

## The 'Night Girl': Evaluating Barbara Neely's Domestic Sleuth in *Blanche on the Lam*

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**Abstract :**

African American women writers contributed to the detective fiction genre in the late 1900s, creating novels that constantly questioned and unsettled societal hierarchies and power relations. They created black female protagonists with the mental capacity to investigate crime, diffusing the misogyny that pervade black crime fiction. In 1992, African American writer, Barbara Neely published *Blanche on the Lam*, weaving her narrative around the eponymous protagonist, ironically named Blanche White, blending it with African American consciousness and elements from the African American culture, examining the dual disadvantages of being black and a woman, while adding the dimension of class to it. This paper aims to analyse Neely's protagonist Blanche's attempt to unsettle the notions of invisibility and stereotyping of black domestic workers, while engaging in ratiocinative activities. Through Blanche, Neely presents a black female voice that goes beyond stereotypes, revealing how a black woman may convey the complexity and diversity of black women's experiences from her own point of view. The novel explores the ties between gender, race, and class, as well as the subject of black women's identity. The paper is written using a close reading of the text to determine how Barbara Neely develops Blanche White as a distinct African American detective persona, manipulating and subverting prejudices associated with her position as a black working class woman.

**Keywords :** black women's self definition, double-conscious detection, invisibility, subversion.