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The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency:
Sexist Opinions as Part of an Appealing Character

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Introduction

“All he does is sit in his chair outside the front door and tell me what to do for him next.
‘Many men are like that,’ interrupted Mma Ramotswe” (McCall Smith 10).

The witch doctor’s wife closed her eyes. “I did not kill that boy.”
“I know,” said Mma Ramotswe. “It is never the women who do it. But that doesn’t make
any difference to the police (McCall Smith 226).

These are extracts from Alexander McCall Smith’s book *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*.

Mma Ramotswe is the main character and owner of the “No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency.”

This book is the first in a series that has become immensely popular since it was first published in 1998. It has been translated into thirty nine languages and sold over fifteen million copies worldwide. Yet, as exemplified in the quotes above, the main character expresses a sexist attitude towards men. In many ways she talks about men as the lower sex.

McCall Smith has received minimal negative criticism concerning Mma Ramotswe’s attitude. Some reviewers mention her sexism. *New York Times* reviewer Janet Malcolm states: “Among the many oddities of Alexander McCall Smith’s *No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* series is its unabashed sexism. McCall Smith treats the weaker sex - men- with pitying condescension.” Malcolm touches on the subject of Mma Ramotswe’s sexism, but then goes on to describe her charming character. This appears to be a contradiction in a successful character of the twenty first century; a character who is loved by millions of readers around the world, but who at the same time is openly sexist. It is this contradiction that will be the focus of this essay. The aim of this paper is to investigate how Mma Ramotswe’s sexist opinions can be a part of her appealing character. Sexist opinions could be expected to instead create a despised character.

The answer will be looked for in the most characterizing roles that Mma Ramotswe's has. Significant for her character is that she is a detective and a woman. How well she fits detective and gender stereotypes is critical for how she is perceived. Feminist analysis is behind the theoretical approach. To analyze Mma Ramotswe from the aspect of gender, the sexual allegory underlying the African patriarchal system will be used as described by Florence Stratton. To analyze the detective aspect of Mma Ramotswe the stereotypical detective provided by crime fiction theory will be consulted. Matching Mma Ramotswe's character to these two stereotypes reveals how Mma Ramotswe's character becomes credible enough to allow sexist opinions and yet ends up as an appealing character. Most attention will be given to the first book in this series about Mma Ramotswe, *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*, but reference will also be made to later books in the series.

Appeal and Sexist Opinions

A short background of the character Mma Ramotswe is helpful as a start. Mma Ramotswe is a middle-aged woman living in the capital of Botswana. When we meet Mma Ramotswe at the beginning of the story, she has behind her an unhappy marriage and the loss of a baby. Also her father recently passed away and it is with the help of the capital that he left behind that she can start her own business: The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. She has a good friend in Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, who later asks to marry her. In the novel we follow her progress in life and in business.

Mma Ramotswe's character has received a lot of attention; mostly in the shape of book reviews but also in academic publications. There is very little negative criticism to be found. Two people have criticized her sexism in personal book reviews, but none at all in search

engines for news or academic publications.¹ The positive aspects of Mma Ramotswe have on the other hand been described in numerous ways. One reviewer writes that “Mma Ramotswe is so sensible and always does what's right” (Memmott). Another reviewer calls her “delightfully intuitive and enormously likable” (Row) and another opinion is that she is “a kind and compassionate individual” (Bukowsky). She gives the impression of being “a respected member of the community for her integrity, poise and practical wisdom” (Matzke 67). A word that summarizes the positive response to her character well is “appealing.” To have appeal means to have “the power of arousing a sympathetic response” (Merriam-Webster). Mma Ramotswe comes across as a very appealing character.

Mma Ramotswe’s sexist opinions concern many different aspects of the nature of men and women. Sexism is “prejudice or discrimination based on sex” (Merriam-Webster). The variety of Mma Ramotswe’s sexist opinions will now be exemplified with extracts from *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency*. One prejudice that Mma Ramotswe expresses is that men do bad things. To reassure one of her clients, Mma Ramotswe says: “Men do terrible things [...] All wives are worried about their husbands. You are not alone” (126). Mma Ramotswe also suggests that men are lazy. When one of her clients complains about a man that: “All he does is sit in his chair outside the front door and tell me what to do for him next”, Mma Ramotswe replies: “Many men are like that” (10). She also contemplates how most men would never even dream of helping with domestic chores (87). Mma Ramotswe also seems convinced that most men are unfaithful. When one of her clients suspects that her husband is having an affair Mma Ramotswe nods and adds in her mind: “All men carried on with ladies [...] The only men who did not were ministers of religion and headmasters” (139). When another client does not suspect unfaithfulness herself, Mma Ramotswe offers this as a likely explanation to a husband’s unusual behavior (65). Men are considered to let their sexual urges control their

¹ Search engines that have been consulted are EBSCO Host, Africana Periodical Literature Database, African Women's Bibliographic Database, the African news search engine allAfrica.com, Google, and the Swedish library search engine LIBRIS.

actions and blur their minds. Mma Ramotswe pities men for this: “How terrible to be a man, and to have sex on one’s mind all the time, as men are supposed to do” (147). She feels that women make fools of men without them knowing it (7). Mma Ramotswe also expresses opinions that indicate that women are better than men. For example when the wife of a witch doctor claims that she did not kill a certain boy, Mma Ramotswe replies: “‘I know,’ said Mma Ramotswe [...] ‘It is never the women who do it. But that doesn’t make any difference to the police’” (226). To summarize: Mma Ramotswe’s sexist opinions are that men do bad things, are lazy, unfaithful and that their minds are occupied too much with sex, whereas women do good things and are the ones who see what is going on.

The fact that Mma Ramotswe comes across as an appealing character, although she openly expresses sexist opinions, indicates that there is something about her character that makes it possible for readers to overlook her sexist statements and perhaps even laugh about them. Attention is now turned to analyzing Mma Ramotswe’s character from a gender and detective perspective, starting with the former.

Gender Stereotypes in African Fiction and their Importance

Gender stereotypes in African society and African texts are not easily defined. A patriarchal society has stereotypes of men and women that correspond to the claim that men are supreme in the family and should control a larger part of society. Postcolonial African texts bear witness of these African patriarchal structures. There is a danger in using the phrase “African texts” and talk about African patriarchy. There is no doubt that the countries on this vast continent have very different histories, circumstances and characteristics. Still, one thing they have in common is a patriarchal system that puts women in a situation where there is not equality between sexes. From this gender perspective it is still fruitful to look at African texts together, regardless of nationality, as Florence Stratton does in her work *Contemporary*

African Literature and the Politics of Gender. Here Stratton outlines how women have had to fight even to be given room in literature and against the stereotypical patriarchal view of what women are or should be like.

According to Stratton, the African patriarchal stereotype of women can be described in a set of Manichean allegories that Stratton calls the sexual allegory. This sexual allegory is defined by five dichotomies: male-female, superiority-inferiority, subject-object, self-other and good-evil (172). To exemplify and define these dichotomies I will use Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, as this is one of the most important works by an African author (Stratton 22). The protagonist in this book is the warrior and farmer Okonkwo. He struggles with the psychological inheritance from his unsuccessful father and the challenges of the appearance of the white man. The women in this text are given very little room and fit well into the patriarchal stereotype as is pointed out by Stratton (22-38). Her reasoning about these dichotomies has been used below, but the examples have in most instances been picked directly from Achebe's text and the page numbers refer to his work.

To use the dichotomy male-female is challenging as it has very different meanings depending on the culture where the words are used. Starting with the word female, a difference is often made between female and feminine where feminine traits are those considered typical of women but acquired and female referring to innate traits of women. The same distinction is often made between the words male and masculine. An example of this would be that some consider stronger muscles a male trait, but emotional strength a masculine trait. However, in the sexual allegory Stratton presents, the word male is used to refer to both acquired and innate traits and that is how the words male and female will be used here when talking about the sexual allegory.

The other difficulty is that what is considered male and female traits differs between cultures. In some cultures cooking can be a male/masculine job, but in other cultures being

good at cooking is considered a female/feminine trait. The traits that are considered female and male in *Things Fall Apart* will be used as a reference point for what is meant by male-female in the sexual allegory presented by Stratton.

Four female traits that seem most apparent in *Things Fall Apart* will be pointed out here. To begin with it is considered female to be caring and emotional. When Okonkwo gets emotional he rebukes himself with the words: “When did you become a shivering old woman” (45). Second, women’s main purpose is to protect and look after the children (94). Cooking is the third female signifier and is something that men never do. Finally women are to be provided for. It is the responsibility of men to make sure that there is something for the women to cook (16).

Having now discussed the dichotomy male-female, focus is now turned to the remaining four dichotomies: superiority-inferiority, subject-object, self-other and good-evil. Women are considered inferior in most aspects of life. Even the lowest man is above the highest women, which shows for example in the order of drinking wine on special occasions. All men are served before the highest rank woman is allowed to drink (24). The superiority of men also shows when something needs to be done. It is the men who are called to meet in the market place to decide what action to take in difficult situations (7). The men are also the “subjects” of the text who make things happen. Women are treated as objects who are bought, sold and owned like objects. They do not make things happen. Finally the female characters are described as the feared other in that men are afraid of becoming what women are. Stratton writes that “Okonkwo is not unique in defining himself in opposition to women, [...] he is simply conforming to a cultural norm” (34). The female characters do not strike the reader as evil, but they are treated as potentially problematic and something that has to be mastered. Okonkwo is happy when his son grumbles about women, because he feels that this attitude will help him control them and be prosperous in the future (37).

The importance of non-stereotypical characters is seen in the criticism that has been aimed at earlier African texts. *Things Fall Apart* was published in 1958. Initially, academic circles and newspaper reviews gave it a warm welcoming and the novel was met with very little negative criticism (22-25). Later, Stratton questions its credibility by showing how the female characters in the book are not credible as they adhere too much to the patriarchal female stereotype to appear realistic (37-38).

In 1966 came the reply in the shape of the first African novels written by women: Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land*. Stratton presents these texts contrasted to *Things Fall Apart* and shows how the situation is now reversed (Stratton 99, 174). If Achebe can be said to present male stories with stereotypical female characters who are not given much room, then the opposite can be said to be true about these first African novels by women. In *Efuru* the women, especially the protagonist Efuru, are complex characters, whereas the men are reduced to stereotypes. These novels had to face very negative criticism straight away (Stratton 58-107). The novels were indirectly criticising the patriarchal society, by showing the hardships of being a woman in this society, but this in itself seems not to have been the target for attack. Instead the books were attacked from what seems like all other possible angles: plot, story, characters and so on. The biggest issue was male characters that did not appear credible. This "mistake" of creating stereotypical male characters seems for its readers to have undermined the credibility of the whole story.

The credibility of characters has shown to be crucial for the credibility of the entire text. Characters who adhere too much to the traditional stereotypes of men and women do not appear credible to the readers. Next the credibility of Mma Ramotswe's character from this woman stereotype angle will be discussed.

Mma Ramotswe and Gender Stereotypes

Despite Mma Ramotswe's sexist statements, it has been argued that Mma Ramotswe does not challenge the traditional female stereotype. Elfi Bettinger writes that "Gender stereotypes, however, are destabilised without being seriously challenged" (166). Christine Matzke, who relies in part on Bettinger, suggests that in McCall Smith's novels about Mma Ramotswe "all is non-confrontational and non-threatening and thus geared towards playful, reassuring entertainment" (67). Matzke comes to this conclusion through the reasoning that Mma Ramotswe fits the definition of the Mother Africa trope. The Mother Africa trope is very much the same thing as the sexual allegory described above and it will be argued here that Mma Ramotswe only to a very little extent can be said to match this trope and accordingly avoids the African woman stereotype.

The basic criterion for the Mother Africa trope is that a female character is set to symbolise the continent and history of Africa. Stratton defines it as "the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman" (39). But Stratton is also careful to point out that the trope in addition to this includes sexism against women. Stratton means that the use of the Mother Africa trope is something that male African writers have in common and that "[t]hrough the Mother Africa trope, they mask the subordination of women in the patriarchal socio-political systems of African states" (55). The dichotomies that underlie the Mother Africa trope are for the most part the same as the sexual allegory earlier described. The only difference is that in Stratton's description of the allegories that underlie the Mother Africa trope she has the dichotomy "mind-body" instead of "good-evil" and uses the words "domination-subordination" instead of the words "superiority-inferiority" (41, 172). In other words, the Mother Africa trope means Africa symbolised in a female character, but it also means the embracement of the same stereotypical view of women as the traditional African patriarchal system.

The Mother Africa trope lives in Mma Ramotswe to a certain extent. At the end of *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective* agency it becomes clear that Mr J.L.B Matekoni sees Africa in her as he shares his thoughts of her:

He looked at her in the darkness, at this woman who was everything to him – mother, Africa, wisdom, understanding, good things to eat, pumpkins, chicken, she smell of sweet cattle breath, the white sky across the endless, endless bush, and the giraffe that cried, giving its tears for women to daub on their baskets; O Botswana, my country, my place. (McCall Smith 234)

However, personifying Africa is only a part of the Mother Africa trope. Does Mma Ramotswe also adhere to the sexist stereotype that is a part of this trope? It will be argued here that comparing her character to the dichotomies that underlie both the sexual allegory and the Mother Africa trope leads to a different conclusion.

To begin with the dichotomy male-female, Mma Ramotswe does have certain qualities that are considered female in this sexual allegory. Using the traits pin pointed from *Things Fall Apart*, what is considered female in the sexual allegory of the African patriarchal system is to take care of and protect children, to cook, to be caring and emotional and to be provided for. Mma Ramotswe is caring and emotional. She cares so much for her clients and gets so emotionally involved that she sometimes solves cases that she knows she will not get paid for, such as finding a boy who has been abducted for witchcraft. At the beginning of the story Mma Ramotswe does not have any children, but she has given birth to a child, and she later in the series adopts two children together with Mr J.L.B Matekoni, and it is Mma Ramotswe who cares for them. Also Mma Ramotswe enjoys cooking and seeks strength in her home, her tea and preparing and eating pumpkin:

Mma Ramotswe prepared herself a meal of stew and pumpkin. She loved standing in the kitchen, stirring the pot, thinking over the events of the day.

(83). [...] You could think and think and get nowhere, but you still had to eat your pumpkin. That brought you down to earth. That gave you reason for going on. Pumpkin. (85)

On the other hand, Mma Ramotswe does not always cook for herself and she does not have to clean, as she has a maid. She is also content with her life before she marries or takes on children (138). Mma Ramotswe is not in need of being provided for. She provides for herself and also for somebody else as she employs Mma Makutsi as her secretary. Mma Ramotswe's female traits are that she is caring and emotional. She also likes to cook and take care of children, but she does not define herself in this way, as she is happy also without doing it. She even has the male trait of providing for herself. Thus Mma Ramotswe's character has both female and male traits.

Regarding the second dichotomy, superiority-inferiority, it can be said of Mma Ramotswe that she will not be bossed around by anyone. This includes men who could technically speaking be said to be above her in rank and education, such as attorneys and politicians. She even stands up to Mr Charlie Gotso, a muchfeared and influential man:

[Mr Gotso:]“I have seen this place of yours. I saw a sign when I was driving past. A private detective agency for ladies, or something like that.”

“Not just for ladies, Rra,” said Mma Ramotswe. “We are lady detectives but we work for men too. Mr Patel, for example. He consulted us.”

The smile became broader. “You think you can tell men things?”

Mma Ramotswe answered calmly. “Sometimes. It depends. Sometimes men are too proud to listen. We can't tell that sort of man anything.” (189)

To be successful is not to be superior, but it can prevent a person from ending up in an inferior situation. And Mma Ramotswe is successful. She solves all her cases and brings in

enough money to stay in business. There is one male that she acts inferior to and that is Note, her former husband. However in later books in the series the tables are turned in this relationship as well. If somebody is in control of somebody else in the relationship between her and Mr J.L.B Matekoni it is Mma Ramotswe, even if it is mostly without his knowing it. Mma Ramotswe is not an inferior character.

Considering the third dichotomy, subject-object, Mma Ramotswe is never the object of the text, but rather the subject who makes things happen. She sets up and runs a successful detective agency and is the one who takes initiatives to most things that happen. Matzke says herself that “women are the most capable characters in the narratives” (67). This is not true of all the women mentioned in the book, but of the main characters.

The fourth dichotomy, self-other, is turned around by McCall Smith. In *Things Fall Apart* Okonkwo defines himself in opposition to women. The men are afraid of becoming like women. In *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* the situation is reversed. Especially through her sexist statements Mma Ramotswe makes men the immoral other who are not envied but rather to be pitied or feared. Women are assigned the good and useful qualities: “‘Women are the ones who know what’s going on,’ she said quietly. ‘They are the ones with eyes’” (61). Men are responsible for most of the bad things that happen, for example working as a doctor without an education (194-222). Mma Ramotswe’s sexist statements, together with the evil acts by the men in this novel, create a feeling that men, and not women, are the evil and immoral other.

Summarizing the above, certain aspects of the Mother Africa trope live on in the character of Mma Ramotswe, but most do not. There are two strands in the Mother Africa trope that concern different ways that a female character can impersonate Africa in a text. Stratton calls one of the strands “the pot of culture” and here the woman character represents the same values that Africa is thought to represent. The other strand she calls “the sweep of history” and here the history of Africa is paralleled in the life of the woman character. Concerning the Mother Africa trope Matzke

writes: Both strands [of the trope] reverberate in McCall Smith's Mma Ramotswe novels, though they are much more light-heartedly employed, and have been given a milder gender-sensitive revision where necessary (67).

This agrees with what has been said earlier in this text that Mma Ramotswe seems to personify Africa in some ways. As Matzke points out, Mma Ramotswe also adheres to the trope in that she is very female in her caring and cooking qualities. However this is not the same thing as carrying on the Mother Africa trope, as this trope comes with an almost identical stereotype as the one which is inherent in the African patriarchal society. Mma Ramotswe has very little in common with the Mother Africa trope and the woman stereotype of the African patriarchal system.

McCall Smith has thus succeeded in creating in Mma Ramotswe a woman who is non-stereotypical. A non-stereotypical woman comes alive to the reader and feels credible. This is one part of the explanation to how Mma Ramotswe can be an appealing character despite her sexist opinions. The other part of the explanation can be found in the stereotype for a female detective.

Detective Stereotypes and their Importance

The male detective stereotype does not demand a lot from its characters, but the female detective stereotype does. In the introduction to Kathleen Gregory Klein's book *The Woman Detective* we learn that male detective characters, can be "blind, fat, homosexual, aristocratic, lazy, crooked, clever, violent, intuitive, sexist, logical, racist and more"(9). The two crucial factors are that they solve crime and are heroes (Klein 1). Woman detectives face a different stereotype, although it has changed over the years. There are many aspects of this stereotype, but of interest here is what will be called the traditional versus the modern female stereotype, and also the female way of fighting crime compared to the male way of fighting crime.

The major part of Klein's work deals with woman detectives who all fit what will here be called the traditional woman detective stereotype (1-14). This stereotype was a result of the fact that when female detectives started to emerge the concepts "woman" and "detective" were seen as contradictions. For these female detectives to be interesting and acceptable to readers, their creators had to compromise on one of these two concepts to make the character work. In practice this meant that female detectives had to either be unsuccessful as detectives or as women. As Klein words it: "To succeed commercially, authors decided that their character was either not a proper detective or not a proper woman. Occasionally, they drew both conclusions" (4).

The woman detective Miss Marple, created by Agatha Christie, can be used to exemplify the traditional female detective stereotype. She is not a proper detective in the respect that she does not make her living on her detective work. She does not have clients who come to her to ask for help to solve crime. She just takes an interest in crime and solves them with the help of close observation. As an amateur she solves crime without expectations and is allowed to make mistakes and rely on luck (Klein 5). She is not a proper woman in the respect that she does not adhere to society's stereotypical norms of a successful woman. She is not married and does not have any children. Miss Marple is neither a proper woman nor a proper detective and is because of this a good example of a character adhering to the traditional woman detective stereotype.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, this traditional stereotype has changed into what will here be called the *modern* female detective stereotype. Society and the readers have now changed and the concepts of "woman" and "detective" do no longer contradict each other. What used to be allowed for male detectives only, to be successful both as a person and professionally, is now allowed women as well. The modern woman detective is both a proper woman and a proper detective (Klein 230-242).

One thing that sets the modern woman detective apart from the male detective is the way of fighting crime (Klein 232). Male detectives can use crime, such as violence or theft, to stop crime. Female detectives are more apprehensive about violence and use their compassion for, and closeness to, the victim to work against crime. A traditional hero who can exemplify this, although he is no detective, is Robin Hood. He considers it stealing to demand such high taxes from the farmers. To put things right he himself steals and uses violence to get the money back from the rich and return it to the poor. He gives the criminals a taste of their own medicine. Klein writes about female detectives: "Rather than catching a killer by becoming like a killer, many of these characters choose instead to avenge a victim by caring about the victim" (233). Even though Miss Marple is of the old generation of detectives, she could serve as an example of this. She does not need violence to solve her mysteries. Instead she approaches and cares for the victims and through this gets clues for her case. One way to put this is that women detectives fight crime with love.

Female detectives have two different types of crime to fight: crime against society, such as violence and theft, but also crime in the shape of sexual discrimination. Maureen T. Reddy writes in "Women Detectives": "Probably the most important distinction between the hardboiled [male detective] and feminist revisions of it lies in the theme of fighting back, not only against violence but also against all attempts at external, particularly patriarchal, control" (199). This double crimefighting is another difference between the stereotypical male and female detective. In short, the modern stereotypical woman detective is successful both as a woman and as a detective. She fights crime with love and she fights crime not just from individuals, but also from society in the shape of sexism.

For a detective character it is important to adhere to the detective stereotype. Miss Marple created the traditional female stereotype and later female characters who have not fit within this framework have been shortlived (Klein 4-5). As Klein points out, a detective author is

always limited by the thoughts of its readers: “whether written by women or men, the product is usually responsive to society’s demands” (5). The novel will not sell if its characters step too far out of the detective stereotype box. Earlier in this paper, it was concluded that the opposite seems to be true for characters outside the detective genre, as exemplified with earlier African texts. For characters in these novels to be credible, they need to be realistic, which means that they cannot be too close to the male/female stereotype. When it comes to the detective genre, this is no longer the case. Next Mma Ramotswe’s character will be discussed from the aspect of her character as a detective.

Mma Ramotswe and Detective Stereotypes

Mma Ramotswe has several times been likened to Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple. The first synopsis on the back cover of *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective* reads: “Meet Precious Ramotswe, ‘the Miss Marple of Botswana’” (*The New York Times book Review*). Bettinger also points out the similarities between Mma Ramotswe and Miss Marple and believes that they share “a remarkable number of traits” (164). Yet, the fact that they have several things in common does not mean that they adhere to the same detective stereotype. What they have in common is that they both rely on gossip and draw conclusions by analogy. They both look for the culprit among people who are close to the victim and use common sense to catch the criminals.

What separates Miss Marple and Mma Ramotswe are the crucial points of being a proper woman and a proper detective. Mma Ramotswe is a professional detective in that she earns a living from her clients. In the beginning of the book she is not a “proper” woman, as she starts out with an unsuccessful marriage. But as *The No. 1 Ladies’ Detective Agency* ends with her decision to marry Mr J.L.B. Matekoni, and in the following books they adopt two children

together. She thus ends up as successful, regarding both her detective and her woman role. This qualifies her to the modern woman detective stereotype.

When it comes to her tactics of fighting crime, she partly steps out of this modern woman detective stereotype and takes on the fighting tactics of male detectives when it suits her. She uses female techniques when it comes to fighting crime against society. She does not use violence and works with the victims. However, when it comes to fighting the patriarchal society, she fights back with the same means as she is attacked, although verbally. We are shown how her society often treats women in a sexist way and so in return Mma Ramotswe uses sexism in her talk about them.

For example, in one of her cases, an older man shows up and tells a younger woman that he is her dad. He demands that she looks after him and although she has never met her dad she agrees to this. It is only the fact that she starts to doubt that he really is her father that makes her want to throw him out. She says: "Can you find out whether this man is really my Daddy? If he is, then I will be a dutiful daughter and put up with him" (11). We understand that women are supposed to look after and provide for their fathers even though they get nothing in return. This burden of women to look after all men can be considered sexist. Mma Ramotswe's response to this is to pass sexist judgements on men. Mma Ramotswe's response to her sexist society is to be sexist in return. She fights crime with crime, sexism with sexism, and in doing so she uses a male strategy of fighting crime. She is herself aware of this strategy to some point and considers it a necessary evil. When one of the custom officials tries to give her a hard time she lies to put him in place, but has second thoughts about it: "Mma Ramotswe did not like lying. But sometimes it was necessary" (210).

Mma Ramotswe never steps out of the detective stereotype box. She qualifies to be a modern woman detective, yet she puts one foot in the male detective stereotype box in her way of fighting back sexist crime. This is the other part of the explanation to how Mma

Ramotswe can be an appealing character despite her sexist opinions. She fits close enough to the woman detective stereotype to be accepted by the readers and becomes a credible detective.

Conclusion

Mma Ramotswe's character has received very positive response from the readers of *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency* and minimal negative criticism. She is often described in the terms of being a wise and kindhearted character, an appealing character. Yet, she openly states her sexist opinions that men do bad things, are lazy, unfaithful, too occupied with sex, and that women are the ones who do good things. The aim of this paper has been to investigate how Mma Ramotswe's sexist opinions can be a part of her appealing character as opposed to turning her into a despised character.

The analysis has focused on her characterizing woman and detective roles. Both these aspects of her character have stereotypes that will affect how the readers perceive her. As she is a woman in an African patriarchal society, a gender stereotype found in African fiction has been used. It presents a stereotype of women that can be summarized in five dichotomies called the sexual allegory: male-female, superiority-inferiority, subject-object, self-other and good-evil. Mma Ramotswe is not an inferior character, not the object in the text, and she is not portrayed as evil or as the immoral other. She does have female traits but also male traits and thus she does not match the woman stereotype of the African patriarchal society. Earlier African fiction that has presented characters who stay too close to gender stereotypes have been criticized for losing their credibility. By challenging the stereotype Mma Ramotswe becomes a credible woman character.

Being a detective, detective stereotypes are also important for how readers perceive Mma Ramotswe. The traditional woman detective stereotype meant that a woman detective could

not be successful as a woman and as a detective, but the modern woman detective stereotype allows for this. Mma Ramotswe fits the modern stereotype in this aspect. However, the stereotypical woman detective does not fight crime with crime as the stereotypical male detective does, but rather with love. Sexism can be considered one of the crimes in detective stories and Mma Ramotswe breaks the pattern of fighting crime with love as she fights sexism with sexism – her sexist opinions. In this way Mma Ramotswe steps out of the woman detective stereotype and into the male detective stereotype. It is only a small step though and it is still within the detective stereotype. Staying close to the reader's expectations of what a detective should be like has proven crucial for a detective to appear credible and be successful. Because Mma Ramotswe does this she becomes a credible detective character.

Comparing Mma Ramotswe to relevant woman and detective stereotypes shows that she is a credible woman because she avoids the stereotypical African woman, and a credible detective because she stays close enough to the woman detective stereotype. These two aspects combine and make Mma Ramotswe a credible enough character to outweigh her sexist opinions and make her come across as an appealing character overall. Had she not been a credible character in this way, it is possible that her sexist opinions would have upset readers and not allowed her to attack the patriarchal society the way she does. It appears that a credible character is allowed to do things that would normally not be considered acceptable.

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