and expressive freedom, all of which have been historically denied to women. In this context, 'voice' has become a metaphor for textual authority, and alludes to the efforts of women to reclaim their own experience through writing ('having a voice') or to the specific qualities of their literary and cultural self-expression ('in a different voice'). (1)

This view of voice as power is central to the writings of novelist and self-described feminist Sara Paretsky, as the second epigraph to this chapter reveals. While Roosevelt could be called a hero because he carried a big stick, Paretsky redefines heroism to center on speaking rather than acting. True heroes, she says, are those who find the courage to speak in spite of the forces around them who wish to keep them silent. These heroes are those who continue to speak—and to speak loudly—while the more powerful try, and fail, to drown them out. To this end, Paretsky has given voice to her own heroine, V.I. Warshawski. As she explains, "V.I. is a woman of action. But her

² For original source see Hardman and Taylor, eds., *Hearing Many Voices* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton, 2000) 3.

primary role is to speak. She says those things which I—which many women—are not strong enough to say for ourselves. ... [H]er success depends not so much on what she does, but on her willingness to put into words things that most people would rather remained unspoken. ... [M]y heroine has a voice” (“Sexy, moral and packing a pistol”).

For Paretsky, discovering and maintaining her own voice has been challenging. She grew up in the 1950s in a household that, representative of the culture of the times, sought to silence her: “Home was for me personally, specifically, a place where my value lay in housework and baby-sitting, not in an education leading to the careers envisioned for boys. I grew up barely able to speak above a whisper” (“Writers on Writing”). It was only after coming to Chicago in the late 1960s and doing community service work on the city’s South Side (which would become V.I.’s birthplace), that Paretsky began to develop her voice. But, she says, it still took some time for her to gain the courage to speak through her writing: “Even then I still felt so voiceless myself that it was another 12 years before I tried to sell my work: so fully had I absorbed the indoctrination of my Kansas childhood that I couldn’t imagine myself writing outside the home, couldn’t imagine that my words might speak to other people” (“Writers on Writing”).

It is through the V.I. Warshawski series that Paretsky begins to speak. The series gives Paretsky the opportunity not only to use her own voice, but also to create new ones. It is in V.I.’s world that Paretsky is able to decide who gets to speak and what those speakers get to say—and what they do not get to say. In this study, I examine two categories of voices Paretsky uses throughout the series: the voice she creates and the voice she silences.

The voice that Paretsky creates is revealed in the community of women that V.I. embraces. This community consists of strong individuals who are even stronger collectively, women who take care of themselves and each other, who speak against the stereotypes and violence that society tries to use against them. The voice Paretsky silences is the voice of patriarchy. This voice is revealed in the violent men who target V.I. and seek to silence her. It also is embodied in the women who act as an extension of these men.

Let us begin by examining V.I.'s community of women.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNAL SISTERHOOD: RESTORATION AND REGENERATION

In discussing Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, D.H. Lawrence says Cooper "dreamed a new human relationship. A stark, stripped human relationship of two men, deeper than the deeps of sex. . . . The stark, loveless, wordless unison of two men who have come to the bottom of themselves. This is the new nucleus of a new society, the clue to a new world-epoch" (58). Sara Paretsky incorporates this single-sex ideal into the V.I. Warshawski series—but with a twist. Paretsky transforms this relationship into a community of women united by a commonness of spirit—that quality which is their essence, which motivates every aspect of their lives, from their political and social views to their actions. By giving voice to this matriarchal society—which I will call the spiritual maternal—Paretsky rejects the imprisoning obscurity to which the feminine is frequently banished by the patriarchal pen (as vividly illustrated by the absence of women in the "new world-epoch" Lawrence describes), asserting communal sisterhood instead as the center of strength, well-being, and revelation.

While the all-male society Lawrence describes is defined by its promise of "new" life, female communities are often defined by absence, or what Nina Auerbach in *Communities of Women* calls "blank exclusion" (3). In literature, Auerbach says, "all-male communities usually possess indisputable magnitude and significance" (7). Literary groups of women, however, are not painted with similar qualities. As Auerbach explains,

“A community of women may suggest less the honor of fellowship than an antisociety, an austere banishment from both social power and biological rewards” (3). Communities of men, then, like Cooper’s “wordless” male union, are endowed with the power of creation. This power mimics that which many nineteenth-century writers associated with authorship, a situation Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe: “In patriarchal Western culture . . . the text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis” (6). Under this “paternity/creativity metaphor” (8) creative power, however, is deemed foreign to femaleness: “If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power” (8). Likewise, female communities are often deemed voiceless, stripped of social and reproductive power. This absence is starkly articulated by feminist psychiatrist Charlotte Wolff: “The effect produced by a group of women alone is different from that of a group of men alone. Women by themselves appear to be incomplete, as if a limb were missing” (qtd. in Auerbach 7).¹ What these communities of women lack that their male counterparts possess is the phallus.

In many literary representations, this lack of the phallus is manifested in the physical mutilation of the female body. Auerbach describes two female communities from Greek mythology whose members’ bodies are deformed: the Graie and the Amazons. The Graie are three blind sisters who share an eye, which they pass from one to another. The Amazons, whose name is commonly thought to mean “without a breast” (3), cut off their right breasts so that they can shoot their bows more effectively. In each

¹ For original source, see Wolff, *Love Between Women* (New York: Harper, 1971) 211.

case, the women's isolation from the male center of power is embodied in the mutilation of their bodies. And in each case, the community is eventually routed by the male hero.

Paretsky rejects the traditional representation of the female community as weak, isolated, and mutilated. She does so not by explicitly proclaiming that the community is powerful. Instead, she illustrates its strength by weaving the community deeply into the series, presenting it as central to the world that V.I. inhabits. She begins this presentation with the first novel of the series, *Indemnity Only*. When the novel begins, the spiritual maternal is already an integral part of V.I.'s life. Throughout the course of the novel, the reader is introduced to several of V.I.'s female friends, including her closest friend and mother figure, Dr. Lotty Herschel; Lotty's nurse, Carol Alvarado; and V.I.'s bartender, Sal Barthele, who appears briefly but is given greater prominence in later novels. The reader also is allowed to witness new women being added to V.I.'s circle: Jill Thayer and Anita McGraw. However, the reader is not allowed to witness the community's formation. Rather than presenting this community as a piece of the plot that will end when the novel ends, Paretsky introduces it as a foundational part of the series that is independent of the plot and that is an essential part of the world that makes up the series.

V.I.'s community is such an integral part of her life that it helps her to define who she is. In *Indemnity Only*, she tells Ralph Devereux that her independence, or "strong sense of turf" (209)— i.e., her sense of self, often causes rifts in her relationships with men, but not in her relationships with women. In fact, she says, it is only in the company of her female friends that she can be her true self: "I have some close women friends, because I don't feel they're trying to take over my turf. But with men, it always seems, or often seems, as though I'm having a fight to maintain who I am" (209). While men

threaten V.I.'s sense of self, her female friends enhance it. In the third book in the series, *Killing Orders*, V.I. says she knows herself better when she talks to Lotty (56). In *Blood Shot*, the fifth novel in the series, she describes Lotty as “the person who helps me see who I really am” (339). After having a falling out with Lotty in *Guardian Angel*, the seventh novel, V.I. says “being estranged from her is like missing a piece of my own body” (275). It is through her female friends, then, that V.I. not only defines herself, but also defines what it means to be whole.

Paretsky further emphasizes this connection between the spiritual maternal and wholeness by asserting V.I.'s community as the center of restoration and mending. Throughout the series, it is to members of this community that V.I. runs when she is injured and when she needs comfort or refuge. The person V.I. turns to most is Lotty, as evidenced in her first appearance in the series. Lotty is introduced in *Indemnity Only* when V.I. comes to her after being beaten by mobster Earl Smeissen's men. When she first sees V.I., Lotty is immediately concerned for V.I.'s well-being: “My dear Vic—what on earth is wrong with you?” (108). Once V.I. tells her about the attack, Lotty does not tell V.I. what she should or should not do, as others have in the novel, instead she concentrates on taking care of V.I.'s injuries: “[Lotty] wasted no time arguing about whether I ought to go to the police or drop out of the case or spend the day in bed. She didn't always agree with me, but Lotty respected my decisions. She went into her bedroom and returned with a large, businesslike black bag. She pulled my face muscles and looked at my eyes with an ophthalmoscope. ‘Nothing time won't cure,’ she pronounced” (109). Lotty's main concern during this scene is helping restore V.I. to physical wholeness—a restoration she declares as fact at the end of the quotation. Her

words seem aimed primarily not at comforting V.I., but at authoritatively proclaiming and establishing V.I.'s return to health.

Lotty's role as restorer, however, is not limited to caring for V.I.'s physical well-being. From the beginning of their relationship, Lotty provides V.I. with much-needed emotional and social support. In *Indemnity Only*, Lotty tells V.I., "you have no mother, but you are a daughter of my spirit" (292). The two met when V.I. was in college; Lotty became a surrogate mother for V.I. (whose biological mother died when V.I. was fifteen), providing the advice and encouragement V.I. needed as she entered womanhood:

I've known Lotty Herschel since I was an undergraduate at the University of Chicago. I was a blue-collar girl on an upscale campus, feeling rawly out of place, when I met her—she was providing medical advice to an abortion underground where I volunteered. She took me under her wing, giving me the kind of social skills I'd lost when I lost my mother, keeping me from losing my way in those days of drugs and violent protest, taking time out from a dense-packed schedule to cheer my successes and condole over failures. (*Total Recall* 134-35)

Paretsky describes Lotty here in clearly restorative terms. Lotty takes the emotionally and socially stunted V.I. and returns her to good health, mending those parts of her that were broken when her mother died. She also helps the "out of place" V.I. find her place and meaning. Importantly, it is a community of women that serves as the backdrop for this restoration: the abortion underground. Rather than providing the exclusion traditionally associated with female communities (an exclusion that is even invoked in its name through "underground"), this community helps V.I. move from social ostracization to a position of belonging. It provides the setting and opportunity for V.I. to meet Lotty and, in turn, supplies the means through which V.I. becomes the person that she is throughout the series.

The abortion underground provides the key to the community of women that emerges throughout the series. According to Auerbach, “[a]ll true communities are knit together by their codes” (8). The code that unites V.I.’s community, epitomized by the abortion underground’s focus on the politics of the female body, centers on female empowerment. In *Tunnel Vision*, V.I. puts this code into words while describing the composition of a board that she sits on for a battered women’s shelter: “Most of us have worked together for years, through different incarnations of women’s activism” (8). This board works to provide a safe and restorative place for women with injured bodies and spirits. This mission mirrors that of V.I.’s circle of female friends. Like the women on this board, V.I.’s community works throughout the series to promote, protect and empower other women.

In *Indemnity Only*, V.I., Lotty and Carol provide a safe haven for a young woman, Jill Thayer. V.I. meets Jill while investigating the murder of Jill’s brother, Peter, and the disappearance of his girlfriend, Anita McGraw. Almost immediately, V.I. becomes attached to the girl, later taking her in after her father, too, is murdered. It is only in the presence of V.I. and her friends that Jill is able to be her full self. Jill’s biological family often silences and ignores her. When Jill tells her family that she has asked V.I. to investigate her father’s death, they decry her decision. Her sister, Susan, tells her, “Really, Jill, ... I think we can leave this to the police without upsetting Mother by bringing in hired detectives” (169). And later, after calling Jill “spoiled rotten,” Susan says: “Do you have any idea what people are going to be saying about Daddy, the way he was killed and all?” (170). Her husband, Jack, adds: “Like Susan said, it’s going to be hard enough explaining away the way Mr. Thayer died, without having to explain why

we got a private detective involved as well” (170). When Jill subsequently bursts into tears, V.I. is the only one to comfort her: “I gave her a hug and wrapped my right arm around her” (171). However, when Mrs. Thayer cries, both Susan and Jack comfort her, leaving Jill to rely solely on V.I. The only physical contact Susan has with Jill during this scene brings pain, not comfort: “Susan leaped up from the couch and slapped her sister hard on the face. ‘You goddamn brat, be quiet!’” (172). Rather than seeking to console Jill, Susan seeks to hurt her and to force her to be silent.

While Jill’s biological family ostracizes her, V.I., Lotty, and Carol adopt her as one of their own. When V.I. brings Jill to the clinic after inviting her to be Lotty’s houseguest, both Lotty and Carol readily welcome Jill even though neither woman had advance notice of her arrival. Lotty tells Jill that it is “good” V.I. has brought her “down for a little rest” (182). Lotty’s welcoming of Jill is also evident when she gives V.I. instructions on how to take care of her when she “get[s] her home” (182). Lotty’s use of the word *home* presents her apartment as a refuge and retreat not only for herself, but also for V.I. and Jill. Lotty could have used the terms *my house*, *my apartment*, or *my home*, instead, she refers to her apartment simply as *home*, implying that V.I. and Jill are heading to a place that each could call her own. Lotty also makes sure that Jill is well taken care of, deciding to send Carol to stay with the teen while V.I. does her investigative work. Carol gladly accepts the assignment, seeing it not only as a chance to ensure Jill’s well-being, but also as a “good opportunity” for her to catch up on paperwork from the clinic (189). Carol also changes her plans for the evening so that she can have dinner with Jill and Lotty.

The acceptance that Jill receives from the women frees her to unwind and to truly be herself. Soon after Jill arrives at Lotty's, V.I. says that a great deal of color has returned to Jill's face and that she seems more relaxed (203). When Jill is with her family, however, V.I. describes her face as "pinched and anxious" (161) and says she has an "anguished look" (161), which later becomes a "bleak look" (162). Jill is also able to do what comes naturally to her. When Carol brings her nieces to Lotty's, Jill immediately takes to them. As Lotty tells V.I., "Jill is good with these children—took them on, we didn't ask her to look after them" (204). Later, when Jill is taking care of the kids at Lotty's clinic, V.I. tells her, "Looks like you're a natural" (234).

The women further enable Jill to be herself by encouraging her to speak and think for herself. When Jill asks V.I. if her father's death will be viewed as a scandal, V.I. tells her that it will only be a scandal if Jill lets it be: "Lots of things in this life happen to you no matter what you do, or through no fault of your own—like your father and brother getting killed. But how you make those events part of your life is under your control" (179). When Jill opts not to make dinner when asked by Lotty, V.I. reassures her that it is okay for her to say no: "Jill looked at me uncertainly: Was I angry because she didn't want to make dinner? 'Look, ... you don't have to be perfect: Lotty and I will like you even if you have temper tantrums, don't make your bed, and refuse to cook dinner'" (222).

V.I. and her friends also take in another young girl, Emily Messenger, later in the series in *Tunnel Vision*. Like Jill, Emily is ostracized by her biological family. When V.I. meets Emily at her parents' dinner party, V.I. first thinks she's an outsider, mistaking her for her brothers' nanny because she seems responsible for them and because she wears

the ill-fitting hand-me-downs and psychological discomfort that are associated more with hired help than with wealthy offspring: “I wondered how Deirdre could be so cruel as to put her into one of her own dresses. The pink wool not only fit the girl badly but was clearly designed for an older person, a matron, not a child. Dressing her to look like an adult only added to confusion about Emily’s status, especially since she seemed consumed with child care” (52). After the dinner party, V.I. walks in on Deirdre and Fabian Messenger chastising their daughter because her brother had failed to recite successfully a poem she taught him: “They were browbeating *Emily* because they’d kept their son up long past his bedtime to expose him to a crowd of strangers?” (64, emphasis in original). When Emily subsequently runs from the room crying, it is V.I., not her parents, who follows to comfort her.

In response to her parents’ abuse, Emily retreats behind a blank look that she uses to disguise her feelings. The first time V.I. sees Emily, she is struck by this look: “Her expression was lackluster under her mass of ill-cut frizzy hair; I wondered if she might be retarded” (46). V.I. later describes Emily’s expression as a “dull mask” (115) and “her idiot face” (118). When Emily’s teacher tells V.I. that Emily is very creative, V.I. says to herself, “I remembered Emily’s passivity when I first saw her. Her creativity was certainly muted at home” (145).

After witnessing Fabian and Deirdre’s abuse of Emily, V.I. makes it her mission to protect the teen. When she comforts Emily after the dinner party, V.I. tells her she will help her leave her parents if she wants to: “[I]f you think you can’t take life here anymore, maybe I can help you figure out some other choices. ... You have a right to a life, Emily, only nobody here is going to help you get one” (68). Later, after Deirdre is

murdered and V.I. suspects Fabian, she again offers to help Emily escape the house: “You don’t have to stay here to be hurt There are safe places for you. If you want to come with me—now or at any time—I can see that you get help” (118). When Emily becomes the police’s prime suspect in Deirdre’s murder investigation, V.I. becomes her defender, repeatedly urging Detective Terry Finchley not to jump to conclusions and to find out who really murdered Deirdre. When the police, along with Fabian, continue to maintain that Emily killed her mother and deny her assertion that Fabian molested her, V.I. exclaims: “We can’t believe that a respected man rapes his daughter, so we’ll say she’s having a fantasy about having sex with him. So not only does she get violated physically, we deny her her story and she gets violated emotionally” (346). V.I. refuses to let Emily be silenced by the men around her; instead, V.I. becomes Emily’s voice, championing her story and making sure that it is heard.

V.I. speaks for Emily again during a meeting with Terry, Detective Conrad Rawlings (who is also V.I.’s lover), Fabian, Officer Mary Louise Neely, and Dr. Mortimer Zeitner, a psychiatrist hired by Fabian. Dr. Zeitner tells the group that Emily is suffering from hysterical amnesia, causing her to forget murdering her mother and to fantasize that Fabian raped her (377). He further dismisses Emily’s story by saying they will know more about what really occurred when Emily “recover[s] enough to be able to speak” and when she “starts trusting [them] enough to speak” (377), i.e., when she starts saying what they—the men in power—want her to say. V.I. responds by saying, “Maybe if you trusted her enough to listen to her she would trust you enough to talk to you” (377). When all the men accept Zeitner’s conclusions, V.I. again urges them to heed Emily’s story: “I would be very grateful if everyone in this room could abandon their

fantasies about Emily's fantasies and pay serious attention to what she said. She is not crazy, nor hysterical, nor amnesiac. She has a clear and most painful memory about the events around her mother's death" (378).

V.I. is so devoted to defending Emily that she is willing to risk her relationship with her lover, Conrad: "To dig a channel between [Conrad and me] would be like cutting off a piece of my heart. But to abandon Emily to salvage my life with Conrad would mean cutting off a chunk of my soul" (346). While ending her romance would be painful, V.I. says turning her back on Emily, i.e., her female community, would damage the core of who she is.

Mary Louise Neely joins V.I. to help Emily. Mary Louise first appears in the series in *Blood Shot* as a silent extension of the male-dominated police force: "The uniformed man turned out to be a woman She was quiet and serious, holding herself ramrod straight in her fiercely pressed navy serge" (248-49). In the next novel in the series, *Burn Marks*, V.I. learns that Mary Louise's stern, silent demeanor results from her position as the first woman in her unit (315). Consequently, V.I. invites Mary Louise to consider joining her circle: "You get tired of the Boy Scouts, come see me Maybe we can work something out" (318). Mary Louise takes V.I. up on this offer in *Tunnel Vision*. She leaves the force after she believes the system has turned its back Emily. Mary Louise's breaking point comes immediately after the meeting with Zeitner, V.I., and the others. When Terry, Mary Louise's supervisor, tells V.I. that Zeitner's diagnosis is "plausible," Mary Louise explodes: "Why is it that we give the man's story four times the weight we do the daughter's? . . . Is it because he's a male and she's a female? . . . I will not have any role in arresting Emily Messenger, Terry. If you want to report me for

insubordination, or send me off to do street patrol in Wentworth, I don't care" (380).

Disgusted by the force's apparent lack of concern for Emily's well-being, Mary Louise, an abuse survivor herself, gains her voice and speaks for Emily. Mary Louise has been silent for so long (both during the meeting and during her work in this and previous novels), V.I. says, that everyone jumps at the sound of her voice (380).

After gaining her voice, Mary Louise is enabled to act. She tells V.I. she feels betrayed by the force and will resign if she has to: "I joined the force because I wanted to arrest creeps like my father But now, instead of arresting the creep, I'm supposed to arrest the kid. It's like they want me to send myself to jail. Or worse, to a mental hospital where a girl like Emily will have one chance in a thousand of coming out with her head straight" (383-84). To protect Emily, Mary Louise secretly takes her from the hospital to Arcadia House, the battered women's shelter where V.I. volunteers, providing a safe place for Emily to heal physically and emotionally. Mary Louise later provides another safe haven for Emily by agreeing to become Emily and her brothers' foster mother. In addition to helping Emily, Mary Louise helps herself by quitting her job with the police, saying, "I'm not much good in a hierarchical organization when I don't agree with the hierarchy" (461). Rejecting this hierarchy, she asks V.I. if she can work for her, taking V.I. up on her offer to come see her when she got tired of the "Boy Scouts" and thereby becoming a part of V.I.'s circle.

In addition to V.I. and Mary Louise, the women at Arcadia House work to protect Emily. Their desire to help her is apparent even before they meet her. Both Marilyn Lieberman, the shelter's executive director, and Eva Kuhn, the shelter's therapist, respond readily when V.I. asks them to examine a poem Emily wrote for any clues about

the girl's state of mind (156-60). Later, the women freely take Emily in when Mary Louise brings her to the shelter. They take the charge to protect her so seriously that V.I. must prove that the teen is no longer in danger before they will even acknowledge that she is at the shelter: “‘What about her old man?’ Marilyn asked. ‘She’s a minor; we aren’t about to acknowledge her existence if she has to go back to him’” (447). The women want to protect Emily not only from her father, but also from the image he and Dr. Zeitner have created of her. When Emily says she sometimes wonders if she is crazy and suffering from hysterical amnesia, like Dr. Zeitner suggested, Eva reassures her: “I know you’re not crazy, Emily, not after all the talking you and I have done this week” (449). Unlike Dr. Zeitner, Eva actually listens to Emily. Because she has listened to her, Eva can reassure Emily that her story is true and that her memories are not a sign of psychosis.

The shelter's healing effect on Emily is noticeable in her appearance. Upon seeing Emily, V.I. says: “I was amazed at the change in her. ...[S]he already looked younger than I had ever seen her. She had on jeans that fit her and a bold turquoise T-shirt that proclaimed ‘Our Bodies, Our Lives.’ Someone ... had braided her frizzy mop into cornrows Emily looked at me with her usual solemnity, but her face relaxed into a grin” (448). Gone are her mother's ill-fitting hand-me-downs. Instead, Emily wears clothing more appropriate to her age, donning “bold” colors and a hair style that announce her individuality and define her existence outside the suffocating role her parents' prescribed for her. The phrase on her shirt further claims a place for her of her own choosing; no longer can her father violate her body, nor can he determine how she lives her life.

The physical and emotional restoration that V.I.'s circle provides for Emily comes after Paretsky flirts with disbanding V.I.'s community. In *Guardian Angel*, the novel that precedes *Tunnel Vision*, Lotty and V.I. suffer a breach in their relationship. This breach occurs after Lotty, while driving V.I.'s car, is mistaken for V.I. and is attacked in her stead. Even though Lotty is eight inches shorter and years older than V.I., the thugs who perpetrate the attack treat Lotty as if she is V.I. As V.I. explains: "All women have known guys who treat us like so many interchangeable parts" (*Guardian Angel* 168). This attack on Lotty's body represents a larger attack on the greater female body. The men have no desire to verify the identity of the person they are assigned to assault; to them, one woman is the same as another, "just another dumb broad" (168). Their only concern is silencing the feminine voice that has dared to question their power. In this manner, the attack threatens the heart of V.I.'s community: its mission to protect and promote the feminine.

By the end of *Guardian Angel*, the reader is left wondering if the female relationship at the center of V.I.'s community has disintegrated. While Lotty and V.I. have started communicating again, V.I. says Lotty seems "brittle, almost fragile" and that "her usual vital spark [is] missing" (414). She goes on to say that she is worried Lotty is "feeling a repugnance, a withdrawal, from my whole life" (415). V.I.'s worries about her relationship with Lotty begin manifesting in nightmares in which her mother and Lotty are interchanged. V.I. expresses these concerns to Conrad: "It's Lotty. I'm so scared—scared she's going to leave me the way my mother did. It didn't matter that I loved my mother, that I did what I could to look after her. She left me anyway. I don't think I can bear it if Lotty abandons me too" (416). This concern echoes one voiced by V.I. in the

third novel in the series, *Killing Orders*, when she fears a breakup with Lotty: “Could a friendship evaporate in the same mist as a marriage?” (57). *Guardian Angel* ends with V.I.—and the reader—worrying that such a divorce has occurred.

When *Tunnel Vision* opens, it is still unclear whether the breach in Lotty and V.I.’s relationship has been completely repaired. While the two are on speaking terms, their interaction is still strained. As V.I. says at the end of the second chapter, “A year ago some thugs mistook Lotty for me and broke her arm. Her anger and my remorse had cut a channel between us that we rebridged only after months of hard work. Every now and then it gapes open again” (16).

Restoration comes at the end of the eighteenth chapter. At the beginning of the chapter, V.I. says her “unsettled life” is making her “long for security” (127). To fill this need, V.I. turns to one of the few heirlooms she inherited from her mother, her red Venetian glasses.² V.I.’s mother, who brought the glasses with her when she fled to the United States from Italy before World War II, used the glasses to entertain guests. Likewise, V.I., in previous novels, frequently uses them to entertain. This time, however, she turns to them to induce memories of her mother. The glasses, however, fail to satisfy V.I.’s void. Satisfaction comes not from her dead, biological mother, but from her living, spiritual one. Realizing she “couldn’t bear an evening at home alone” (131), V.I. turns from the glasses and calls Lotty, who greets her with “a friendly concern that acted like a balm” (131) and proceeds to listen sympathetically to V.I.’s concerns. When V.I. pauses, wondering how to end the conversation, Lotty relieves her unspoken worry: “Maybe you’d like to drop by this evening” (132). Not only does she address V.I.’s concern for how to end the conversation, but she also addresses her unspoken desire not to be alone.

² I will explore the significance of these glasses in greater depth in the next chapter.

Inviting V.I. back into her home, and accordingly back into her heart, Lotty once again mends V.I.'s brokenness: "As I locked my front door I felt closer to peace than I had for weeks" (132). V.I. echoes this restoration at the end of the novel when she celebrates her fortieth birthday surrounded by her loved ones: "What else can I say, except that good friends are a balm to a bruised spirit?" (464).

By presenting V.I.'s circle of friends as a balm not only for V.I.'s spirit and body, but also for those of each woman they embrace, Paretsky crafts a work that serves as a balm for the historical image of the female community. Through the series, Paretsky gives voice to a community that is whole and that invokes fullness, not absence. By doing so, she reconstitutes the "new nucleus of a new society" that Lawrence described into one that is not only new, but also, and most importantly, female.

CHAPTER III

SILENCING THE FATHER: DISEMPOWERING THE BIOLOGICAL PATERNAL AND MATERNAL

In giving voice to the matriarchal community that populates the series, Paretsky disempowers the voice of patriarchy. One way that she does this is by devaluing the paternal and biological maternal. Throughout the series, Paretsky links the paternal to violence and death. In *Indemnity Only*, both Jill Thayer and Anita McGraw at some point believe that their fathers killed Peter Thayer, Jill's brother and Anita's boyfriend. Jill tells V.I., "Sometimes I even get the crazy idea that Dad just freaked out totally, like he does, and killed Peter" (119). Jill's comment—especially "like he does"—reveals that her father is frequently violent. She fears that this violence has escalated to the point that he has killed his own son. Anita, meanwhile, has similar fears about her father, Andrew McGraw, who is head of a local union and tied to the mob. She asks V.I., "So my father had [a mobster] kill Peter, didn't he?" (269). Later she tells V.I., "My father is the kind of man who gets people killed, and he got Peter killed" (271). Both girls, therefore, link their fathers to the death and violence that pervades the novel.

Jill and Anita also are both put in danger as a result of their fathers' dishonest actions. Jill is kidnapped by Yardley Masters after confronting him with proof of her father's illegal dealings with him and McGraw. After kidnapping her, Masters and his cohorts physically abuse her to find out how much she knows and use her as leverage to get V.I. to talk. Threatening V.I., Masters says, "Jill is as good as dead. ... I can have

Tony kill her, one clean shot and it's done, or I can have him rape her while you watch, and then kill her" (306).

Anita, meanwhile, is forced into hiding and hunted because of her knowledge of her father's deal. As V.I. tells the University Women United meeting:

I believe Anita McGraw's life is in serious danger. The overwhelming probability is that Peter Thayer shared with her the secret that got him killed, and that when she came home last Monday evening to find his dead body, she panicked and ran. But as long as she is alive, and in lonely possession of this secret—whatever it is—then the men who have killed twice to protect it will not care about killing her as well. (245)

Later, McGraw admits that it is his actions that have put Anita in danger: "Do you think I haven't seen it, sitting here for ten days wondering if I'd see you dead, too, and know that I had killed you?" (321). Each girl, then, is targeted because of the sins of her father, and each comes face to face with the violence that she recognized in her father.

In the thirteenth and latest novel, *Fire Sale*, Paretsky uses three generations of namesakes to reveal the insidiousness of the paternal. The eldest, William "Buffalo Bill" Bysen, is founder and head of By-Smart superstores, which he rules with an iron fist. As V.I. describes him, Buffalo Bill "was eighty-three now, but he still came into work every day, still controlled everything from the wattage of the lightbulbs in the employee toilets to By-Smart's contracts with major suppliers" (32). Daddy Bysen, as Buffalo Bill is also called, takes a similar approach to leading his family. His four sons, who all work in management at the company (32), were required by their father to first work at the company's warehouse because that was where he started (113). His daughters, however, are not allowed to work for the company. Buffalo Bill tells V.I. that his "girls" do volunteer work instead (97). When V.I. asks if his sons also do charitable work, he replies, "They're too busy helping run this business" (97). He also keeps a tight rein on

his family by having most of them live on his estate: “Three of Buffalo Bill’s four sons and one of the daughters lived with him in a gated estate in Barrington Hills. They had separate houses, but all in the same happy patriarchal enclave. The second daughter was living in Santiago with her husband, who headed South American operations; the fourth son was in Singapore managing the Far East. So no one had run away from Papa” (198). By keeping his children close by and by having them or their spouses work for his company, Buffalo Bill is able to oversee all parts of their lives. He controls their livelihoods and their residences, ensuring that he is able to run his family just as he runs his company.

Buffalo Bill also seeks to control his sons by requiring them to conform to a masculinity defined by toughness. His oldest son, William the Second, tells V.I. that as kids, he and his brothers “grew up fighting, the old man thought it made us tougher” (106). Daddy Bysen, however, does not think his adult sons are tough enough. When one of them complains that several vendors are trying to back out of their contracts, Buffalo Bill says the vendors are simply trying “to see whether we have the guts God gave a goose” and that his sons are “too thin-skinned” (102). He views this apparent weakness as a sign his sons will not be able to run the business without him: “I don’t know what will happen to this company when I can’t be here in the kitchen every day, taking the heat” (102).

While Buffalo Bill may want his sons to be tougher, he only questions one’s manhood, William’s. Known as “Young Mister William”—despite his fifty-two years of age—William is regarded by his father as incompetent. When discussing who needs to call the company’s board to dispel rumors of unionizing, Buffalo Bill decides William

can make the calls because it “doesn’t take any great genius to tell them they’re letting the rumor mills grind ’em down” (99). When William responds sullenly, his father says, “Oh, don’t take things so personally, William. You’re too thin-skinned, always have been” (99). Later in the novel, Buffalo Bill’s wife, May Irene, tells him that William “never could be as tough as you wanted him to be” (384).

Daddy Bysen challenges William’s parenting skills as well as his business skills. Buffalo Bill frequently ignores decisions William makes about his son, the third William Bysen, “Billy the Kid.” When William threatens Billy’s trust fund, Buffalo Bill responds, “While I’m still on the planet, I’ll see the boy gets his share of his inheritance. When I’m in front of the Judgment Seat, God will surely want to know about how I treated my own grandson” (99). William replies: “Yes, whatever I say or do I can be sure you’ll undercut it” (99). Later, William tells V.I.: “It’s been the same story since Billy was born: every time I try to set—not even the same limits Dad gave us, just some kind of parental guidance—Dad undercuts me, then blames me” (106).

By constantly challenging William’s manhood, Buffalo Bill denies him possession of the phallus, thereby emasculating him and condemning him to be identified forever as the underdeveloped “Young Mister William.” William expresses the powerlessness he feels to V.I.: “If I had real authority, we could pass Wal-Mart, I know we could, but my company decisions are just like my parental” (106). Buffalo Bill’s rejection of William’s masculinity leads directly to the violence that occurs in the novel. To show his father that he knows “how to take strong action” (362), William works with Patrick Grobian, one of the company’s district managers, and his sister-in-law Jacqui to force one of the company’s vendors to abide by his contract. But in the end, his attempt

to please his father leads only to death: the vendor is killed, along with the trio's henchman, Bron Czernin, and V.I. is shot, beaten and left for dead. Faced with his father's constant disregard, William chooses violence as a means to demonstrate his masculinity. For William, the toughness his father equates with manhood can only be expressed by violently forcing others to obey his will.

The violence William exhibits because of his father's behavior in turn endangers his son. Billy initially chooses to run away from home after a disagreement with his family. His choice becomes a necessity, however, after he overhears Bron Czernin's murder. As V.I. explains: "Poor guy, witnessing his own father commit murder. No wonder he was hiding. No wonder William wanted to find him" (363). Like Anita in *Indemnity Only*, Billy is forced into hiding because of his father's actions. His father's and grandfather's pursuit of absolute patriarchal power puts his life on the line.

Paretsky also uses V.I.'s father to illustrate the violence inherent in the paternal. V.I. remembers her father as a gentle, nonviolent man. In *Indemnity Only*, V.I. says, "My father, my Tony, had been a bit of a dreamer, an idealist, a man who had never shot another human being in all his years on the force—warning shots in the air, but no one killed because of Tony Warshawski. ... [His best friend] Bobby [Mallory] asked him how many people he'd killed in his years on the force. Tony replied he'd never even wounded a man" (318). Despite being a member of the police force—the enforcement arm of patriarchal society—Tony never wielded the violent power entrusted to him.

Yet while V.I. remembers Tony as the paragon of nonviolence, Paretsky remembers him in *Indemnity Only* in the hired thug Tony Bronsky, who is the embodiment of patriarchal brutality. In the absence of V.I.'s father, Bronsky becomes the

disciplinarian in V.I.'s life. Bobby tells V.I. that her father should have beaten her to force her into the role patriarchy has assigned her: "You know, if Tony had turned you over his knee more often instead of spoiling you rotten, you'd be a happy housewife now, instead of playing at detective and making it harder for us [i.e., the agents of patriarchy] to get our job done" (37). Tony Bronsky becomes the embodiment of Bobby's statement when—following a command from his boss, mobster Earl Smeissen, to "Get her, Tony, get her" (83)—he beats V.I. This beating comes precisely to force V.I. to obey the order that almost every man in the novel (Bobby, Earl, Thayer, McGraw, etc.) has given her: Give up the case.

V.I., however, rejects this order and defeats the paternal by stripping Bronsky of his power. She does so by emasculating him first when, while talking to Masters, she calls him impotent: "Are you telling me Tony's going to rape that girl on your command? Why do you think the boy carries a gun? He can't get it up, never could, so he has a big old penis he carries around in his hand" (306). Second, she emasculates him by stripping him of his gun, the symbolic phallus: "Tony's bullet went wide and I reached him in one spring and chopped his gun arm hard enough to break the bone. He screamed in pain and dropped the Browning" (307). Not only does she strip him of his gun, but she also breaks his arm, which was the limb that had wielded the phallus. After Tony drops his gun, his comrades try to retrieve it. Masters recovers the gun for a short while, but V.I. shoots him, forcing him to drop it. She then fires at Smeissen to prevent him from grabbing it and warns all the men, "If any of you goes for that gun, I'll kill you" (307). By denying the men control of Tony's Browning, V.I. positions herself as the only person holding a gun. By doing so, she usurps the authority of the paternal, leaving it powerless in the end.

Along with diminishing the paternal, Paretsky also devalues the biological maternal. In *Indemnity Only*, the only living mother in the novel, Mrs. Thayer, is ineffectual and emotionally unavailable. Anita describes her as being “very self-centered, into clothes and the body beautiful” (317). Her self-absorption is distinctly apparent when she and the other members of her household ridicule Jill for hiring V.I. to find out who murdered Peter and Mr. Thayer. During the confrontation, Mrs. Thayer dismisses Jill as being “in one of her moods” and focuses on her own needs: “Jill, *I* just cannot stand for you to have one of your temper tantrums right now. ... With Petey dead and John, *I* just can’t take anything else. So don’t talk to this private detective any longer. She’s taking advantage of you to get her name in the paper, and *I* can’t bear another scandal about this family” (172, emphasis mine). By repeatedly using *I*, Mrs. Thayer makes herself the center of everything that has and is happening to her family and paints herself as the sole victim of the murders. Therefore, any suffering that exists outside her does not qualify as suffering, hence, to her, Jill’s emotional needs are nonexistent. During this exchange, Mrs. Thayer—and every other household member present—dismisses Jill as a troublemaker, thereby denying that she is or can possibly be suffering emotionally because of her brother’s and father’s deaths.

Paretsky presents this maternal self-centeredness at its extreme in *Killing Orders*. In the novel, V.I.’s Aunt Rosa Vignelli hires her to find out who stole \$5 million in stock certificates from the priory where Rosa works as treasurer. V.I.’s investigation soon escalates into a murder case when her friend, stock broker Agnes Paciorek, is killed. In the course of her investigation, V.I. uncovers a web of deceit and corruption—at the

center of which is Corpus Christi, a secret Roman Catholic society to which both Rosa and Agnes' mother, Catherine Paciorek, belong.

It is through Rosa and Mrs. Paciorek that Paretsky devalues the biological maternal. Both women are so focused on what they perceive as their own personal hurts that they become consumed by anger. Rosa blames V.I.'s mother, Gabriella, for ruining her life. She tells V.I., "You, of all people, should know why my life has not been happy" (4). Later she says, "What have I not suffered at the hands of that whore who called herself your mother!" (270). She goes on to describe how she took Gabriella into her home out of the kindness of her heart only to be repaid by Gabriella stealing her husband's affections. This betrayal was amplified, she says, when her husband, Carl, committed suicide after Rosa threw Gabriella out of the house. Subsequently, Rosa becomes consumed by hatred, which she takes out on everyone around her. Father Boniface Carroll describes Rosa as "extremely difficult to work with" (132) and says that the priory has "lost a lot of part-time people over the years because of her—no one can do anything perfectly enough for her" (132).

The corrosive effect of Rosa's bitterness is evident in her relationship with her son, Albert. She counts the fact that her husband left her "alone with Albert" (271) as one of the harms caused by his alleged affair and subsequent suicide. Like Mrs. Thayer in *Indemnity Only*, Rosa focuses only on her own hurts, ignoring the effect her husband's death has had on her son. Instead of saying Carl had left her *and* Albert alone, she concentrates solely on herself. In doing so, she conveys the message that she is the only person who is important and that Albert is a burden that she has been forced to bear by herself.

Rosa's alienation of Albert is apparent in his behavior. When around Rosa, Albert is anxious and uncomfortable: "Albert sat uneasily on the narrow settee, eating a piece of *torta del re*, glancing surreptitiously at the floor when a crumb dropped, then at Rosa to see if she'd noticed" (3). Outside her presence, however, he appears more confident. V.I. says he seems "less amorphous with Rosa out of the room" (4). This change in his demeanor is even more apparent when he is in his own surroundings: "In his own place, Albert relaxed and his face took on a more decisive look. ... When you saw him with Rosa, you couldn't imagine him managing anything on his own, but in here it didn't seem so improbable" (5). Rosa's natureless mothering robs Albert of a strong sense of self. In her presence, he projects not his own person, but the person Rosa has cast him to be: a burden.

Similarly, Mrs. Paciorek is filled with bitterness and hatred. As V.I. describes, "Like Rosa, she [Mrs. Paciorek] had lived with her anger too long to want to give it up" (136). Mrs. Paciorek blames Agnes for her troubles:

"It was enough for Agnes to know I believed in something for her to believe the opposite. Abortion. The war in Vietnam. Worst of all, the Church. I thought I had seen my family name degraded in every possible way. I didn't realize how much I could have forgiven until she announced in public that she was a homosexual." (136)

Like Rosa and Mrs. Thayer, Mrs. Paciorek focuses on her own perceived hurts, as evidenced by her repeated use of *I*. Instead of expressing sadness or despair over Agnes' murder, Mrs. Paciorek expresses anger at how Agnes lived her life. Agnes' chief fault, she says, was that her beliefs were in opposition to her mother's. Mrs. Paciorek does not identify any specific biblical, legal or political guidelines that Agnes had violated; instead, she presents her own beliefs, in and of themselves, as the rule by which Agnes should have lived. Instead of believing Agnes put time, thought, and research into

deciding which causes to support, Mrs. Paciorek asserts that Agnes was motivated solely by a desire to oppose, and thereby hurt, her mother.

Also, like Rosa, Mrs. Paciorek blames a third party for leading her family member astray: “I could tell you [V.I.] had led her into that [homosexuality], just as you led her into all her other horrible activities” (136). Again, Mrs. Paciorek places the blame for her internal displeasure and unease on an outside source, refusing to acknowledge any personal responsibility. But, as V.I. points out, only one person suffers as a result of Mrs. Paciorek’s blame-finding: “For some reason, it brings you solace to be furious at Agnes’s way of living, and it brings you further pleasure to blame it on me. ... [I]f you want to be that blind about your daughter’s character and personality and how she made her choices, that’s your problem. Your views don’t affect the truth. And they only make one person miserable: you” (137).

In the end, both Mrs. Paciorek’s and Rosa’s lifelong, selfish anger leads to mental breakdown. Mrs. Paciorek faints after being confronted with her machinations and culpability in Agnes’ death: “Mrs. Paciorek made a strangled little noise and fainted, falling over on the couch” (253). Later, V.I. says that Mrs. Paciorek actually has “suffered a major stroke” that leaves her virtually lifeless (275). The only semblance of vitality she has remaining manifests in anger: “What few signs of life she showed were rage at her husband” (275). Similarly, Rosa has a breakdown after V.I. reveals the wrongdoings of the secret society to which both Rosa and Mrs. Paciorek belong: “The demon that had rocked her sanity two weeks ago was too close to her now. ... She was screaming louder and louder, repeating herself now. ... From the prior’s closed inner office Rosa’s screams came in a mind-shattering stream” (270-71). Later V.I. says, “My

aunt has gone mad” (276). When forced to face her own guilt—after a lifetime of blaming others—each woman collapses into herself, becoming literally and fully self-absorbed.

Paretsky further diminishes the biological maternal by presenting it as an extension of the paternal. Mrs. Thayer is almost always addressed as Mrs. or Mother Thayer, names that are derived from her husband’s name. The only person who addresses her by her first name, Margaret, is Dr. Mulgrave. But his use of her name seems to be more a confirmation of the intimate relationship Jill implies he has with Mrs. Thayer than an acknowledgment of her as an independent individual. In fact, he and the others present when Jill and V.I. confront the family reject Mrs. Thayer’s independence by speaking for her. When V.I. first addresses Mrs. Thayer, it is Jack, not Mrs. Thayer, who responds: “The young man answered, sticking his jaw out. ‘I’m Mrs. Thayer’s son-in-law, and I think I can safely say that if my father-in-law threw you out of the house on Saturday, that you’re probably not wanted here’” (*Indemnity Only* 169). Later, it is Susan who responds when Jill accuses her mother of having an affair with Mulgrave: “Susan leaped up from the couch and slapped her sister hard on the face. ‘You goddamn brat, be quiet!’” (172). Here, not only does Susan speak for her mother, but she also acts as an extension of the violent arm of the paternal by hitting Jill in order to force her to conform.

Later, Mulgrave speaks for Mrs. Thayer when V.I. tells Mrs. Thayer that she thinks Jill should come stay with her: “It’s important that Margaret—Mrs. Thayer—be kept absolutely quiet. If Jill really is worrying her, perhaps it would be better if she did leave for a few days. I can make some inquiries about this person, and if she’s not reliable, we can always bring Jill back home” (177). Not only does Mulgrave usurp Mrs.

Thayer's right to speak, but he also usurps her right to make decisions about her daughter. He even says that she must be kept quiet, exercising his role as an agent of patriarchy to silence opposition (real or perceived) and to force conformity.

Mrs. Thayer, however, is a willing participant in her silencing. After Mulgrave says that Jill should go with V.I., Mrs. Thayer responds: "Thank you, Ted. If you say it's all right, I'm sure it will be" (177). She refuses to make her own decisions, but instead, allows Mulgrave to think and speak for her. She believes that it is okay to send Jill with V.I. only because Mulgrave has deemed it so. Earlier, while speaking to Jill, she affirms Jack's right to decide what is truth: "I'm just as sorry as you are that Petey is dead, but Jack is right, honey: if he'd listened to your father all this wouldn't have happened" (171). Here Mrs. Thayer rejects Jill's beliefs as false and embraces Jack, an agent of patriarchy, as the decider of the truth.

While Mrs. Thayer is presented as being an ineffective and inattentive mother, V.I.'s mother, Gabriella Warshawski, is presented as an active and important influence on V.I.'s life. V.I. cites her mother as the source of her "scrappiness" (*Indemnity Only* 104) and determination: "I had my Italian mother's drive, and I try to emulate her insistence on fighting battles to the finish" (44). V.I. also says that her mother encouraged her to rely on her intellect rather than her looks: "Yes, Vic, you are pretty—but pretty is no good. Any girl can be pretty—but to take care of yourself you must have brains. And you must have a job, a profession. You must work" (14).

Despite being a dynamic part of V.I.'s life, Gabriella still acts as an extension of the paternal, attempting to mold V.I. into her idea of the acceptable woman. V.I. says repeatedly that her mother would not approve of her lifestyle and that she especially

would not approve of her occupation. Although she encouraged V.I. to work, Gabriella pushed V.I. toward a certain profession—opera singing: “She had hoped I would be a singer and had trained me patiently; she wouldn’t have liked my being a detective” (14-15). Gabriella chooses opera singing as a suitable profession for V.I., in part, because it is one she had hoped to follow herself. V.I. says, Gabriella “wanted me to live a life of erudition if not artistry, to inhabit the milieu the second World War had destroyed for her—concerts, books, voice lessons, friends who lived for music and art. She had made me learn both piano and voice, hoping I would have the vocal career the war had taken from her” (*Hard Time* 164).

Although she attempts to rebuff the violence of war—the epitome of patriarchal violence—by using her daughter to restore what was stolen from her, Gabriella only fortifies the society that perpetrated her loss. In encouraging V.I. to be an opera singer, Gabriella pushes her into a profession that not only is accepted by patriarchal society but that also reinforces that society. In *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, Catherine Clément argues that opera is inextricably linked to the patriarchal repression of women. It is, she says, a “spectacle thought up to adore, and also to kill, the feminine character” (5).

According to Clément, opera centers on the heroine but, in the end, only celebrates her silencing:

Opera concerns women. No, there is no feminist version; no, there is no liberation. Quite the contrary: they suffer, they cry, they die. Singing and wasting your breath can be the same thing. Glowing with tears, their décolletés cut to the heart, they expose themselves to the gaze of those who come to take pleasure in their pretend agonies. (11)

By encouraging V.I. to become a singer, then, Gabriella urges her to enter a profession that repeatedly stages the death and silencing of women. It is also a profession that places women under the watching and controlling gaze of men. It is, as Clément explains, a

world that is controlled by men—male writers, conductors, producers, etc. By becoming a singer, then, V.I. would have performed roles that promoted a femininity written and consumed by men and regurgitated by countless women.

V.I., however, rejects the profession modeled by her mother, opting instead to emulate her father by entering the investigative field. V.I.'s occupational choice is emblematic of an opposition between that which she inherited from her mother and that which she inherited from her father. This opposition is one that Gabriella embraced. As V.I. says, "It's possible ... that my dad would have loved to see me follow in his footsteps, but I knew my mother would not" (*Hard Time* 164). Bobby Mallory also embraces this opposition: "One of Bobby's unexpected traits was to share her [Gabriella's] love of opera; she used to sing Puccini for him. He would be a happy cop if I'd fulfilled her dream and become a concert singer instead of aping my dad and turning into a detective" (*Burn Marks* 159). For Bobby, there is a clear demarcation between Gabriella's realm and Tony's. As an opera lover and a police officer, he is intimately familiar with each realm but believes V.I. should not and could not operate in both. Instead, he believes she should have followed Gabriella's wishes, thereby imitating her same-sex parent.

Bobby is not alone in using such gender delineations. V.I. frequently describes her parental legacies in gendered terms: "Diamonds from my mother, handguns from my father" (*Total Recall* 324). Diamonds invoke the feminine, as in the popular adage, "Diamonds are a girl's best friend." Handguns, as described earlier, symbolize the phallus, embodying the power that is ascribed to the masculine. In modeling her father's profession, V.I. embraces handguns, the central tool of Tony's office. As a child, V.I. got

a “guilty thrill” from playing with Tony’s gun: “[W]hen I was small ... [I would hunt] out the drawer where my dad hid his police revolver. I knew I wasn’t supposed to touch it, or even know where it was, and excitement and shame would get me so wound up I’d have to put on my skates and race around the block a few times. With an uneasy twinge I wondered if those feelings had led me into detective work” (*Guardian Angel* 363). The young V.I. clearly recognizes the control and importance (and unconsciously, it seems, the sexual significance) assigned to the phallus as represented by her father’s gun. She also clearly comprehends that she is barred from possessing this power, hence the guilt she feels at even gazing at or touching the gun. In adulthood, this guilt has diminished to “an uneasy twinge” about the nature of V.I.’s work, which requires her not only to gaze at the forbidden phallic symbol, but also to possess and wield it.

V.I.’s early fascination with the gun further highlights the opposition between her parents’ realms. Tony, to Gabriella’s disapproval, teaches V.I. how to use a gun: “My dad saw too many shooting injuries from kids getting hold of guns. He started taking me to the range with him when I was ten. My mother hated it—he wanted her to learn, also, but she wouldn’t acknowledge that he even carried a weapon” (*Tunnel Vision* 277-78). While Tony views teaching V.I. how to use a gun as a matter of safety, Gabriella views it as a danger. By refusing to acknowledge Tony’s possession of the gun, Gabriella takes to heart the feminine banishment from the phallus, living out the order that V.I. transgresses as a child not to “touch it, or even know where it [is]” (*Guardian Angel* 363). Gabriella believes V.I.’s attention should be focused instead on singing: “Those Saturday mornings come back to me whenever I go to the range, Gabriella’s back rigid with anger as she settled some child at the piano for a lesson. ‘If you would work on your breathing as you

do on those ghastly toys we could make a singer out of you, Victoria—a creator of life, not of death,’ she said when I returned in guilty triumph from hitting a bull’s-eye” (*Tunnel Vision* 278). Highlighting the violence inherent in the paternal, Gabriella views the gun as a “ghastly toy,” capable only of bringing death. This view does not change when the phallic symbol moves from masculine to feminine hands. While V.I. sees her mastery of the forbidden gun as a “triumph,” Gabriella sees it only as a loss. For her, V.I. could be empowered only through singing. Gabriella, however, fails to recognize the death and violence that are infused in opera, as Clément describes. But while Gabriella links opera with life, V.I. does not. In fact, she says she does not “really like opera all that well” and that “the singing is too violent” (*Killing Orders* 32). Her comments indicate that she is aware of opera’s connection to patriarchy and the imprisoning femininity that it advances.

The patriarchal femininity opera promotes also is embodied in the red Venetian glasses that, like her singing, V.I. inherits from her mother: “Along with the red glasses, my voice was my legacy from Gabriella” (*Killing Orders* 145). Traditionally, receptive vessels, like the red glasses, are considered feminine symbols, representing the womb. This interpretation of the glasses is apparent in their history. The glasses had been part of Gabriella’s dowry. As V.I. tells her lover Ralph Devereux in *Indemnity Only*: “[M]y mother had left Italy right before the war broke out on a large scale. Her own mother was Jewish and they wanted her out of harm’s way. The eight red glasses she wrapped carefully in her underwear to take in the one suitcase she had carried, and they had always held pride of place at any festive meal” (101). When fleeing Italy, Gabriella protected the glasses, the symbolic womb, as she protected her physical womb—by

wrapping them in her underwear. She arrived at her destination with all the glasses intact, so that when she got married, she was able to present the glasses to her husband as a part of her dowry, just as she presented her own body. After she was married, Gabriella displayed the glasses at special meals as a symbol of her skill as a homemaker. V.I. even says that Bobby had drunk out of the glasses to ring in several New Years (134).

Gabriella bequeaths this history to V.I. when she leaves her the red glasses. But for V.I., the glasses do not represent a femininity that should be protected, rather one that should be rejected. V.I. rebuffs the fertility of the womb by rejecting not only motherhood, but also marriage. She presents the glasses to Ralph, along with a description of their history, but only for one night; she refuses to have a long-term relationship with him, denying him the possibility of accepting the glasses or her womb as a dowry. V.I. also refuses to protect the glasses as her mother had. In fact, she puts the glasses in danger through her profession. It is precisely because she rejects the profession her mother chooses for her and follows instead in her father's footsteps, embracing a profession that has been traditionally male, that one of the glasses is destroyed when someone breaks into her apartment: "My mother had carried those glasses from Italy in a suitcase and not one had broken. Nineteen years married to a cop on the South Side of Chicago and not a one had broken. If I had become a singer, as she had wanted, this would never have happened" (132). V.I. also refuses to mirror her mother's protection of the glasses when she flees her apartment after it is ransacked. Whereas Gabriella places the glasses in her suitcase when she flees Italy, V.I. leaves the glasses in her apartment and, instead, places her gun, the symbolic phallus, in her suitcase.

V.I. endangers the glasses again in *Killing Orders*. Once more, she uses the glasses to entertain a lover, this time Roger Ferrant, who she briefly suspects had hired someone to attack her with acid. To show Roger she no longer suspects him, V.I. decides to serve him wine in the glasses during dinner. That night V.I.'s apartment is set on fire after she and Roger have retired to the bedroom. V.I. is able to save the two glasses she and Roger used before she escapes from the apartment, but the other five—which she had tried to protect by keeping them “in a locked cupboard in the back of [her] clothes closet” (143) after the attack that destroyed one of the glasses in *Indemnity Only*—are left in harm's way in the burning apartment. When V.I. returns to the fire-damaged apartment, she finds that she has lost another glass:

The glasses were wrapped carefully in pieces of old sheet. I unrolled these slowly. The first one I picked had a jagged piece broken from it. I bit my lower lip again to keep it in order and unwrapped the other four. They seemed to be all right. I held them up to the dim morning light and twirled them. No cracks or bubbles. . . . ‘One’s broken. Maybe someone could glue it, though—it’s just one big piece.’ The only other valuables in the cupboard were Gabriella’s diamond drop earrings and a necklace. I put these in my pocket, rewrapped the glasses and placed them in one suitcase, and put on the shoulder holster with my Smith & Wesson in it. (159-60)

V.I. again puts her gun in a privileged position, as she does when she flees her apartment in *Indemnity Only*. She keeps her gun close to her, again privileging the symbolic phallus over the symbolic womb. She does wrap the glasses to put them in her suitcase, as her mother did, but she does not wrap them in her underwear; she wraps them in pieces of old sheets—discards, rags. While she embraces the glasses and expresses concern for them, she also rejects them, repeatedly refusing to privilege them as her mother did.

V.I.'s ultimate rejection of the glasses comes in *Tunnel Vision*. As described in the previous chapter, V.I. turns to the glasses in an effort to fill her longing for “security”: “I took one of my mother’s red Venetian glasses, usually saved for special occasions, and

tried to capture her fiery warmth in its refractions” (127). Feeling battered by her circumstances, V.I. hopes the glasses will make her feel her mother’s comfort, nurturing, and embrace. Yet the glasses fail to satisfy her: “Looking into the ruby of the glass I could see my mother’s fierce dark eyes. Gabriella had been like some wild bird, choosing a cage as a storm haven, out of bewilderment, then beating her wings so fiercely she broke herself against the walls. If that was what compromise brought, I didn’t want it. The red glass was bringing not comfort but agitation” (128). Instead of being calmed by memories of her mother, V.I. is reminded of the compromise her mother made by giving up her life’s dream in exchange for the security and stability of marriage, and how this compromise diminished Gabriella’s spirit and eventually cost her life.

As described earlier, the red glasses represent the symbolic womb, which Gabriella protects when she flees Italy as she would her physical womb. Later in the series we learn Gabriella dies from a sickness that attacks her physical womb, uterine cancer (*Hard Time* 147), which manifests only after she has a miscarriage (234). This is no coincidence. By choosing a stable life over a fulfilling one, Gabriella gives up part of herself. Even though she tries to use V.I. to fulfill her dreams, she never regains that part of herself she had lost. It is no surprise, then, that her physical death results from a sickness of the body part associated with the ideals that bring about her spiritual death: marriage and motherhood. The glasses, then, only remind V.I. of the domestic life that she has consistently rejected and the detrimental costs that life can bring to women who enter it.

For V.I., comfort comes when she turns to her spiritual mother, Lotty. Like V.I. Lotty rejects the confinement and compromise of traditional domestic life. Though she

has a boyfriend, Max Loewenthal, Lotty repeatedly refuses to marry him (for example, see *Total Recall* 186, 193). She also rejects motherhood, giving up for adoption a child she has early in life (*Total Recall* 518-22). Lotty's most visible rejection of motherhood comes in her profession. While as an obstetrician, Lotty cares for many pregnant women and successfully delivers their babies, she also regularly performs abortions. Through her clinic (and earlier through her volunteer work with the abortion underground where she and V.I. meet), Lotty offers abortion as an option to many poor women who otherwise might not be able to afford the procedure. By doing so, she routinely empties the womb represented by Gabriella's red glasses. When V.I. turns from the glasses to Lotty, then, she turns to the one person who embraces the same ideals that she does, soundly rejecting the patriarchal femininity embodied by the glasses.

The glasses also are reminiscent of the red shoes Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. According to Gilbert and Gubar, the red shoes represent female creativity, specifically writing, and the violence that is inflicted upon women who choose to operate in realms that have traditionally been reserved for men. In other words, the shoes represent the violence that results from the conflict between female creativity and the patriarchal definition of femininity. For V.I., this violence is apparent in *Indemnity Only* when she tells Bobby that one of the glasses is broken: "Mallory had been charging up the stairs, about to muscle me aside, but that stopped him—he'd drunk too many New Year's toasts out of those glasses. 'Christ, Vicki, I'm sorry, but what the hell were you doing poking your nose into this business anyway?'" (134). Bobby, stung that one of the glasses, along with all its implications, has been destroyed, shows little sympathy for V.I. Instead, he turns on her, like the men who

invaded her apartment, and blames her for the glass's destruction: If she hadn't been "poking her nose into this business"—i.e. doing her job—the glass and the femininity that it represents would still be intact. Because the glasses are attached to Gabriella, the biological maternal is inextricably linked to the patriarchal hostility displayed by Bobby.

Throughout the series, Paretsky undermines the biological maternal and paternal, presenting mothers who are pathological, exemplified by Rosa and Mrs. Paciorek; inept and self-absorbed, represented by Mrs. Thayer; and problematic, typified by Gabriella; and fathers who are consumed by and engender violence, epitomized by McGraw, Thayer, and Buffalo Bill and William Bysen. Each set is birthed from and, in turn, sustains a patriarchal society that seeks to subdue its inhabitants and to replicate itself. By presenting the biological maternal and paternal as powerless and valueless, Paretsky silences the voice of patriarchy. By doing so, she leaves only one community that gives life—the spiritual maternal.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION: BEYOND SPEAKING SOFTLY

Decades after President Theodore Roosevelt popularized the phrase “Speak softly and carry a big stick,” another politician became known for employing the adage. However, on the lips of this politician, self-avowed feminist Bella Abzug (1920-98), the phrase took on new form: “Women have been trained to speak softly and carry a lipstick. Those days are over.”¹ Abzug elaborated this saying in writing on the United Nations’ Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995:

I very seriously believe, and I know that I have said this before, that women have been trained to speak softly (that is, some of us) and to carry a lipstick. Women came out to demand a bigger stick at the international conference in China. We are no longer content to sit only at the kitchen table—women must be at all the tables where decisions of life and death are made: the peace table, the trade table, at every table in the parliaments and the cabinets, as ambassadors to the United Nations, in missions, in UN agencies and at the tables in Bretton Woods and other financial institutions that are globalizing our economy. (121)

In both its short and extended forms, Abzug’s statement speaks to the heart of patriarchy’s systematic silencing of women and the feminist movement’s rejection of this silencing. It also pinpoints the original adage’s source of power, the big stick. Modern-day women, as described by Abzug, reject the training of their past, i.e., society’s mandate that they conform to a male-constructed femininity, opting instead to replace, or in many cases supplement, their “lipstick” with “a bigger stick,” thereby laying claim to

¹ Quote found on several Web sites, including <http://www.library.csi.cuny.edu/dept/history/lavender/386/babzug.html>; [http://www.quoteworld.org/author.php?thetext=Bella+Abzug+\(b.+1920](http://www.quoteworld.org/author.php?thetext=Bella+Abzug+(b.+1920); <http://www.fembio.org/women/bella-abzug.shtml>.

the power invested in the phallus. This power, however, does not manifest explicitly in physical action; instead it empowers women to speak. No longer speaking softly, these women gain entrée to “the tables where decisions of life and death are made,” raising their voices in the discourse that affects not only their lives, but also the world at large.

Like the women Abzug describes, Sara Paretsky takes hold of a bigger stick, using the V.I. Warshawski series to make her voice heard. Paretsky purposely chooses as her medium a genre traditionally dominated by men. Kathleen Gregory Klein writes, “Hard-boiled fiction was marked off as the domain of men—writers, readers, characters—striding down mean American streets with a gun and a quick left jab” (4). In this domain, women are often relegated, as in patriarchal society, to second-class status. Even before the publication of her first novel, Paretsky desired to speak against such representation of women: “From my first reading of American hard-boiled novels in my early twenties I knew I wanted to create a female detective who turned the tables on [the] negative images of women [prevalent in traditional detective novels]” (“Sexy, moral and packing a pistol”).

These negative images center primarily on one thing: sexual power. Paretsky emphasizes this point: “[Raymond Chandler’s detective] Philip Marlowe and [Dashiell Hammett’s] Sam Spade inhabit a landscape filled with explicit sexual politics. Raymond Chandler’s women reek of sex ... ; Chandler’s women, like [Hammett’s] Brigid O’Shaughnessy, try to make good boys do bad things. But Marlowe and Spade are both too moral for them” (“Arts: ‘This was my destiny: housework, babysitting, marriage’”). In the world of the hard-boiled novel, women like O’Shaughnessy inhabit a realm outside that of the “good” detective, existing solely as sexual objects who use their bodies to

seduce the detective and thereby entice him to stray from his commitment to re-establish order. As such, these women are denied the power of choice and are dependent upon the detective's acceptance or rejection of her sexual advances. The female detectives created by female novelists, like Paretsky, turn this sexual politics on its head. "[W]hile she asserts autonomy through voice, the 'female dick' ... also causes a crisis in the normal role for male characters. This crisis is essentially characterized by a diminution of the sexual power over women which the male character in the genre normally enjoys—to the extent that he frequently becomes a simple bystander in the events unfolding for the female gumshoe" (Irons xxi).

In V.I., Paretsky crafts a female detective who exercises sexual power but is not controlled by it. She chooses when and with whom to enter into sexual relationships, but does not use sex as a method to control men. In conceiving V.I., Paretsky says, "I vowed not to use sex to exploit my characters—or readers. I also wanted my hero, V.I., to be a sexual being and a moral person at the same time" ("Sexy, moral and packing a pistol"). By doing so, Paretsky creates a character who breaks the mold established by traditional hard-boiled novels.

Throughout the series, the voices Paretsky creates and those she silences join together to promote an image that affirms, rather than demeans, women. Like V.I., the women in her circle of friends shatter the feminine image promoted by traditional detective novels. Likewise, the male characters in the series function to undermine patriarchal stereotypes. In the end, Paretsky presents a series and a heroine that speak loudly, clearly, and defiantly.

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