Uncertain Justice

Uncertain Justice:
Crimes and Retribution in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction

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CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS
PUBLISHING

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This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2420-8, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2420-0

A Carlo e Vinia,

mamma e papà

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Mark Chu, Marco Amici and Luca Somigli, for contributing to this book with their knowledge of conspiracy theories and of historical fiction. Chapter One contains their work.

Some parts of the volume have been developed and expanded from earlier work already in print. I am grateful to Gillian Ania and Ann Caesar as editors, and to Cambridge Scholars' Publishing for allowing reprint of Luca Somigli's essay on Fascist *gialli* and my own on Salvatori's *Sublime anima di donna*, which were originally published in *Trends in Contemporary Italian Narrative, 1980-2007*. The section on Grimaldi's narrative is a reworking of an earlier essay originally in *Spunti e Ricerche*, Volume 18 (2003), February/March 2004. The section on Farinetti's work was originally published as "Portraits of Bourgeois Inside-outside. Family Groups in Gianni Farinetti's Narrative", a chapter in S. Lucamante (ed.), *Italy and the Bourgeoisie: The Re-Thinking of a Class*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (2009). My analysis of Garlaschelli's novels appeared in *Rivista di Studi Italiani*, 1, Vol. XXI. The work on Mazzucco's *Un giorno perfetto* was published as 'Roma in *Noir*—The Eternal City as Dystopia. Or Perfect Imperfection', in *Romance Studies*, 25(4), 2007, also accessible online at www.maney.co.uk/journals/ros and www.ingentaconnect.com /content/maney/ros. Finally part of the section on Gianrico Carofiglio was published in *Italica* 86:4. I am grateful to all editors and publishers for granting permission to reprint.

My thanks go to the staff at the Law School Library at the University of Modena and Reggio, in particular to its director, Massimo Donini, for granting permission to reprint the cover of Filippo Maria Renazzi's *Elementa juris criminalis liber I* in the cover of this volume. A special thanks to Andrea Lodi, curator of the library's Fondo Antico, for taking the trouble to locate a version of the image in the best suitable format.

Finally, my gratitude goes to the writers of the novels analysed here, who have allowed me access to their materials and their time during the process of writing of this book.

This book is dedicated to my parents.

INTRODUCTION

The detective novel, or *giallo*, as it is commonly known, developed in Italy from the convergence of two foreign models – the nineteenth-century French *feuilleton* and the Anglo-American detective story – mediated through the "romanzo d'appendice", the serialized novel form that gained popularity in post-Unification Italy. Because of the circumstances of its beginnings, Italian crime fiction, or *letteratura gialla*, has struggled for a long time to gain literary kudos: on the one hand in fact, Italian authors found it difficult to establish themselves as credible alternatives to the "foreign masters", whose works were readily available in Italy in translation; and on the other the historical association of *giallo* with "low brow" literature, or *paraliterature* relegated it to the lower echelons of the literary scale. This lack of validation as a sound, attention-worthy artefact, which ultimately meant lack of status, has resulted in the genre being long ignored by scholars, except to highlight its nature of cultural by-product of an increasingly mass-orientated, "popularised" society.

This situation has changed radically, and the genre has increased steadily both in popularity and in standing, particularly from the last decade of the twentieth century.

Amongst the many definitions that have been offered to encapsulate the essence of crime literature, one that I find particularly congenial is that proposed by Maureen T. Reddy. Writing in the late 1980s, Reddy described the crime novel as a work of fiction "in which a central interest lies in the examination of events, often but not always criminal, that are partly concealed at the beginning of the story" (Reddy 1988: 151-53). In placing the focus on the analytical and hermeneutic process that drives the narratives, the purpose of which is to interpret evidence and reveal a state or situation that were initially (partly) concealed, this definition captures effectively the ethos of Italian crime fiction, as this volume intends to show.

From the early Anglo-American and French examples of the genre, which set the standard for many generations of writers, the task of uncovering these concealed events was entrusted to the character of the (typically male) investigator. Often a lone individual, detached from the official police networks and free from significant affective ties, he would

unearth the useful clues and piece together the broken puzzle, leading the narrative mystery to its solution and using methods that varied according to the chosen sub-generic alignment – the "clean" ratiocination à la Edgar Allan Poe was not always adequate, and at times the investigator had to get more physically involved, as the American hard-boiled gumshoe proves.

Since Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes – the first detective and the first series detective in literary history respectively – the investigation has usually led to a single, unchallenged explanation of events and to the identification of the perpetrator(s), albeit often via a number of detours. The red-herrings, the dischronies - such as the retrospective re-tellings of the story or the ellipses - had a function that was rhetorical and aesthetic but which did not alter the teleological scope of the genre: having discovered the who/how/why through a regressive ratiocinative process, the sleuth would take the story and the text to their mandatory final closure, all questions answered, all doubts clarified. This formula, considered for over a century as paradigmatic of the genre, came under scrutiny when it became apparent that a full restoration of order was not an attainable outcome – because full order was never the point of departure. From this moment on the philosophy of crime fiction changed radically: from being an instrument of escapism and reassurance, presenting a world in which logic – or bravery or foolhardiness – could successfully restore a comfortable status quo ante, it became the site where social and existential anxieties, uncertainties, discomfort and dissent could be expressed. It is at this point in the evolution of the genre that Italian literature began to make a significant contribution, and this can be conventionally made to coincide with the publication of Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta (*1961*; The Day of the Owl*, 1984*)*, a novel in which the focus is not on the solution of the original crime, uncovered in the first few pages, but on the progressive uncovering of the political forces within society which nullify and dismantle the investigator's careful reconstruction.

Embryonic forms of what would be defined today as "giallo", narratives which structured the plot around the cycle crime-detection-restoration of order, can be traced in the mid nineteenth century. Francesco Mastriani's *Il mio cadavere* (1852) [My corpse] and *La cieca di Sorrento* (1852) [The blind woman from Sorrento] are considered by some as the precursors of the Italian enigma novel (Siviero 2003). Later works, by writers such as Cletto Arrighi (*La mano nera* 1883) [The black hand], Emilio De Marchi (*Il cappello del prete*, 1887) [The Priest's Hat] and even Carolina Invernizio (*Rina o l'angelo delle Alpi*, 1877) [Rina, or the angel of the Alps] are also cited as evidence of a developing national interest and competence in the

genre, and interestingly were all inspired by a desire to reach as wide a range of readers as possible.[1] This type of narrative fiction, popular amongst the semi-literate Italian public of the post-unification years, explored the vices, virtues and sins of the whole social spectrum: the well-off upper classes, usually far removed from the harsher aspects of reality; the newly-born petite bourgeoisie and their aspirations to climb the social ladder; and the proletariat, tempted by the comfort and status enjoyed by the occupants of the higher echelons. If all these novels gave space to processes of ratiocination and detection, they still in the main subordinated them to the romantic/adventurous or moralistic elements characteristic of the *feuilleton*, and responded predominantly to a political need to foster a sense of national identity in the reluctant citizens of the newly formed Italian state.[2]

Developing from these turn-of-the-century prodromes, the genre was officially inaugurated a few decades later, in the years following the end of the First World War. The series *I libri gialli*, named after the colour chosen for its trademark spine, was launched by Mondadori in 1929 and was initially dedicated exclusively to foreign crime novels in translation.[3]

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[1] Both Cletto Arrighi (Carlo Righetti) and Emilio De Marchi were members of the Scapigliatura and prolific novelists, who wanted to experiment with literature to render it appealing to the ordinary people. Popularization of literature was high on the agenda of the Scapigliati, whose attitude towards the elitism of the cultural establishment was rebellious and subversive, and is a stance of particular significance in the Italian context, where the number of people who had access to books and/or entertained the prospect of reading them was in those days very limited. The contribution of Carolina Invernizio (1858-1916) to popular fiction is also significant. She was author of over 100 novels published by Salani and of many serialised novels published in Turin's newspaper *La Gazzetta*. Invernizio's work is distinctive for its tortuous and often morbid plots, focussing on strong and at times violent passions, which were aimed at a semi-literate public. Her predilection for torrid love-hatred relationships earned her a reprimand from the Vatican.

[2] Evidence of a problematised use of the generic paradigm begins to emerge in the novel *Spasimo* by Federico De Roberto, originally published in 1897 (1989), in which the failure of a judicial enquiry raises questions on the suitability of the institutions and of ratiocinative processes to solve mysteries. I am grateful to Mark Chu for this observation.

[3] The four novels published in 1929 were translations of S. S. Van Dine (*La strana morte del signor Benson***,** transl. of *The Benson Murder Case*, 1926), E. Wallace (*L'uomo dai due corpi*, transl. of *Captain of Souls*, 1922), R. L. Stevenson (*Il club dei suicidi/Lo strano caso del dottor Jekyll e del signor Hyde/L'isola delle voci /Il tesoro di Franchard* , transl. of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1886) and A. K. Green (*Il mistero delle due cugine*, transl. of *The Leavenworth Case: a Lawyer's Story*,

The popularity of the initiative was immediate and long-lasting, as shown by the fact that the name originally and fortuitously chosen for the series has become metonymically associated with the entire genre, and that the word "giallo" is in the Italian language the common, synthetic and undifferentiated definition for all types of detective narratives. In 1931, two years into the life of the series, the first *giallo* by an Italian author was published, *Il settebello* [The seven of diamonds] by Alessandro Varaldo, starting a long tradition of home-grown *giallisti* which included Arturo Lanocita, Augusto De Angelis, Ezio D'Errico, Giorgio Scerbanenco and the first *giallista*, Magda Cocchia Adami.[4] These authors were favoured then by the protectionist policy pursued by the Fascist regime, which imposed that publishers worked with a minimum quota of national writers, and their books were published despite the Fascists' aversion for a genre which they considered guilty of corrupting minds and of endorsing the dissemination of an unfavourable image of Italy. Augusto De Angelis and Ezio D'Errico penned detectives – Carlo De Vincenzi and Emilio Richard, operating in Milan and Paris respectively – who investigated into the psychological aspects of crime and showed how pervasive it was in everyday life, despite the Fascist proclamations to the contrary. Already from these early examples, Italian crime fiction appeared to have rejected the formulaic structures that had become established in the previous century, to develop a distinctive style that allowed ample space for dissent and social criticism.

The cultural protectionism applied by the Ministry of Popular Culture, which had initially fostered the work of Italian crime writers, eventually turned into a repressive campaign, in part due to the fact that their novels contradicted the official line on the achievement of internal security. The tenaciously censorious crusade against this allegedly deleterious genre culminated in July 1941 with the confiscation of all crime novels in circulation in Italy, be they Italian-authored or otherwise, and resulted in the closure of the two main dedicated series, *I Libri Gialli* and *I Gialli Economici*, both owned by Mondadori. A few months later these books were destroyed, and the monopoly on violence fully reclaimed by the regime.

The fall of Fascism at the end of the Second World War removed the

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1878). See http://www.lfb.it/fff/giallo /test/g/1929-1941.htm, accessed 1 July 2010.

[4] Varaldo's *Il settebello* and *Le scarpette rosse* were issues number 21 and 28 respectively, published in 1931. D'Errico's *Qualcuno ha bussato alla porta* and De Angelis' *L'albergo delle tre rose* were published in 1936.
(http://www.lfb.it/fff/giallo/test/g/1929-1941.htm, accessed 1 July 2010).

stigma that the Fascist ideology had imposed on the crime genre. Writers started to submit new work for publication, most of them to Mondadori – still a prime outlet for crime fiction – but also to other publishers: Franco Enna, Giuseppe Ciabattini, Sergio Donati and Laura Grimaldi were amongst the first autochthonous writers to publish works in the post-war years. However, at this point, Italian crime fiction writers encountered a different obstacle, this time represented by the new liberalism of post-war market forces: the Italian readership, freed from years of coerced reading of carefully vetted and for the most part autarchic literature, craved the promises of exotic settings and plots suggested by foreign names, who in crime fiction included Hammett, Chandler or Stout, and shunned national authors. Publishers responded to this pressure by privileging novels in translation and suspending the publication of Italian authors.[5] This prevalent xenophilia began to relent from the late 1960s, when the publishing industry became more attentive and responsive to Italian *giallisti*, partly due to a change of taste in the reading public, partly because some of these authors, in an operation of genre contamination which will become a defining trait of the Italian *giallo*, were beginning to incorporate crime fiction elements into "non genre" works and were thus creating innovative, stimulating literature. Gadda, Sciascia and Veraldi are only examples of writers who, extrapolating certain formulae of the crime genre and integrating them into their works, produced novels in which the mystery element became an instrument of social and existential analysis of contemporary Italian reality, and which were able to exercise a strong appeal on the Italian reading public.[6] Neither the umbrella qualifier "giallo" nor its numerous but equally restrictive alternatives or synonyms suitably described an ever increasing corpus of literature which was ambitious in the choice of themes and sophisticated in style, and which was beginning to play an ever more significant role in Italian cultural history.

[5] This is what Laura Grimaldi, one of the first and most versatile authors of crime genre in Italy, said to me in private correspondence. As evidence of this ostracism she cited the case of her novel *Attento, Poliziotto* [Watch out, cop] which was purchased by Mondadori in 1956, but only published four years later when passed on to a different, smaller, publisher, Ponzoni.

[6] Readers seeking exoticism could indeed find it in Italian authors: Gadda's *Pasticciaccio* offered linguistic innovativeness and experimentalism, while the Sicilian setting of Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* allowed a glimpse of what Schneider would refer to as the "orientalized" south (1998).

It is clear that, from its inception, the crime novel in Italy aimed to establish a very direct relationship with reality, encouraging the reader not to evade from it through fictive worlds, but on the contrary to use fictional representations as a way of engaging in a critical reflection on Italian social and cultural mores. And Italian crime fiction authors were and continue to be aware of the civil responsibility that their literary efforts involved.[7] The stories narrated were often a pretext to expose individual and collective sins, endemic corruption and bad practices, exercised by single individuals or by large social groups – the powerful and largely impune groups that have always operated in Italian society and that have lately become known as *la casta*, or *la cricca*.[8] Hence a novel such as Carlo Emilio Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (*1957*; That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1965*)*, besides presenting the story of an "ugly mess" in a central street in Rome, demands to be read as an accurate and damning account of the capital and of the entire Italian population in the Fascist era. In Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta (The Day Of The Owl*) and *A ciascuno il suo* (1966; *To Each His Own*, 1989) the criminal events, that in both cases occur near the incipit and that are soon overshadowed by other issues, are just the trigger that sets off the real concern: the examination of the Mafia-ridden Sicilian society and its

[7] The notion of "impegno", civil responsibility and commitment, is a constant in Italian crime fiction authors. See for example the interview with Marcello Fois, cited in M. Marras, *Marcello Fois*, Fiesole: Cadmo, 2009, p. 22. It is also a contested concept, as Wu Ming 4 observes in "Tra specchio e martello", as it may create a class of permanently indignant but actually ineffective individuals who become self complacent (in *Giap* n. 3/4, December 2008).

[8] Both "casta" and "cricca" are names attributed to groups of prominent public figures who were found to have taken advantage of their roles for personal – financial or otherwise - gains. "Casta" was coined to define the entire political class in Italy, after the publication of *La Casta: così i politici italiani sono diventati intoccabili* (The Caste: how Italian politicians have become untouchable), written by *Corriere della sera* journalists Sergio Rizzo and Gian Antonio Stella (2007). The book, which sold well in excess of the expected figures for a work of non-fiction, publicly exposed an entire political class, from small town mayors to major ministers, naming names and listing evidence of profligacy, wanton waste of public funds and corruption at all levels of government. "La cricca" refers to a group of politicians, bankers, entrepreneurs, senior civil servants who were embroiled in a system of mutual favours with the aim of securing lucrative contracts, generally in large public works, including the reconstruction in Abruzzo following the earthquake of 6 April 2009. Intriguingly, Sciascia could be seen to have anticipated these developments by naming the criminal priest in his last novel, *Una storia semplice*, padre Cricco.

parallel and only partly submerged reality, ruled by an omnipresent criminal organization which operates with - and thanks to - the complicity and the *imprimatur* of the institutions.[9] The works of Giorgio Scerbanenco – from *La sabbia non ricorda* (1963) [The sand has no memory], *Venere privata* (1966 and 1990) [Private Venus], *Traditori di tutti* (1966 and 1990; *Duca and the Milan Murders*, 1970) to *I ragazzi del massacro* (1968) [The massacre guys], *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* (1969) [The Milanese kill on a Saturday], and *Il Centodelitti* (1970) [The hundred-murders] – are collectively a cruel saga of emargination in a neocapitalist society (Crovi 2000:15). Its ability to engage with serious social issues without resorting to the formulaic structure of the classic crime novel – in which crime is followed by an investigation which sheds light on the whole system of motives and dynamics and ends with a neat and conclusive restoration of order – renders the Italian *giallo* an effective, if hybrid, category of narrative fiction, capable of foregrounding themes and issues that are in tune with the readers' own, becoming a prime site for the articulation of concerns about society and denouncing the irregularities and contradictions of the "sistema Italia".[10] And if these irregularities and contradictions are not resolved or explained by or through literature, and retain a high level of inexplicability even after they have been represented in fictional terms, still their coming to the fore makes a difference: it turns the "obscurity of the unspoken" into the "obscurity of the voiced", as Sciascia said in an interview, and, producing a raised level of public awareness, it constitutes the first step towards change.[11] What makes the

[9] In these two novels not only do the crimes occur early, but the solution is also attained to quickly: in *The Day*, this happens towards the beginning, while in *To Each* the truth behind the 'mystery' is shown at the end of the novel to have been common knowledge to everyone but the naïve investigator. Thanks to Mark Chu for this comment.

[10] In a radio interview with Marco Tesi (Giornale Radio Rai, 19 December 2001), Laura Grimaldi went so far as to argue that contemporary "non genre" or highbrow Italian fiction "says without saying [...] mindful more of style than content", and is unable to bring to the fore substantial themes and issues, unlike "genre" fiction, which however tended to be dismissed as "paraliterature". This position appears to revive the perennial discussion within Italian literature about what Pirandello described as the distinction between 'letteratura di fatti' e 'letteratura di parole', which he traces back to the difference between Dante and Petrarca.

[11] Sciascia's words are: "C'è però una differenza tra quest'oscurità e quella dell'ignoranza: non si tratta dell'oscurità dell'inespresso, dell'informe, ma al contrario dell'espresso, del formulato." (Sciascia and Padovani 1979: 87) Quoted in M. Marras, "Insularità e universalità nel giallo sardo", in *Narrativa* 2004, n 26 , p 287-309, p 289.

representations of these contexts and situations all the more relevant and pertinent is the particular attention that authors pay to individual local realities – Rome, Milan, Sicily; but also Bologna, Florence, Sardinia or Veneto. The realism of place conveyed enables the novels to capture the very different regional specificities of the criminal activities narrated as well as the national overview, and to enhance the readers' engagement with the stories.[12]

The indicators of the impact of the *giallo* on Italian culture today are various, ranging from commercial to critical. An index of its current status in the cultural market is its pervasive presence in the publishing sector: from the small and specialised publishing houses to the large conglomerates, *gialli* are supported by a sustained editorial effort which keeps sales figures buoyant, especially against the background of a sector in general decline.[13] In bookstores, the sections on detective fiction are in constant expansion to accommodate the numerous examples of Italian authors practising in all the sub-genres, from the established enigma-narrative of the classic tradition to "the angst-ridden *noir* to the hyper-technical 'procedural' and the exotic historical mystery" (Somigli, in Ania and Caesar 2007: 7). The genre continues to have very fluid boundaries, and to be practiced not only by fully fledged "genre practitioners", but also by the so-called authors of "letteratura bianca": some of Italy's most refined and bestselling novelists have been intrigued by the expressive possibilities offered by *letteratura gialla* and have written detective stories, or novels with a clearly identifiable heuristic ethos and structure. If Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* (1980) is probably the most sensational case, it is worth remembering that other "non genre" writers, such as Antonio Tabucchi, or writers commonly associated with other concerns, such as feminist author and playwright Dacia Maraini, amongst others, have incorporated some of the features of the genre into their works.[14] Crime fiction is showcased in important cultural events, such as

[12] Critics have commented on the regional aspect of Italian crime fiction. See for instance M. Marras (2009: 16).

[13] A number of publishing houses have developed series entirely dedicated to the *giallo* and its subgenres. Besides giants such as Einaudi and Mondadori, smaller publishers are giving space to this prolific genre, such as Frassinelli, Marsilio and Sellerio, but also E/O, Dario Flaccovio, Meridiano Zero, Todaro and Terzo Millennio.

[14] It can be argued that many of Tabucchi's novels, from *Notturno indiano* (1984, *Indian Nocturne*, 1988) to *Il filo dell'orizzonte* (1986, *The Edge of the Horizon*, 1990) to *La testa perduta di Damasceno Monteiro* (1997, *The Missing Head of*

the *Premio Scerbanenco* and the *Premio Tedeschi*, the two most prestigious accolades, each awarded at the end of a literary festival entirely devoted to the genre. These initiatives have succeeded not only in catapulting hitherto little-known talented Italian authors to fame, but also in attracting critical attention and readers' interest to all forms of *giallo*.[15] Writers such as Loriano Macchiavelli, Giulio Leoni and the duo Massimo Carloni and Antonio Perria have been amongst the recipients of the *Premio Tedeschi*; Barbara Garlaschelli and Massimo Carlotto have been awarded the *Premio Scerbanenco*, whilst Claudia Salvatori and Carlo Lucarelli have succeeded in securing both.

Additional evidence of the success of this narrative formula with the public is provided by the numerous adaptations made of crime novels, and by the fact that authors of crime novels habitually turn into scriptwriters for bespoke TV series. The success of the Montalbano series produced by Palomar for RAI, a total of 18 TV-movies released between 1999 and 2008, has been unprecedented and has contributed greatly to the readers' interest for the eponymous novels by Andrea Camilleri.[16] Still a RAI production, the two series *Crimini*, shown in 2006-7 and in 2010 respectively, are based partly on adaptations of short stories by Camilleri, De Cataldo, Carlotto, Carofiglio and others which were published by

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Damasceno Monteiro, 1999), pivot around a mystery in need of a solution (see Rita Wilson's "On the Margins: Antonio Tabucchi's Investigative Reflections", in Cicioni and Di Ciolla (2008): 13-26). Maraini's *Voci* (1994, *Voices* 1997), *Colomba* (2004) and the collection of stories *Buio* (1999, *Darkness*, 2004) similarly use a crime fiction structure to explore crimes against women and children.

[15] The *Scerbanenco* Prize is awarded at the *Noir in Festival*, which takes place in Courmayeur every December, to the best *giallo* published the previous year. The *Tedeschi* Prize, named after *Giallo Mondadori* series editor Alberto Tedeschi, was established in 1980, a year after Tedeschi's death**,** and is awarded to the best unpublished *giallo*, which is subsequently inserted in the *Giallo Mondadori* series.

[16] Camilleri has written sixteen Montalbano novels to date starting with *La forma dell'acqua* (1994, *The Shape of Water* , 2002). The first novels to be adapted for television in 1999 by Alberto Sironi were *Il ladro di merendine* (1996, *The Snack Thief* , 2003) and *La voce del violino* (1997, *The Voice of the Violin*, 2003). The frequent repeats of the various episodes shown by RAI Uno consistently attract large number of viewers. Auditel data show that *Le ali della sfinge (The Sphinx's Wings)* shown in prime time on 26 May 2010 was viewed by an audience of just under 5 million, a share of 20.88% of the public. (See http://antoniogenna. wordpress.com/tag/il-commissario-montalbano/, accessed 28 June 2010)

Einaudi in 2005 and in 2008, and partly on original scripts.[17] Lastly, the proliferation of academic studies both in Italy and elsewhere, from monographs to edited collections to conferences and workshop, diachronic and synchronic in focus and covering either key periods, or specific authors, or specific trends, testifies to the finally established kudos of a genre which used to be considered as paraliterature and which is now the object of lively academic debates.[18]

It can be argued that the statutory mission of the *giallo* and of all its sub-genre ramifications in Italy today is that of 'speaking the truth' to a

[17] The first series contained adaptations of *Troppi equivoci* by Andrea Camilleri, *Il covo di Teresa* by Diego De Silva, *Il bambino e la befana* by Giancarlo De Cataldo, *Morte di un confidente* by Massimo Carlotto, *L'ultima battuta* by Sandrone Dazieri, all included in *Crimini* (Einaudi, 2005). Five episodes in the second series (*La doppia vita di Natalia Blum* by Gianrico Carofiglio, *Niente di personale* by Carlo Lucarelli, *Little Dream* by Massimo Carlotto, *Neve sporca* by Giancarlo De Cataldo and *Luce del Nord* by Giampaolo Simi) were adapted from eponymous stories published in *Crimini italiani* (Einaudi, 2008), while *Bestie* was adapted from a novel by Sandrone Dazieri. *Cane nero* and *Mork e Mindy* were original scripts by Giorgio Faletti e Piergiorgio Di Cara. Four additional scripts were commissioned from Marcello Fois, Domenico Gangemi, Loriano Macchiavelli and Diego De Silva. Each one of the episodes is set in a particular Italian city, which the writers were instructed to depict accurately and authentically. (See http://www.tvblog.it/post/19191/crimini-da-stasera-su-raidue-squadra-antimafia-da-martedi-27-aprile-su-canale-5, accessed 28 June 2010).

[18] *Storia del 'giallo' italiano* (1979) is possibly the first study to be published in Italy on the *gialli*: in this work, Loris Rambelli presented a diachronic overview of the development of the genre. Five years later Stefano Tani studied the legacy of the classic *giallo* on postmodern narrative fiction in *The Doomed Detective* (1984). Massimo Carloni's *L'Italia in giallo* (1994) was predicated on the association of Italian crime narratives and the territory, highlighting how authors tended to be linked to a city or region, which was elected as the setting of all their stories and often a prominent protagonist. Other studies published in the last decade include Giuseppe Petronio's *Sulle tracce del giallo* (2000), Raffele Crovi's *Le maschere del mistero (2000)*; Luca Crovi's *Tutti i colori del giallo. Il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco* (2002); Carlo Oliva's *Storia sociale del giallo* (2003); Marco Sangiorgi e Luca Telò's *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale* (2004). Monographs on individual authors have been published by Cadmo and include Elisabetta Bacchereti's *Carlo Lucarelli* (2004); Luca Somigli's *Valerio Evangelisti* (2007); and Margherita Marras' *Marcello Fois (2009)*. Studies in English include Anne Mullen and Emer O'Beirne, *Crime Scenes: Detective Narratives in European Culture since 1945*, (2000), an edited collection of essays including studies on Italian authors; and Mirna Cicioni and Nicoletta Di Ciolla's *Differences, Deceits and Desires. Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction* (2008), a volume focusing entirely on Italian crime literature.

vast number of recipients. If the public responds enthusiastically to most types of crime fiction, it is the *noir* in particular that is experiencing an unprecedented creative ferment. Another import from France,[19] the *noir* began to gain momentum in Italy in the mid-1990s, supported by a sustained editorial effort which continues to boost both supply and demand. *Noir* narratives differ substantially from the standard detective novel in that they are not sustained by the same impeccable logic; they do not trust in the investigation as a clearly defined process which moves towards the re-establishment of order, but aim instead at revealing the chaos that lies behind human existence. As Tzvetan Todorov observes, unlike its parent *giallo* genre, in which the main driver was the process leading to the solution of the mystery, in the *noir* the interest resides in the observation of the underlying causes of crime (1977:47). *Noir* fiction tends to deal with "public" ills seen from a "private" angle: it voices the discomfort that the individual feels towards blatant and institutionalised breaches of the moral code; it revisits a far or near past, the memory of which has not yet been fully metabolized; it reflects on a societal order that is not entirely just or fair; and by speaking out the author's dissent, it aims to stir the consciences of the reading public, to provoke a reaction that from the diegetic world will eventually spread out into the experiential world.

All narratives perform a cognitive function. As Claudio Milanesi has written, the novel is a weapon that can be used to restore, at least symbolically, the truth and justice that are systematically denied in reality (2009: 22). The *noir* narrates so that we can remember, and it narrates so that we may take heed and action, turning cognition into an act of resistance against oblivion and rebellion against injustice. In this book I have chosen to explore three broad areas that contemporary Italian *noir* literature appears particularly keen not to consign to silence: an unresolved historical and political legacy, the repercussions of which still inform and affect life and practices in the present times; the institution of the family, considered as the bedrock of Italian culture and the founding principle of Italian society, with some specific attendant questions of gender politics; and the justice system with its operators, nominally in charge of putting the wrongs right and frequently accused of preventing this from happening. The works considered in this volume represent an

[19] The *noir* was "born" in France and developed in the 1970s under the aegis of the publisher Gallimard.

effort to resist oblivion and to expose and counter injustice through the power of the word.

The majority of the narratives discussed are set either in an identifiable contemporary context, with features, flaws and idiosyncrasies which activate an automatic process of recognition in the reader, or in a historical past, in which references to the present are veiled and require a more complex process of decodification. Chapter One looks at revisitations of recent Italian history and the role that genre fiction has in acts of resistance against revisionist attempts or convenient cover-ups. The first part of this chapter, which has been written by Luca Somigli, examines the role of detective novels in the context of the historical and political debate on the years of the Fascist regime. Italian *giallisti* and authors of *noir* often deal with historical settings, as well as with the present, an attitude that reveals a desire or necessity to keep the dialogue with certain chapters of Italian recent history still open.[20] Observing how the rise of the historical crime fiction sub-genre in Italy is contemporaneous with a new wave of debates on the interpretations of Fascism and of the Resistance, Somigli analyses the role that these narratives play in complicating any simplistic debates by asking provocative questions through a reading of novels by Lucarelli, Augias, Gori and Angelino. If these novels present well defined chronological settings, other authors have elected to explore the potential of more fluctuating chronological boundaries: the travel across different temporal planes and the juxtapositions of different eras conducted, for example, by Claudia Salvatori – who is discussed in Chapter Two – and by Giuseppe Genna, underpin the principle of history repeating itself. While Salvatori traverses over one hundred years of history in *Sublime anima di donna* (2000) Genna structures his *Nel nome di Ishmael* (2001, *In*

[20] Carlo Lucarelli, one of the most prominent exponents of the genre, often sets his novels in the Fascist era (*Indagine non autorizzata*, 1993 [Unauthorized enquiry]; *Il giorno del lupo*, 1994 [The day of the wolf]; *Via delle Oche*, 1996 [Geese street]; *L'isola dell'angelo caduto*, 1999 [The island of the fallen angel]), although he is also capable of producing disquieting frescoes of contemporary life, as for instance in *Almost blue* (1997). Similarly Corrado Augias, who set his inaugural trilogy *Quel treno da Vienna* (1981) [That train from Vienna] , *Il fazzoletto azzurro* (1983) [The blue handkerchief] and *L'ultima primavera* (1985) [The last spring] in the ten years between the Libya campaign and the rise of Fascism (1911-21), moved on to a contemporary setting with *Una ragazza per la notte* [A girl for the night] in 1992, to return to one of the most complex periods of recent Italian history, 1943 and the end of the Fascist regime, with *Quella mattina di luglio* [That July morning], in 1995. Marcello Fois is another example of author who is equally at ease with past and present settings, with a corpus of narrative works that spans from nineteenth-century historical *gialli* to contemporary political novels.

the Name of Ishmael, 2005) from two closer parallel diegeses, one set in 1962 and the other in 2001. As the two narratives – which are linked by a mysteriously similar destabilizing plot against the establishment – unfold along parallel and never-intersecting planes, the reader is invited to work out the nature of their connection, to discover the rationale for their coexistence in the same textual space and diegetic universe. In pursuing their separate investigations into different sets of criminal events forty years apart, the two detective protagonists are ultimately led to the same individual: the seemingly omnipotent yet invisible "Ishmael", architect of international actions and sub-plots and symbol of the timelessness of unrestrained power. Having established the connection between the two different narratives, the reader is inspired to engage in a reflection on the dynamics of international power and on its hidden uses. Italian history is full of Ishmaels, or of "Grandi Vecchi", or of "eminenze grigie", as the many political/conspiracy novels published in the past 20 years seem to suggest. This aspect is analysed in the remainder of Chapter One: the section written by Marco Amici and Mark Chu examines the very notion of the conspiracy novel and its ambivalent status which, on the one hand, enables it to fill a void in interpretation, to insert apparently disparate events into a coherent narrative, thus providing a form of resistance to official non-histories, while on the other it is a disabling genre, attributing responsibility for atrocities and corruption to the conspirators and therefore absolving the individual and society in general of their own responsibilities. Through an analysis principally of Giancarlo De Cataldo's *Romanzo criminale* ((2002) [Criminal Novel] and *Nelle mani giuste* (2007) [In the Right Hands], and of the first two novels of Simone Sarasso's trilogy, *Confine di Stato* (2007) [State Boundary] and *Settanta* (2009) [The Seventies], set in the context of the unresolved or partly resolved mysteries of Italian history since the 1950s, and compared to the model of James Ellroy's 'rewriting' of American history, Amici and Chu seek to evaluate the position of the Italian conspiracy novel within this ambiguous space.

It is a widely shared opinion that the crime genre is tendentially conservative, and this is particularly evident in its perception of gender taxonomy. In Chapter Two I examine the contribution made by female authors to the genre today, by focusing on a "typical" female *giallista* – and I will attempt to define what constitutes "typical" when it comes to women authors of crime fiction; on an established non-genre *scrittrice*, whose frequentation of the genre has been only occasional and a declared case of *divertissement*; and on an eclectic novelist/script writer/graphic novel writer with a passion for *noir* atmospheres. The novels by Fiorella

Cagnoni, Francesca Duranti and Claudia Salvatori are understandably very different because their authors are very different. Yet in all three texts it is possible for the reader to identify a similar set of gender-specific issues which bring to the fore questions of female positioning in the social sphere, as well as in a possible canon for the genre.

The interest of Italian *noir* writers is generally focused on the outside, on society – past and present – on the realm of the public, often to express indignation and dissent. When the gaze turns onto the inside, to one's immediate context, the revelations become possibly even more unsettling. The family is the milieu that most aptly represents the notion of private sphere, where the discomforts of the individual become visible even in the context of a generic discourse, and it is beginning to feature frequently as the setting for *noir* fiction. From Dacia Maraini's *Voci* (1995, *Voices* 1997) to Niccolò Ammaniti's *Io non ho paura* (2001, *I Am Not Scared*, 2003), Barbara Garlaschelli's *Alice nell'ombra* (2002) and *Sorelle* (2004) [Sisters] and Melania Mazzucco's *Un giorno perfetto* (2005) [A perfect day], the attention to families uncovers complex and often problematic paradigms of relationships, enacted in the bosom of a social microcosm where the unbound power of affective ties can supersede even the most basic principles of democratic coexistence. Chapter Three looks at family dynamics, expressed in the relationships between mothers and sons, mothers and daughters, large extended families or small nuclear ones. If some of the texts expose the effects of the violence perpetrated "in the name of love", others more positively offer hope, demonstrating how more desirable options do exist and can be pursued.

Finally, this book looks at justice as a system and at its practitioners, as a significant number of judges, lawyers, senior police officers have lately become involved in crime fiction writing. This interesting development, peculiar to Italy, raises questions as well as expectations. The questions relate to the contribution that these "specialists", who have extensive theoretical and technical knowledge in a field which crime fiction routinely frequents, can make to the genre; the expectations are that by bringing together the moral function of pointing to the truth – which is the prerogative of the fictional investigator – with the social function of rectifying a wrong – the prerogative of the upholders of the law – these writer may have a fundamental role in shaping social consciences. Chapter Four examines the works of, in particular, Gianrico Carofiglio and Domenico Cacopardo, and seeks to establish whether they can potentially enhance the citizen's perception of the principles of justice and of a fair civil society.

CHAPTER ONE

REWRITING HISTORIES

Fighting Crime in Times of War: Detective Fiction's Visions and Revisions of Fascism[1]

A "new social novel"?

The sudden rise in status of detective fiction, or the *giallo* in the 1990s is one of the most peculiar and enduring phenomena of Italian literature. It is, indeed, a good time to be a *giallista* in Italy, after all those years during which Alberto Savinio's self-fulfilling prophecy that "Italian detective fiction is absurd in principle" (Crovi 2002:10) was dutifully trotted out, either to salvage 'real' writers such as Leonardo Sciascia and Carlo Emilio Gadda from the netherworld of popular fiction, or to relegate to the margins of the literary system those stubborn novelists (Franco Enna, Loriano Macchiavelli, Renato Olivieri, Laura Grimaldi, to name but a few) who, from the '60s on, insisted on testing out Savinio's theory for themselves. Even the only apparent exception to this rule, Giorgio Scerbanenco, did not acquire a degree of legitimacy until he was awarded a *French* prize, the *Grand Prix de la Littérature Policière*, in 1968, a year before his death, confirming the Latin proverb "nemo propheta in patria".

While the reasons for such a sudden and dramatic change in critical fortune are numerous, many commentators seem to agree that one of the

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1 The author of this section is Luca Somigli, Associate Professor of Italian Studies at the University of Toronto. Somigli's research focuses on the European avant-garde and Italian genre fiction. His publications include *Legitimizing the Artist. Manifesto Writing and European Modernism, 1885-1915* (2003), awarded the prize for best book by the American Association for Italian Studies in 2004; the monograph *Valerio Evangelisti* (2007), on Italy's foremost writer of science-fiction; and essays on various aspects and figures of Italian modernism and detective fiction. He has co-edited volumes including *Italian Modernism: Italian Culture between Decadentism and Avant-Garde* (2004), *L'arte del saltimbanco. Aldo Palazzeschi tra due avanguardie* (2008) and the forthcoming *'Neoavanguardia': Italian Experimental Literature and Arts in the 1960s*.

most significant is the role of social criticism that the genre has gradually come to play over the last three decades, becoming a sort of "nuovo romanzo sociale," as the title of a recent collection of essays aptly put it.[2] Already in 1992, at the dawn of the current renaissance of the genre, critic and author Massimo Carloni had observed that one of the peculiarities of contemporary Italian detective fiction was the fact that it had come to fill a perceived void, covering "with craftsmanlike modesty, an area of fiction in the realist tradition that had grown progressively narrower in the '60s and '70s" (1994: 162).[3] In a period characterized by the critical triumph of experimental fiction, first with the "neoavanguardia" in the '60s and then with postmodernism, the element that sanctioned the marginality of genre fiction within the literary field became, paradoxically, its strength.[4] The *giallo*'s apparently naïve belief in the mimetic power of language, in the capacity of narrative to bridge the gap between the linguistic code and reality in order to provide an accurate representation of a certain socio-cultural environment, made it possible for the genre to take on the function of immediate social description and critique that high literature seemed to have abdicated. This, in any case, is precisely the argument used by a number of writers of detective fiction to vindicate their work. Refuting the traditional perception of the genre as a form of pure and unadulterated escapism, several *giallisti* of both the "old guard" active since the '70s and the new wave of the '90s have emphasized the critical thrust of their literary enterprise. For Loriano Macchiavelli, as he observes in a *RaiLibro* interview, "detective fiction has always been a possible source of disturbance, a virus within the healthy body of literature, authorized to speak ill of the society in which it developed".[5] Carlo Lucarelli has made a similar point: "detective fiction has always been political, and in Italy the genre has only recently discovered and become aware of its political dimension"(2002: 29). Likewise, writer Gianni Biondillo has remarked in an interview that "today, it is the 'investigation' of reality (because in the end it is precisely this, the 'investigation', that holds together a *noir*,

[2] See Sangiorgi and Telò (2004)

[3] All translations from the Italian texts are by Luca Somigli.

[4] On the relationship between genre fiction and postmodern narrative, see in particular Carla Benedetti's essay "I generi della modernità", (in Blasucci et al. 1996: 51-75).

[5] "Tendenzialmente il giallo è sempre stato un possibile motivo di squilibrio, un virus nel corpo sano della letteratura, autorizzato a parlare male della società nella quale si sviluppava.". In "Loriano Macchiavelli e il destino del giallo:La sconfitta del vittorioso". Interview with Maria Agostinelli, http://www.railibro.rai.it/interviste.asp?id=15, accessed 2 July 2010.

giallo, crime novel or thriller) that best describes our desire for reality, for understanding the reality in which we live" (Milesi and Infante:17-18).

At first glance, it might seem that the argument regarding the potential for social and even political criticism on the part of the *giallo* does not apply to historical detective fiction. Leaving behind, as it does, the dysfunctions of contemporary society, historical detective fiction safely transports the reader to another world—a past potentially as foreign in its remoteness as the far-off future of science fiction—which, at best, can only be related to the social institutions of our own times by way of allegory. Indeed, this is usually the case with the mysteries—of which there are many, of varying degrees of accomplishment—set in places such as Imperial Rome or Dante's Florence, Renaissance Venice or a 14th-century abbey somewhere in Northern Italy. But what happens when the period in question is one with which contemporary Italian society is not fully reconciled? What happens when, instead of a distant and historicized past, the novelist chooses a period on which the historical and political debate remains, for whatever reason, open? This is clearly the case with those detective novels set against the background of the Fascist regime and World War II, many of which have enjoyed considerable success over the past twenty years.[6] Leaving aside the lone example of Gadda's *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* (1957; *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, 1966)—a *giallo sui generis* if ever there was one, and in any case a novel that can hardly be considered an example of historical fiction given its closeness to the past it represents (its earliest version appeared in the journal *Letteratura* in 1946-47)—the beginning of this new narrative trend is marked by the appearance of Carlo Lucarelli's *Carta bianca* (1990; *Carte Blanche* 2006). This book, the first volume in what would eventually become a trilogy about a policeman caught between the fall of the regime, the Resistance, and the rise of the Republic, demonstrated the remarkable adaptability of the detective novel: the author uses the conventions of the genre to investigate broader questions of personal and political responsibility in the administration of justice, to great effect. Lucarelli was rapidly joined by a fairly large group of writers, who, in different ways, explored the tensions between the straightforward formula

[6] In spite of its popularity, not only in Italy, but also in the Anglo-American tradition, historical detective fiction has received surprisingly little critical attention. Some insightful theoretical suggestions can be found in Scaggs (2005). Browne and Kreiser (2000) provide a useful survey of the major authors working in the genre (mostly English and American). For an Italian perspective on the often-remarked parallels between the work of the historian and that of the writer of detective novels, see Lucarelli (2004).

of the mystery and the social and moral ambiguities of the regime. A partial list might include: Lucio Trevisan, whose Commissario Epifanio Pennetta, investigates actual crimes such as the attempted murder of Mussolini by Violet Gibson in 1926, producing a not entirely convincing mixture of fact and fiction; Leonardo Gori, a capable *giallista*, who has chosen a dashing young captain of the *Carabinieri*, Bruno Arcieri, for his more conventional mysteries; historian Luciano Marrocu, who has chronicled the adventures of Eupremio Carruezzo and Luciano Serra, two functionaries of the dreaded Fascist secret police (*OVRA*) who bear more than a passing resemblance to Nero Wolfe and Archie Goodwin; Corrado Augias, author of *Quella mattina di luglio* (1995) [That July morning], the only case of his Commissario Flaminio Prati, set against the Allied bombing of Rome and the fall of Mussolini; and Edoardo Angelino, who, like Lucarelli, recreates the social and political divisions in the period of transition from Fascism to democracy.[7]

The enduring fortune of what is now a veritable sub-genre suggests that more is at stake here than the superficial exoticism of a different historical epoch. Indeed, the almost simultaneous development of this particular narrative trend and the recent so-called 'revisionist' debate on the interpretations of Fascism and the Resistance seems to be more than a coincidence. Detective fiction has intervened, both explicitly and implicitly, in the very public discussion on the meaning and on the moral and political implications of a series of pivotal moments and events at the twilight of the Fascist regime and its artificial continuation with the Italian Social Republic ("Repubblica Sociale Italiana"), a period which encompasses the dismissal and subsequent arrest of Mussolini on 25 July 1943, the Armistice of 8 September of the same year, the formation of the 'Salò' regime ("Repubblica di Salò"), and the Resistance and civil war of the following two years. A reading of Lucarelli's *Carta bianca* and Augias' *Quella mattina di luglio* as well as of Gori's *Il passaggio* (2002) [The passage] and Angelino's *L'inverno dei Mongoli* (1995) [The winter of the barbarians] shows that it is specifically through the figure of the detective that the *gialli* set during this crucial phase of Italian history articulate those very same ethical issues that the revisionist debate has attempted to call into question.

[7] Another indication of the popularity of the genre is the anthology of short stories *Fez, struzzi & manganelli* [Fezes, ostriches, and cudgels], edited by Gianfranco Orsi and published by Sonzogno in 2005 to coincide with the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II.

"Io sono un poliziotto": truth and justice among the ruins

As many of the scholars who have intervened on both sides of the debate have remarked (Poggio 1999: 22; De Felice 1992 (1975): 112-113; Losurdo 1996: 34), the term "revisionism" is characterized by a constitutive ambiguity since a certain kind of "revisionism" is an intrinsic part of the work of the historian. Significantly, on this score, Nicola Tranfaglia (2006 (1999) : 90) a scholar who can be assigned to the anti-revisionist camp, quotes approvingly from a text of which he is otherwise extremely critical, De Felice's controversial book-interview *Rosso e Nero* (1995: 17): "by their very nature, historians can only be revisionists, insofar as their work begins with what was established by their predecessors and tends to extend, correct and clarify the latter's reconstructions of events." That said, however, over the last twenty years the term has come increasingly to signify a much more precise and far less neutral perspective on the past, one in which what becomes central is not so much the 'accuracy' of the historical reconstruction, but rather the current political implications of competing interpretations. The subjects of such new (and often polemical) readings of history are many, ranging from the French revolution to European colonialism, from the Spanish civil war to the experiences of Nazism and Fascism, but the underlying motif, as Poggio has remarked, is discrediting "any historical experiment that is based on justice and equality" (32).[8] More specifically, in Italy revisionism has come to indicate "in popular terms, a re-evaluation of the Fascist experience", to quote another historian, Luigi Ganapini (1999: 128). This "re-evaluation" takes two forms: on the one hand, an emphasis on the Fascist *ventennio* as a phase of modernization of the nation and a re-interpretation of the regime as a "soft" dictatorship;[9] and on the other, a parallel and symmetrical critique of anti-Fascism and of the Resistance, often described as dominated by its communist components (a crucial text for this interpretation is Ernesto Galli della Loggia's *La morte della patria* [Death of the Fatherland], which will be discussed in more detail below). The immediate political objective of such interpretations is Italian communism and the current parties that trace their roots back to it. Indeed, the revisionist debate has been remarkably attuned to the transformations of the political landscape that have characterized recent Italian history. For this reason, it

[8] For a broad overview of the different subjects of revisionist historiography, see Losurdo and, more specifically on its polemical implications, Detti and Flores. On the history of the term and its uses, see also Santomassimo (1999: 141-43).

[9] On this, see also Romanelli (339), who rightly speaks of a "mondanizzazione", or normalization, of Fascism.

is important to distinguish between a sound, scholarly form of revisionism, based on the protocols of the discipline and exemplified by the controversial but impeccably documented historical works of De Felice or Nolte, and the debate carried out in the public arena by the media and driven by competing needs for political legitimation.[10] In fact, the Italian transition from the so-called "first" to "second" Republic, further complicated the matter, as it inextricably interwove the interpretations of Fascism and the Resistance with the political discourse used by the new parties thrust into the spotlight in the wake of the "Tangentopoli" scandals to legitimize themselves and simultaneously delegitimize their opponents before a confused and sceptical electorate. In Italy, we can thus distinguish at least two phases: in the first, the debate remained confined mostly to professional historians even in cases where it took a more popularized form, such as De Felice's well-known *Intervista sul fascismo* (1975); in the second, post-1992 phase, on the contrary, the historiographic context receded into the background, while the short-circuit between the interpretation of the past and the political necessities of the present became more evident.

Published between the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse in 1992 (with the beginning of the "Mani Pulite", or "Clean Hands" investigation) of the system that had dominated Italian political life since 1948, Lucarelli's *Carta bianca* lies at the juncture of these two phases and thus both reflects and anticipates the shifts in the critical debate on Fascism. In fact, the origins of the novel are closely linked to the historiographic research on the regime in the late '80s, as Lucarelli, then a university student, conceived the text while collecting material for a thesis on the police of the Italian Social Republic. As he has stated in an interview, his initial intention was not so much that of writing a mystery, but rather of presenting, through the fictional police inspector De Luca, the story of a real policeman whom he had interviewed in the course of his research, and whose career had spanned Fascism, Salò, the partisan police, and the first four decades of the Republic (he had retired in the '80s).

> Arrivati alla fine [dell'intervista] io gli ho detto: Ma senta maresciallo, scusi, ma lei per chi vota, posso chiederlo? Come fa a uscire indenne? E lui m'ha guardato e m'ha detto: Che c'entra questa domanda, io sono un poliziotto. E questo è De Luca. Ora, io volevo scrivere quella storia lì, e non un giallo. È la storia di un uomo che ti dice "cosa c'entra?" (185)

[10] The bibliography on the role of Nolte and De Felice in re-orienting the historiographic debate is extensive. On Nolte, see, for instance, Poggio (2000); on De Felice, see Santomassimo (1999; 2000) and Tranfaglia (2006: 69-101).