

CRIME FICTION OF CRISIS: NEW NEO-REALISM IN THE AGE OF BERLUSCONI

FROM 1990 TO 2010

by

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Title: Crime Fiction of Crisis: New Neo-Realism in the Age of Berlusconi from 1990 to 2010

This dissertation focuses on selected crime novels by Grazia Verasani, Elisabetta Bucciarelli, Carlo Lucarelli, Luciano Marrocu, Massimo Carlotto and Giancarlo De Cataldo written between 1990 and 2010, the years known as the era of former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, an age that is symbolic, among other things, of disrespect and affront to democracy, of reinforcement of sexism, control of the media, controversial legitimizing views of Fascism, impudent corruption, attempts to change and create laws for personal advantage, and collusion with Mafia.

My work shows that these novels are *romanzi sociali* that continue the tradition of social commitment of Italian crime fiction began with Augusto De Angelis in the 1930s and then developed by Giorgio Scerbanenco, Lorian Macchiavelli and Leonardo Sciascia.

The novels I analyze are a commentary on the country's current crises, such as the status of women, the objectification of the female body and the increase of violence against women (Verasani and Bucciarelli).

My study also explores how historical crime fiction brings attention to the issue of historical revisionism that characterized the rise to power in 1994 of Berlusconi's *Forza*

*Italia* and exposes the mythology of the innocent Fascist and the good-hearted Italian regarding the responsibilities of Italian colonialism (Lucarelli and Marrocu).

Finally, in an era characterized by the lack of freedom of the press, some of these novels act as a counter-information tool on hot issues such as the collusion with the institutions and organized crime and the web of powers that shaped postwar Italy, and they demythologize the image of northeastern Italy, described as the engine of Italian economy, by exposing its corruption and illegal business with organized crime. (De Cataldo and Carlotto).

Ultimately, this dissertation shows the potential of crime writing as a genre suitable to perform social criticism and to involve a more socially and politically conscious readership.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

This dissertation aims to illustrate how Italian crime fiction represents and investigates Italy's recent history. By exploring a selection of texts written in the last twenty years by different authors, the study intends to demonstrate the particular relationship between the Italian crime novel and its social settings, during the so-called *Berlusconismo*, the social and cultural phenomenon of the last twenty years that contributed to the country's unprecedented crisis. The choice of political allies and collaborators, the business entrepreneurship and the attitude towards opposition of the former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has been "widely regarded as a threat to Italian democracy" (Edwards 225). Furthermore, the former Premier has fostered an increased public display of sexism. The dissertation explores those texts that address the transformations and dysfunctions of contemporary Italian society. These are misogyny and violence against women in Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli, historical revisionism and the legacy of fascism and Italian identity in Carlo Lucarelli and Luciano Marrocu, and the spread of criminal organizations and corruption along with the theory of the 'double state' in Massimo Carlotto and Giancarlo De Cataldo.

My work endorses the notion of crime fiction as new *romanzo sociale*, social novel, but it also argues that Italian crime novel represents a sort of new realism in literature, as well as *romanzo d'inchiesta*, filling the lack of investigative journalism in Italy.

A late development genre in Italy, crime fiction has been extremely popular. The

period between the second half of the nineteenth century and the 1930s is considered the ‘prehistory’ of Italian detective novel (Pistelli, *Un secolo in giallo* 3). During this time, some ‘pioneers’ of the genre, such as Carolina Invernizio, Francesco Mastriani, and Emilio De Marchi, developed the theme of the investigation in their typical *romanzi d’appendice*. The success of the novels was due in part to the Mondadori collection (the “Gialli Mondadori”), which began in 1929, and many other publications by authors such as Alessandro Varaldo, Ezio D’Errico and Augusto De Angelis (considered the first Italian *giallista*). This was accomplished despite the challenges of Fascist censorship, which prohibited their publication and attempted to do away with detective novel. The Italian *giallo* eventually came back to life in the 1960s with Giorgio Scerbanenco’s new literary production. These novels were (after his 1940s *gialli* all set in the United States) set in Milan in the post-economic miracle years, and turned the *giallo* into the noir, which gave life to what many now affirm to be a typical characteristic of the contemporary Italian detective fiction, that of being a *romanzo sociale* (Carloni 12-13).

Today, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, detective fiction is a praised literary genre, with many varieties (historical, legal, medical, ecological) and has become part of mainstream culture. According to scholar Eva Erdmann, recent crime fiction can provide material for a comparative study more than any other literary genre because, “the fixed course of events in the genre remains the same – first murder, then suspicion, sometimes a false trail, and in the end, resolution” (Erdmann 12). What differs is the particular setting in which the plot unfolds, offering the parameters for comparison to the extent that “crime fiction’s primary distinguishing characteristic has become the *locus criminalis*” (Erdmann 12). In order to provide an original setting with its own social,

cultural, historical and political situation, it is the surroundings where the crime and the investigation take place that become the center of the writer's inventiveness. According to Erdmann, the description of a variety of customs and mores from many different parts of the world of recent crime novels is often so detailed that these novels can be regarded as "milieu studies and social novels" (Erdmann 13).

Since the pre-history of crime narrative, with the diffusion of novels that denounced the evils of the city, following the French writers such as Eugène Sue, Victor Hugo, Eugène Vidoq, Maurice Leblanc and Emile Gaboriau, this type of narrative has always had a significant relationship with the desire of depicting life in urban settings. Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843) contains the primary factors of what will be part of the genre: gothic, suspenseful scenarios, with thrilling plots. As the scholar Maurizio Pistelli recounts in one of the most exhaustive studies on the history of the Italian *giallo* (focusing specifically on the period 1860-1960), the literary trend of *Les mystères* came to Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century, spreading the themes of "denuncia sociale, tracciando spietati e crudi ritratti di realtà metropolitane degradate, ove spesso vengono commessi truci delitti, frutto di trame oscure e misteriose" (*Un secolo in giallo* 6). Defined by Croce as the major interpreter of Sue's works, Francesco Mastriani published immediately after the Unity of Italy a series of works (*I vermi: studi storici sulle classi pericolose in Napoli, 1862-64; Le ombre: lavoro e miseria, 1868; I misteri di Napoli: studi storico sociali, 1869-70; Il materialista, ovvero i misteri della scienza, 1896*) devoted to a merciless sociological inquiry into the unsettling contradictions of the city, poverty, illiteracy, criminality and the marginalization of the lower classes. As Pistelli observes in his detailed study of the history of the giallo,

Mastriani's popular novels "sono recepiti, soprattutto nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia, come una delle risposte più immediate all'acceso dibattito sulla 'questione meridionale', nonché alla sentita esigenza di una narrativa di impegno civile" (*Un secolo in giallo* 7). Mastriani explores social themes (for example, the police's cruel behavior towards two girls) and contemporary events (such as the 1860 revolutions of Independence). His 1893 novel *Il brindisi di sangue*, despite belonging to the feuilleton genre, "si presenta per certi aspetti differente dal tradizionale schema appendicistico e più vicino ai modelli del poliziesco vero e proprio" (Pistelli, *Un secolo in giallo* 8). The success of the *mystères*, continued in Italy by many other authors, such as Matilde Serao (*Il ventre di Napoli*, 1884), Giuseppe Alessandro Giustina (*I misteri di Torino*, 1880; *Il ventre di Torino*, 1882) and Demofilo Italico, who wrote *I misteri del Vaticano* (1883) and *I misteri della polizia* (1886). Pistelli notes that these works have many characteristics in common, because the *giallo* became a tool through which it was possible to "raggiungere molteplici obiettivi: un auspicato rinnovamento formale e stilistico della narrativa all'insegna del boicottaggio della tradizione accademica, l'instaurazione di un rapporto di commistione tra letteratura 'borghese' e letteratura 'popolare', il proporre un tipo di letteratura che sia manifestazione diretta e paradigmatica della società e della cultura contemporanea" (*Un secolo in giallo* 10). Thus, the foundations of the contemporary Italian detective novel came to be. However, the more proper detective novel (where fundamental features are murder, investigation, the detective, solving the crime) actually appears in Italy right after the Unification, following the success of Emile Gaboriau's *L'affaire Lerouge* (1869), and has its main realization in Emilio De Marchi's *Il cappello del prete* (1887). The first writer of what has been identified as the Italian tradition of crime fiction is usually

considered Augusto De Angelis, who is also the first theorist of a specifically Italian mystery genre. Creator of Commissario Vincenzi, De Angelis aimed at exploring human nature, reconstructing the complex desires and conflicts of human nature in contemporary society. As Somigli observes, “De Angelis’s defense of the genre ... was ... a wide-ranging affirmation of the cognitive possibilities of detective fiction and of its function in providing a critical representation of the contradictions of modernity” (*The realism of detective fiction* 71). Among De Angelis’s works, some of the most representative are *Il banchiere assassinato* (1935), *Il candeliere a sette fiamme* (1936), and *L’impronta del gatto* (1940).

According to the critic Raffaele Crovi, one main feature of Italian crime novels since the 1930s is its tendency towards the *romanzo di costume*, offering a representation of the social and political conditions of the society in which such novels are set (Raffaele Crovi 30). The novels of Augusto De Angelis, Giorgio Scerbanenco, Lorianò Macchiavelli, Fruttero & Lucentini and Gianfranco de Cataldo share a realistic representational mode. Since the 1960s, crime novels have displayed a critical depiction of Italian society and of the processes of its evolution and transformation, taking the place of the “letteratura della realtà abbandonato dalla narrativa non di genere che, sconvolta dalle trombe d’aria dell’alienazione e delle nevrosi individuali, sembrava andare di nuovo incontro all’epifania dell’Io” (Raffaele Crovi 35). Furthermore, the crime writers’s faith in the capacity of narrative to convey a proper representation of a specific socio-cultural milieu allowed the genre to take on the mission of “social description and critique that high literature seemed to have abdicated” (Somigli, “The Realism of Detective Fiction” 7), with the advent of the 1960s neoavanguardia and later



with postmodernism. Thus, as mentioned above, many critics argue that the Italian crime narrative can be considered as the new social novel. More recently, the Italian crime novel has been defined as the new *romanzo sociale* because of its social content (Carloni 1994, Sangiorgi and Telò 2001). In 2002 Massimo Carlotto, a crime writer and main advocate of the social commitment of Italian crime fiction, observed: “Raccontare una storia criminale, ambientata in un determinato luogo e in un determinato momento, significa descrivere, radiografandola, la realtà politica, sociale ed economica che ci circonda” (Carlotto “Il lato oscuro del giallo”).

Furthermore, critics maintain that crime fiction has had the role of bringing back the realist tradition to Italian literature (Somigli “the Realism in Detective Fiction” 9). The "new" realist tradition dates back to the postwar *neorealismo* (Fenoglio, Bassani, Cassola, Pratolini), inspired by the movement of *verismo* of the end of nineteenth century (Giovanni Verga).<sup>1</sup> It consisted of depicting the reality of life and struggles of specific social groups, such as the middle and lower classes after the war, and it aimed to be a document of an era that left its mark on everybody’s lives. The language used is therefore clear, simple, essential and accessible to every reader, and the aim was to avoid idealized representation of the social classes, “inspired by real-life subjects and resolved to tell the unvarnished truth” (Marcus 19).

In contemporary crime fiction production, the realist tradition is back and depicts the social and moral conflicts of contemporary Italian society, addressing the country’s current crises, such as the relationship between organized crime and the financial and political worlds, and corruption in the police force, in the courts, in the State itself, and

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<sup>1</sup> Romano Luperini, and Eduardo Melfi. *Neorealismo, neodecandetismo, avanguardie*. Roma: Laterza, 1980.

also the high rate of domestic violence. This 'new realist' tendency coincides with the recent international philosophical debate that began in the summer of 2011, when the Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris published an article, suggestively entitled "Ritorno al pensiero forte" in the philosophical magazine "Alfabeta 2" on a popular newspaper, *La Repubblica*.

In the article he expresses his opposition to postmodernism, identified in the principles of *Pensiero debole* (weak thought), developed by former colleague Gianni Vattimo and previously embraced by the same Ferraris. He proposes a new thought - opposite to the *Pensiero debole* -, which he calls New Neorealism. The "new neorealism" debate is still going on in magazines, blogs and newspapers. During 2011 and the beginning of 2012, international conferences on this topic were held in New York and Bonn, and the *Manifesto del nuovo realismo* was written by Ferraris and published in 2012. Ferraris' neorealism is opposed to Postmodernism, a philosophical, artistic thought that developed at the end of the 1970s from the schools of thought of Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault. Postmodernism had as its aim the emancipation of human beings from the humanist tradition and the totalizing theoretical discourses of modernism. For Postmodernist philosophers, the subject is produced by language. They have asserted that nothing exists outside of the language of the text (Ferraris 55). Reality is created by ideas, and all reality can be interpreted through conceptual systems. According to Ferraris, the overtaking of the myth of subjectivity did take place, but it did not bring the emancipating outcome prophesized by its philosophers. On the contrary, it has a nihilistic outcome, expressed by the Nietzschean motto according to which "there are no facts, but only interpretations" of them (Ferraris 55). Ferraris maintains that *pensiero debole*,

according to which "there are not facts but only interpretations" had found its realization in Berlusconi's 'mediatic' populism. Berlusconi had the means, such as, for example, the televisions and the publishing houses, through which the idea of facts as interpretation became a part of talk shows and TV news, where supposedly more serious information is to be communicated. The 'mediatic' populism manipulated information, making reality a product of interpretations. In fact, Ferraris argues that it has been possible to create 'unrealities' that contributed to the supremacy of interpretations over facts, and that the place where skepticism and the "addio alla verità" triumphed is politics (Ferraris 23). More precisely, it prevailed in the last twenty years of Berlusconi's government, because the former Premier has been the spokesman of relativism, transforming communication in slogans, rejecting analysis and thinking, destroying the value of logic by making it a tool of political power and finally subjecting it to rhetoric. He used all the tools of talk shows relativism to impose his 'truth'. The outcome is the 'mediatic populism' that characterized his government, a system in which the ones who have power can demand to believe in the truths that they established.

However, Ferraris argues that the recent events in Italian society reveal the falseness of postmodern doctrine:

[l'] esperienza storica dei populismi mediatici, delle guerre post 11 settembre e della recente crisi economica ha portato una pesantissima smentita di quelli che a mio avviso sono i due dogmi del postmoderno: che tutta la realtà sia socialmente costruita e infinitamente manipolabile, e che la verità sia una nozione inutile perché la solidarietà è più importante della oggettività. (Ferraris XI)

The debate provoked a series of contrasting comments and reactions. However, despite the controversies, the debate took place while at the same time a new tendency for realism also spread in literature. Raffaele Donnarumma, in *Nuovi realismi e persistenze postmoderne: narratori italiani di oggi* (2008), acknowledges the changes in literature since the 1990s. The new literary production is interested in representing reality differently from postmodernism, because "pone al centro l'esperienza di personaggi credibili, ritratti nella loro piena complessità psicologica e nel mezzo di rapporti conflittuali e morali. La vita quotidiana è tornata ad essere lo scenario in cui si misura, in modo problematico e senza garanzie, la ricerca di valori collettivi e il senso dei destini individuali" (Donnarumma 16). It appears, therefore, that the dialectic between self-centeredness and the attention to society and the world has been restored, despite postmodernism's displaced focus on the self. Donnarumma argues that there is a:

duplice rinascita: da un lato, quella di poetiche in senso proprio realistiche; dall'altro, quella di poetiche che si rifanno, più o meno esplicitamente, al modernismo pur con stili e impianti narrativi molto diversi, questi scrittori hanno fiducia nel racconto come strumento d'analisi della società presente, della vita interiore, del mondo materiale. (Donnarumma 16)

Crime fiction is one significant example of literary reactions to crises in Italy, and it brought back interest in investigating society and the world. For crime fiction writers, in fact, "il noir intende far presa sulla realtà e svelarne i meccanismi occulti" (Donnarumma 18).

While there are clear continuities in the social-realist tendencies of crime fiction

in Italy since its inception, the Berlusconi-era novels display unique characteristics, such as the specificity of the topics explored, a certain pessimism that is not present in the crime fiction of previous eras, and a set of stylistic parameters not common before. The authors of the novels I analyze in this dissertation are moved by a sense of social engagement and address key political issues of the last twenty years that are still relevant, such as the problem of justice, systematic corruption, the spread of crime, and the merging of the state with the underworlds and mafia (De Cataldo, Carlotto), the empowerment of women (Bucciarelli, Verasani), the problem of historical amnesia regarding Italy's colonial past (Maher 168) and the legacies of Fascism (Lucarelli, Marrocu). The new realism employed by these authors is grounded in historical documentation, archival research, even autopsies, to bolster the authenticity of the social realities narrated in the novels, such as the descriptions of daily life in urban settings and in the description of the characters from the criminal world (Carlotto, De Cataldo), in issues concerning WWII, fascism, the moral conflicts of the protagonists (Lucarelli, Marrocu) and the subordination of women (Verasani, Bucciarelli). Also the psychological insights of the characters and the mimesis of language contribute to the new neorealism of these novels (for example, the spoken jargon of Roman criminals in De Cataldo's *Romanzo Criminale*, 2002).

From this perspective, the crime novel has been proposed also as a *romanzo d'inchiesta* (Amici and Carlotto 106), a much-needed response to the lack of a proper institution of Italian investigative journalism, especially in the novels by Carlotto and De Cataldo. Both authors regard their novels as such, because they investigate unsolved crimes of recent Italian history.

The complexity of the relationship between fiction and history is nothing new. In Italian literature, one of the major examples of the historical novel dates back to the 1840s, when Alessandro Manzoni published in 1842 the revised edition of *I promessi sposi*, including *Storia della colonna infame*, an historical essay containing the investigation of the 1630 trial against two men accused of having caused and spread the plague in Milan. This essay is not just an appendix, but also an independent work at the origin of the investigative essay developed in the twentieth century. It has been adopted, among others, by Leonardo Sciascia on unclear or unsolved crimes of Italian political and social history. In the collection *Cruciverba* (in *Opere 1971-1983*), there are two essays about *I promessi sposi* and *Storia della colonna infame*. In these, Sciascia argues that Manzoni's texts are an objective and merciless analysis of Italian society. Manzoni's argument is that people's responsibilities must be judged apart from the historical time or the society in which they live. For Manzoni, the judges had a choice, and they chose to force the defendants to confess a crime they did not commit. Therefore, they chose to do evil, instead of recognizing the defendants' innocence.

Scholars Renzo Negri and Salvatore Nigro give captivating interpretations in light of Sciascia's inspiration from *Storia della colonna infame*. As Negri puts it, "la *Storia della colonna infame* prefigura il tipo di odierno racconto inchiesta di ambiente giudiziario, che da Gide a Capote a Sciascia discende da rami ottocenteschi non ancora ben conosciuti (Negri 38). For Negri, *Storia della colonna infame* is a work *sui generis* that does not belong to a specific genre. Salvatore Nigro expands the definition, and maintains that it is like a "romanzo di un delitto giudiziario: una *crime story*, ricostruita sul filo di un'inchiesta razionale condotta sui documenti, sulle fonti giuridiche e sulla

bibliografia critica del processo milanese che nel 1630 condannò degli innocenti, accusati di aver diffuso una peste manufatta (i cosiddetti 'untori')" (Nigro 175). The relevance of the story is highlighted also by Carlo Bo who sees in it "un'opera di assoluta modernità" in which contemporary readers can "arrivare alla conclusione che il Manzoni non ha raccontato solo una storia del passato lontano ma ha scritto qualcosa che vale anche per noi e resta di indubitabile attualità" (Bo ix-x).

Sciascia underscores the continuity between the 1630 events and the most dramatic events of the twentieth century, such as the Nazi concentration camps, and argues that this continuity demonstrates the "giustizia della visione manzoniana" because Manzoni exposed the cruelty of the citizens in charge of the administration of justice, intelligent and esteemed by the city of Milan, as the cruelties perpetrated three centuries later by the Nazis, who were aware of their deeds. Sciascia's comments are pertinent to my argument, because he points out the persistence of the dialogue between past and present, instead of their distance:

il passato, il suo errore, il suo male, non è mai passato: e dobbiamo continuamente viverlo e giudicarlo nel presente, se vogliamo essere davvero storicisti. Il passato che non c'è più - l'istituto della tortura abolito, il fascismo come passeggera febbre di vaccinazione - s'appartiene a uno storicismo di profonda malafede se non di profonda stupidità. La tortura c'è ancora. E il fascismo c'è sempre. (Sciascia, *Opere* 1073-1074)

This unfolds also in Sciascia's investigative essay on the kidnapping and murder, in 1978, of the president of the Christian Democrat party, Aldo Moro. As Manzoni stresses the

individual responsibilities of the judge in convicting an innocent man, so does Sciascia when he highlights the responsibilities of the party in abandoning Moro and therefore causing his death. The works by Manzoni and Sciascia represent, therefore, a pivotal legacy in Italian history and literature and highlight the importance of literary writing as a means to come to terms with the country's unresolved questions.

My dissertation focuses on the 'new neorealism' in crime fiction from 1990 to 2010 and analyzes selected novels by Grazia Verasani, Elisabetta Bucciarelli, Luciano Marrocu, Carlo Lucarelli Massimo Carlotto, and Giancarlo De Cataldo. It seeks to underscore the connections between crime fiction as genre and specific social, political, and cultural crises of the 'Berlusconi era'. These two decades span from 1990 (year of publication of Carlo Lucarelli's *Carta bianca*) to 2010 (when Luciano Marrocu's *Il caso del croato morto ucciso*, Elisabetta Bucciarelli's *Ti voglio credere*, and Massimo Carlotto's *Perdas de Fogu* were published). The novels I examine create a space for debate on the themes they address and "use fictional representations as a way of engaging in a critical reflection on Italian social and cultural mores" (Di Ciolla 6), offering a perspective through which to look at those years. I argue that the recent crime fiction boom cannot be separated from the cultural context of Berlusconi's Italy.

The years 1990-2010 are certainly ones of great anxiety in Italy because of the influence and power that the former Prime Minister Berlusconi had in the Italian political and social worlds. Following the political path of Bettino Craxi, his mentor, Berlusconi produced a 'middle' party that brought to power the center-right in national elections by pulling together a disparate assortment of parties. This allowed for the creation of a new party, the coalition *Forza Italia*, which made anti-Communism its leitmotif, forming an



alliance with the National Alliance (descendant of the post-fascist party MSI, *Movimento sociale italiano*), and the Northern League.

The head of a multimedia empire, businessman Silvio Berlusconi is one of the richest men in Italy. He is an anomalous character in Italian politics, because he is an entrepreneur who started as a residential housing developer around his native Milan, and who decided to get into politics to resolve personal financial issues, such as bankruptcy. He served nearly 20 years as Prime Minister (from 1994 to 1995, then from 2001 to 2006, and, finally, from 2008 to 2011), establishing a government characterized, among other things, by corruption and sexism for the scandals of his parties with prostitutes and minors in his villas and for placing showgirls in political positions. Berlusconi used his power to manage his legal problems, surviving 28 trials for corruption, tax fraud, false accounting, bribe, ties with mafia, abuse of office (Ginsborg and Asquer 2011).

His government has failed disastrously in both domestic and foreign policy, making Italy an even more indebted country, unable to finance a crucial endowment for the employment, education and research. This has resulted in the stagnation of the Italian economy, with neoliberal reforms of labor market causing the highest rate of youth unemployment (Shin and Agnew 2008).

Not only did Berlusconi's government put Italy in a deep economic crisis, but also constituted a menace to its democratic institutions. In fact, during Berlusconi's 'reign', there were many attempts to change the Constitution, including a challenge to the balancing role of the Constitutional Court and of the President of the Republic.

Numerous journalists, historians and anthropologists, etc., have attempted to

explain Berlusconi's reign; what is currently called *berlusconismo*. Among these, Paul Ginsborg observes that to better understand the *ventennio* 1990-2010 it is necessary to go back in time and realize how this has already been prepared by the 1980s (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 4). During those years, liberalism spread in Western Europe ("meno stato più mercato", Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 6), and this "diviene ideologia di massa, popolare e populista" (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 6). In Italy a particular "individualismo proprietario" takes off at the dependent workers' expense. Small sized-enterprises (very often family run) increase noticeably, and certain areas of Italy, such as the North-East flourished quickly and thrived (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 6).

The Italian Socialist Party, headed by Bettino Craxi, was, notwithstanding its relative electoral consensus, the dominant party in the 1980s. Under Craxi's government serious problems for the country increased including public ethics (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 9) and the attempts to revise and delegitimize the Italian Constitution. During Craxi's leadership, in fact, corruption spread, with the practice of party financing becoming a common procedure, or, worse, "sistema, regolato e codificato" (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 10):

Nasce una società che ormai non ha più bisogno della politica, che può e vuole 'fare da sé' che non ha bisogno di protezione dai politici ma anzi offre protezione ai politici, che alla politica chiede semplicemente di non intralciare il suo cammino. O, più precisamente, di produrre leggi-quadro che consentano a questa società di crescere senza intralci e regole. (10)

Furthermore, the Socialist leader was an advocate for the reforms of the historical interpretation of the Italian *Resistenza* (Resistance), and anti-fascism, encouraging what has been defined as “revisionismo storico”, and the revision, “per la prima volta ... [del]la Costituzione” (Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* 10-11).

During the 1980s, Italian television also changed, paving the way for Berlusconi’s arrival into politics and for his private television channels. According to Giovanna Gozzini, “[s]enza le radici che la tv commerciale ha affondato nella società e nell’economia, ‘la discesa in campo’ [di Berlusconi] non sarebbe possibile” (Gozzini 20). In Italy, regulations of free competition on the possession of only one national network were not obeyed (Gozzini 20). Also, the “rapporto particolaristico di scambio” (Gozzini 25) with Craxi allowed for Berlusconi to own three national networks (the first is Canale 5, created in 1980). As Gozzini explains, Italian television had already transformed its spectators into passive audiences of anti-democratic, anti-progressive ideology since the 1980s. Television shows such as “*Dallas* [...], *Dynasty*, *Flamingo Road*” (Gozzini 25) had reduced:

il mondo e la vita a un microcosmo di individui governato dalle logiche (cooperative o conflittuali a seconda dei casi) della sopravvivenza personale. L’inflazione e la banalizzazione del dramma in formato soap opera mischia l’introspezione psicologica, l’attenzione empatia per la vita quotidiana, la fiaba che divide buoni e cattivi, il sentimentalismo da feuilleton e fotoromanzo. (Gozzini 25)

For this historian, the mingling of these elements caused the lowering “della complessità, una chiave personale di interpretazione individualistica della realtà del secolo” (Gozzini 25), which conveyed the message of happiness as a private goods “da perseguire attraverso intrighi e relazioni” (Gozzini 26).

For Gozzini, Berlusconi’s regime is founded on these anthropological transformations, with the addition of:

il peso determinante di un’ autorità carismatica, l’assenza di una cultura politica organica, la genesi del partito-azienda, l’alleanza con forze post-fasciste e para-secessioniste, l’elevato grado di secolarizzazione (quanto meno nelle vite private di molti dirigenti) e una relazione scopertamente strumentale con il Vaticano, la scompostezza dei metodi di governo, il clima di scontro quotidiano con la magistratura. (Gozzini 24)

Berlusconi was able to transform information systems, making television a means for his propaganda. This has been infused with Marshall McLuhan's famous statement "The Medium is the Message" (McLuhan 7): in order to rule a society, one needs to focus more on the medium of communication than on content. In fact, as Norma Rangeri points out, Berlusconi's system degraded and distorted the discourse of politics, in order to "determinare una vera e propria eutanasia della politica e della democrazia, alterando il linguaggio pubblico, allontanandolo da un piano razionale, informativo, verso un livello solo performativo, in cui non conta quello che si dice ma il modo in cui lo si dice, la performance" (Rangeri 124). By means of his own private networks, his influence on the national ones and his control over the press, 'berlusconism' has been able to establish a

"dittatura della retorica, dove l'argomentazione razionale [è] stata sostituita dalla pseudo-informazione, dal gossip" (Rangeri 124).

To make things worse, Berlusconi's sex scandals and pitiless treatment of women in his networks has worsened the condition of women in Italy. Watching Italian television with a critical eye can give a picture of the way women are represented. Women are "un elemento fondamentale della narrazione berlusconiana" (Rangeri 127). Italy belongs to the list of countries in which female employment and the presence of women in the political world is scarce. Paradoxically, they are ubiquitous in television shows where they work as showgirls, mostly silent and almost naked, and are object of a spreading domestic violence crisis.

These issues are addressed in Verasani and Bucciarelli's crime novels, which I analyze, respectively, in the second and third chapter. Indeed, a major component of this project is female-authored crime novels. The female contribution to Italian detective fiction has been extensive since the beginning of the twentieth century, when Carolina Invernizio published *Nina, la poliziotta dilettante* (1909), the first giallo with a female detective (Pistelli 2006). During this last century, many other female-authored crime novels were published, contributing to the development of the portrait of contemporary society.<sup>2</sup> In fact, for example, crime novels by Nicoletta Bellotti (*Tutti sul filo*, 1974; *Centro città*, 1977) and Luciana Attoli (*Lungo il fiume*, 1979) portray the loss of moral values of the Italian bourgeoisie after the economic boom in the 1960s, especially in Northern Italy. Gender issues not addressed in these novels are articulated in the more recent production of crime novels. Despite the proliferation of women-authored crime

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<sup>2</sup> See Luca Covi. *Delitti di casa nostra: una storia del giallo italiano*. Bologna: Puntozero, 2000. 63-77.

narratives, little attention has been given to them in national and international studies of Italian crime fiction, while crime novels by male authors have had copious studies and translations in many languages.<sup>3</sup> I argue that two of the most recent women authors of crime fiction, Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli, address specific gender issues and innovate the genre and especially the notion of crime fiction as the new *romanzo sociale* with specific references to female social reality in Italy, adding data to give a realistic overview of an urgent problem that is very rarely addressed so openly in detective fiction. Their novels offer a rather grim perspective on the current situation of women in Italian society, where the Berlusconi TV model is assumed to have shaped Italian contemporary society. In fact, feminists blame Berlusconi for the presence of barely dressed women in advertising and television programs, with young women in bikinis giggling and participating in silly games. No other quality or skill is required than a perfect body to display next to the anchorman in a designer suit, who often makes fun of the showgirl. As Lorella Zanardo argues in her documentary *Il corpo delle donne* (2009), sexism and the commercial use of the female body began with the creation of Berlusconi's networks in the 1980's. What Berlusconi's channels fail to show is the unsettling increase of domestic violence. This exhibition is inversely proportional to the employment of women in management and in politics. In fact, the percentage of working women in Italy is the lowest in Europe (Sabbadini 6).

The showgirl has become a role model for young Italian women, who join in great number contests to be chosen to participate in one of those shows. The requirements are a perfect body and the ability to dance. Many young women are willing to sell their body

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<sup>3</sup> According to Lazzaro-Weis, only Fiora Cagnoni and Silvana La Spina address feminist issues in their novels (Lazzaro-Weis 158-179).

for a nude calendar in order to be noticed by TV producers and enter the world of television, or even politics, as is the case of showgirl Mara Carfagna, who became Minister of Equal Opportunity in Berlusconi's government. Furthermore, the former Prime Minister is not only famous for his humiliating TV shows. A series of inappropriate comments to foreign and domestic female politicians has made Berlusconi a ridiculous person on the international stage, a politician whom foreign Prime Ministers or Presidents tend to avoid in official meetings. In addition, in more recent years, he was involved in a series of sex scandals, because of the parties in his villas with prostitutes and minors.

Within the notion of crime fiction as *nuovo romanzo sociale*, my work provides a much-needed examination of texts that directly address these issues. The female-authored crime novels I have selected are particularly relevant to discuss the status of women in contemporary Italian society, which is almost always neglected. I analyze the representation of two women detectives created by Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli, who seek to address gender politics particularly pertinent to the current reality of women in Italy. Their stories, set in urban environments such as Bologna and Milan, depict a society in which women are still victims of male violence (be it either domestic violence, murder, teenager abuse, drastic plastic surgery, prostitution). Also, Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli, against the current examples of women who use their bodies to achieve their goals, intend to offer a representation of women who, on the contrary, rely more on their intellectual abilities to succeed in their jobs and are concerned with the discrimination of women and the increasing violence against them.

The second chapter explores Grazia Verasani's series on Giorgia Cantini, *Quo Vadis, Baby?* (2004), which depicts a contemporary woman who represents an alternative response to the current cultural image of women in Italian society, where the media promote the ideal of woman as a perfect physical specimen, always beautiful and forever young. The chapter explores major themes, such as violence against women and ownership of the female body.

Cantini observes the dynamics within the family and the relationship between men and women. When investigating the disappearance of a young girl after being presumably raped, Cantini visits the *Casa delle donne*, an organization in Bologna (also present in other Italian big cities such as Milan) that helps abused women, a major problem in Italian society. I argue that the interactions with one of the social assistants in the organization enable the author to raise awareness on the persistent discrimination and victimization of women in Italy. The conversation between the two women highlights the issue: "I diritti delle donne non sono tutelati, e questo non incide solo nei casi di violenza. Guadagnamo il quaranta per cento in meno dei nostri colleghi, senza contare il problema della maternità. Destra o sinistra non cambia. Al potere, sono sempre gli uomini" (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 121). The dialogue thus gives an overview of the problem of domestic violence:

In Italia ci sono undici centri come il nostro [...] ma il novantasei per cento delle violenze non viene denunciato [...] Offriamo sostegno e informazioni. Alcune vengono prima della denuncia, e altre dopo, anche a distanza di anni, perché non riescono a superare il trauma. La



maggioranza di abusi, come lei saprà, riguarda persone conosciute: partner o ex-partner. (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 120)

The author clearly addresses discrimination against women in Italian society. The first person narration allows the character to articulate her feminist convictions. However, it also paints a psychological portrait of Cantini's character, with all her complexities and contradictions.

The third chapter explores another female detective created by the writer, journalist and screenwriter Elisabetta Bucciarelli. I argue that Elisabetta Bucciarelli's novels, especially in the last two, *Io ti perdono* (2009) and *Ti voglio credere* (2010) explore the manipulation and objectification of the female body, an urgent theme in contemporary Italian society, where there is an ongoing debate about the female body in the media and its consequent objectification. Bucciarelli's heroine, inspector of the Questura of Milan Maria Dolores Vergani, represents, like Cantini, an innovative female detective as has never been portrayed in Italian crime fiction. She is a single woman in her forties like Cantini. She is not depicted as a superwoman (although she exercises more than Cantini), but rather as a complex woman, with strength and weaknesses.

I explore the emphasis on violence against women and ownership of the female body. As regards the first, there are many reflections by the third person narrator on the current situation of domestic violence perpetrated against women in Italy, as the one, for example, in *Io ti perdono* (2209), where it is stated "Milano, la città con più stupri denunciati d'Italia" (*Io ti perdono* 39). Ownership of the female body is discussed within the job and the family of the protagonist. In fact, Vergani faces male hostility in the

Questura, where she has to confront the policemen's gaze, who stare at her defiantly when she arrives in the Questura because she is a woman at the head of all male officers. There is hostility towards her job in her family, too. In the last novel, *Ti voglio credere*, her father reveals to her that he did not want her to become a police officer. He preferred her previous job as therapist because he tells her that "La testa è il tuo potere, il corpo no. L'azione e il danno non sono fatti per le donne" (*Ti voglio credere* 58). These words reiterate the concept that a woman is not suitable to do a job that has been traditionally male, and which includes physical action. Rather, a woman's job is envisioned as nurturing.

The novel thus addresses the current debate on the female body I discussed earlier. Other cases investigated by Vergani stress very urgent problems in Italian society, such as rape and anorexia. This is addressed in the case of the three suicidal girls in *Io ti perdono* (2009).

In the fourth chapter I explore Carlo Lucarelli's *Carta bianca* (1990), *L'estate torbida* (1991) and *Via delle oche* (1996), and Luciano Marrocu's *Faulas* (2000), *Debrà Libanòs* (2002). These novels focus on three main characters: the Commissario De Luca, created by Lucarelli, and the policemen Carruezzo and Serra by Marrocu, who are part of an exploration on the legacy of Fascism in present day Italy and the persistent avoidance of confronting with Italy's colonial past. I argue that their characters serve to question the notion of the *bravo italiano*, the good Italian, and therefore Italian identity. This topic is particularly relevant if confronted with the issues addressed by Giancarlo De Cataldo in *Nelle mani giuste*, in which further articulations of the definitions of being Italian are proposed. Lucarelli's crime novels convey the author's meditation on guilt and innocence,

and the involvement in crimes during Fascism and the Resistance. He does so through the character of the Commissario De Luca. Commissario De Luca refuses the accusations of connivance with Fascism, claiming that he has no political agenda and repeatedly insisting that he is a *poliziotto* and that "non si chiedono scelte politiche ad un poliziotto, gli si chiede solo di far bene il suo mestiere" (*Carta bianca* 74). De Luca makes his profession a shield that prevents him from taking a political position. In *L'estate torbida*, De Luca stresses his own ethics. He is devoted only to catching criminals without having to choose one party or the other, and therefore without having to confront the responsibilities of his choice. De Luca fails to understand that his attempt to avoid making a choice is indeed not devoid of ethical implications. In fact, his helplessness in distinguishing between the demands of his job and the ethical values that each person should have, makes him an ambiguous character, one that lives in the shadows of innocence and responsibility.

Luciano Marrocu delves into other forgotten, thorny events of Italy's recent past, such as Italian colonial policy in Africa. Protagonists of the above mentioned novels by Marrocu are the policemen of Mussolini's secret police, Commissario Eupremio Carruezzo and his assistant Luciano Serra. The novel *Debrà Libanòs* (2002) is particularly representative of Marrocu's intention to dig into the recent past and bring to light those obscure and voluntarily censored events of Italian history in African colonies. The novel is set in Ethiopia in 1941 and takes its title from the location of the massacre of almost two thousand Catholic monks and civilians. This massacre is one of the events in Italian Colonialism that are almost never mentioned in history books. I argue that this novel is innovative because it opens for the readers of crime fiction a debate on the

responsibilities of Italy, vis-à-vis its colonial past especially because these events have been so little explored, not only in fiction, but also in scholarly works. I argue that, in addressing these events, the novels underscore issues of Italian identity through the relationship between the events told and the two policemen. In addition, the narrative structure helps give voice to those characters that are not able to express their subjectivity, such as the African population and, in particular, African women, victims of the conquerors' rage and abuse. To talk about these events I use Antonella Randazzo's *Roma predona: il colonialismo italiano in Africa 1870-1943* (2006), one of the few texts on this subject matter.

From Marrocu and Lucarelli's perspective, the parallel between history and crime fiction is apparent. This research and analysis of past events are connected to the present because "esiste una sorta di attualità dei fatti che [lo storico] va a ricostruire, e ricostruisce dei fatti trovando in questi le radici del presente [poiché] non c'è mai un interesse storico [...] che sia fine a se stesso" (Lucarelli, "Il giallo storico" 154), since the reconstruction and narration of past events is meaningful to the present moment. This regards especially the more recent past that has "sempre un aggancio molto forte con quello che è la realtà di adesso" (Lucarelli, "Il giallo storico" 154). In this manner, the historical crime novels examined are considered as attempts to expose the corruption and abuse of power against justice and truth during the regime, and the successive situation of political and social chaos at the beginning of the Republic. These crime novels could unfold in a "rivisitazione politicamente incorretta della Storia, aggressiva demistificazione degli anni e della falsità divulgate dalle stesse istituzioni" (Bacchereti 97).

In addressing the relationship between history and fiction, I agree with Claudio Milanesi's introduction to *Il romanzo poliziesco. La storia, la memoria* (2009), in which he maintains that “storia e misteri sono per definizione intrecciati” (15) since a characteristic of the former is “tentare di illuminare le cause oscure di eventi apparentemente inspiegabili” (15). Moreover, both detective novel and historical research use similar practices in their investigation: “l’inchiesta [...] attraverso la raccolta di indizi, l’uso di tecniche di indagine [...] il ragionamento” (16).

In my fifth chapter, I explore novels by Massimo Carlotto and Giancarlo De Cataldo. Massimo Carlotto is a writer, playwright, screenwriter, and author of crime novels featuring the private investigator Marco Buratti, the *Alligatore*. In these novels, the theme of justice is particularly significant, since the Alligator has been in jail for a crime he did not commit, and especially since this character is based on the author himself who was charged, at the age of nineteen, with a murder he did not commit. After being released, the Alligator starts working for lawyers, together with two unique assistants, a thief, and a former leftwing revolutionary activist. This unusual group of friends confronts various issues of contemporary Italy and its contradictions. All of the Alligator's adventures speak to the social, historical, economic, and political realities surrounding the events narrated in each story, in order to “recount those things the newspapers and televisions will not, or cannot” (Carlotto “Today in Italy”). The novels I explore are *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* (1999) and *Perdas de Fogu* (2008). I selected these two novels among Carlotto's wide bibliography because they are particularly representative of a commitment to critiquing contemporary society. In *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita*, Carlotto explores the criminal world of the Veneto region, where various

underworld organizations control the drug smuggling business. Although the *Alligatore* recalls Raymond Chandler's private investigator Philip Marlowe for his disenchanting attitude, the plot draws from real events as shown in the excerpts from the 1996 verdict by Venice's Court of Appeals at the beginning of the book. *Perdas de Fogu*, instead, is a novel on the military polygon with the same name in Sardinia, and addresses the problem of chemical weapon experiments through the story of an unusual detective, Pierre Nazzari, who discovers the business of experiments with uranium performed in the Sardinian military base. Carlotto wrote the novel with a team of writers, studying the case for two years, on a number of documents. Both novels paint a realistic portrait of Veneto and Sardinia. According to the writer, these novels could fill the void left by the lack of investigative journalism in Italy. For this reason, it is possible to speak about 'crime fiction journalism' when analyzing Carlotto's novels.

In this chapter I also consider two novels by Giancarlo De Cataldo, *Romanzo criminale* (2002), set in the period of time from the 1970s to the 1990s and *Nelle mani giuste* (2007), set in 1992-1993. The two novels constitute an attempt to portray crucial periods in the last thirty years of Italian history, drawn from large numbers of historical documents. *Romanzo Criminale* is based on the true story of a powerful Roman criminal gang that managed to control the city's drug trafficking, getting involved with Italian secret services, the camorra, the mafia and the Vatican. Through literary inventiveness, De Cataldo's novels venture to divulge some of the most ominous yet unresolved Italian crimes and obscure events. A magistrate and a writer, De Cataldo believes in the need for the Italian crime novel to become a

romanzo 'politico' e sociale: sulle città, sui Poteri e le loro trame, sulle inquietudini della democrazia imperfetta. Il poliziesco, che già aveva fatto lodevole fronda sotto il fascismo, per almeno vent'anni ha seguito la realtà italiana e in qualche misura fornito utili elementi per interpretare i cambiamenti e le loro sotterranea direzione. Il poliziesco italiano ci ha fatto capire che il Mistero Italiano per eccellenza è mistero politico, d'intrigo affaristico, di trame occulte. (qtd. in Sangiorgi "Il fascismo e il giallo italiano" 151)

In exploring these two novels, I highlight the differences in narrative style, which aim to convey the ambiance and the context of the two different time frames.

Finally, using Riccardo Donati's essay "Romanzo criminale: le pericolose interferenze tra realtà e finzione" I discuss the relationship of literary invention and factual reality, fiction and history, and I consider how the two have been employed by De Cataldo to create a more reliable explanation of events than the official one. In fact, as De Cataldo maintains, contrary to a notion of crime fiction as escapist, the Italian crime novel is regarded as the perfect means to challenge the complexities of reality and to "offrire una storia più vera di quella ufficiale" (Monica Jansen and Yasmina Khamal 11). For De Cataldo, the writer must ground his work in facts in order to create out of them a false history, a metaphor, that has the role of elucidating on unresolved events (because of lack of proof) of Italian history. The result is a literary invention that can tell what the institutions and media do not reveal.

In analyzing the connection between these novels and their social and political setting, my work highlights how the genre develops its role as *romanzo sociale* and becomes a sort of counter narrative to the country's dysfunctions. In so doing, they fill the empty space left by the institutions and the media, which, on the contrary, recite a different history of the country.



## CHAPTER II

### OF WHOM IS A WOMAN? GRAZIA VERASANI INVESTIGATES

#### **History of women authored mystery and detective novels**

Women writers have always held a major role in the development of detective fiction especially in the English-speaking world. As Rosaling Coward and Linda Semple assert, “[t]here is certainly plenty of support for the thesis that women have not only been present in detective fiction but that they have been enormously important, perhaps even dominant within the genre” (Coward and Semple 42). Despite the predominance, women authors have been widely neglected in histories of crime fiction (Sussex 2-3). However, since the 1980s, scholars have been writing on women detective narratives, and feminist criticism has been analyzing the corpus of women-authored detective novels.

The histories of female detective fiction maintain that the first to write detective novels were American and British writers. In the United States, in 1878 the American poet and writer Anna Katharine Green published *The Leavenworth Case*, the first American best-selling detective novel. Green is usually identified as the mother of detective fiction (Haycraft 16). However, it has been argued by writer Allen J. Hubin that Green had female precursors such as Metta Victor, who, in 1866, published *The Dead Letter*, the first American detective novel under the pseudonym of Seely Register (Hubin 28). As far as England is concerned, Lucy Sussex argues that the first woman to publish a detective story was the English Catherine Crowe, who published anonymously *Susan Hopley, or Circumstantial Evidence* in 1841, the same year of Poe’s “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”, but thirty years before the Sherlock Holmes series.

Scholars claim that the first female detective narratives retain the gothic elements of Victorian era gothic novels such as Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). The suspense and the 'mystery' of such novels were influential in the emergence of the crime fiction genre (Sussex 57). Actually, for Sussex, the heroine of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Emily, "can be read as a prototype female sleuth. Her structural role is certainly comparable to that of the detective, being a rational elucidator of the mysteries of the castle, which includes searching for traces of crime" (57).

The years from 1920 to 1937 are commonly called the Golden Age of detective fiction in England and America. It spans from the first novel published by Agatha Christie, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (1920), to the last work published by Dorothy L. Sayers, *Busman's Honeymoon*, 1937. Other prominent writers were Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham and Josephine Tey (Coward and Semple 40) and Daphne du Maurier.<sup>4</sup> These writers wrote traditional mysteries, "those with an enclosed setting, a series detective, little explicit violence, and a good puzzle to be solved" (Coward and Semple 17). The female detective has been traditionally represented by the character of "the curious old lady, the spunky spinster, or someone's girlfriend" (Mizejewski 17) who happens to come across crimes in a closed community and eventually solves them. Only since the 1970s has the female sleuth been a professional investigator or policewoman, due to real-world changes in society with the women's rights movements (Mizejewski 17). Scholars observe that classic detective fiction and, therefore, earlier women detective fiction is typically conservative, because it follows the coordinates of the classic detective

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<sup>4</sup> Along with these popular names within the genre, Coward and Semple list a number of "excellent writers whose careers (extending to the 1940s and 1950s) challenge the conventional definitions of the Golden Age – Elizabeth Daly, Josephine Bell, Christianna Brand, Charlotte Armstrong, Hilda Lawrence, Ursula Curtiss, Mignon G. Eberhardt and Gladys Mitchell to name but a few" (43).

formula, with “a disruption of the status quo ... [and the] discovery (and eradication) of the perpetrator of this disruption. Usually the ‘establishment’ – the police, and the judiciary – are the forces which restore order and stability” (Coward and Semple 44). Even when the detective is a woman, there is no advancement for the female role, and the worldview remains essentially male, because, in those cases, the female detective is basically a replica of the male.

On the other hand, according to some feminist criticism, women detective fiction has not always been conservative. In fact, Coward and Semple argue that “in the British tradition, women seem to always been at the forefront of a radical use of the genre, both in form and content” (45). The two scholars cite three well-known novels, two by Christie and one by Sayers, which exemplify the innovations of women authors. Despite the traditional view of Christie as the most conservative among them, three of her novels – *Ten Little Indians*, *Murder on the Orient Express*, *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* – refashion the conventional character of the murderer (in *Ten Little Indians* the murderer is also one of the victims; in *Murder on the Orient Express* the murderers are almost all the protagonists of the story, and in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* the narrator is the murderer) (45). Moreover, for Maureen T. Reddy “[f]eminist writers have created female heroes who challenge received wisdom about women’s role and novels that subvert gender conventions” (149). The scholar argues that, “[l]ike gothic and sensation novels, feminist crime fiction displaces the traditionally central male consciousness, offering instead a woman-centered world view” (149).

At almost the same time of the Golden Age, the character of the hard-boiled private detective was defined, in the United States, with the publication of Dashiell

Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, 1930, where the private investigator Sam Spade appears for the first time. The novel had been previously serialized in the magazine *Black Mask*, where Raymond Chandler, creator of the other hard-boiled hero Philip Marlowe, also published his short stories. The archetypal hard-boiled private eye created by Hammett and Chandler in the 1930s is "a loner living in the mean streets" (Dilley 18): tough and quick with guns and fists, "he works alone and drinks alone, operating outside the established social codes" (Dilley 21). Cynical and world-wise, "[h]e replaces the deductive subtlety of golden age detectives, with a sure knowledge of his world and a keen moral sense (Grella 106). The genre endorses male behavior as the norm, defining its characteristics "to exclude female characters, confidently rejecting them as inadequate women or inadequate detectives" (Klein 225). The woman is the 'other', the victim or the *femme fatale*, the object of desire but at the same time the cause of the crime. Despite the misogyny of the genre, hard-boiled detective heroines have also appeared since the 1930s in short stories on the pulp magazines ('the pulps'). The first hard-boiled woman private detective to appear in a full-length book is by Gale Gallagher, pseudonym of the couple William Ousler and Margaret Scott. The heroine they created bear their same pseudonym, Gale Gallagher, and appears in *I Found Him Dead* (1947) and *Chord in Crimson* (1947) (Klein 126). Other private investigators who followed Gallagher were Honey West (*This Girl for Hire*, 1957) created by Gloria and Forest Fickling (G.G. Fickling) and Marla Trent by Henry Kane (*Private Eye*, 1959). These pioneer characters of the professional female private investigator are not successful models of female independence and emancipation. As Klein claims: "gender is not the only contrast, sex-role stereotyping is responsible for most distinctions. Yet, the women are more akin to [Sam Spade, Philip

Marlowe] than to the classically styled women detectives of the same period. Their investigations are urban, potentially corrupting, and physical rather than cerebral. Unfortunately, in plot and characterization, the authors imitate the second-or even third-rate rather than the best of the hard-boiled” (Klein 136). That said, some more contemporary critics, like Della Cava and Hengel seem to reevaluate Gale Gallagher’s character, as they see her creation as “a turning point leading to the new breed of professional investigator” (3).

### **Women hard-boiled protagonists: characteristics and criticism**

Most crime fiction critics characterize the 1980s and 1990s as the second Golden Age of the mystery novel with the presence of the hard-boiled woman private investigator by American women authors (Walton and Jones 24). The first modern American woman private eye, Delilah West, appeared in Maxine O’Callaghan’s short story in the *Alfred Hitchcock Magazine* in 1974. A few years later, Marcia Muller published the first novel with a female investigator, Sharon McCone, in *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* in 1977 (Dilley 17). However, Maureen T. Reddy maintains that “[a]lthough the fictional professional private eye, and especially the hard boiled variety, seems an essentially American creation, the female version was born in England, with P.D. James’s invention of Cordelia Gray in *An Unsuitable job for a Woman* (1972)” (Reddy 100).

The authors who contributed to the development of the female investigator in women authored hard-boiled narrations are the Americans Marcia Muller, Amanda Cross, Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky, who are generally considered the mothers of this genre. They created, respectively, the characters of Sharon McCone, Kate Fansler,

Kinsey Millhone and V.I. Warshawski. Their novels exemplify the tendencies and patterns of many narrations of this type published since the 1980s. The variety of publications of crime novels with female heroines mirrors the social changes taking place in those years (Reddy 2).

The genre appeared to be a rather problematic one for the woman author, because this type of narrations praises traditional masculine values and corroborate conservative social behaviors. With the novels selected for my analysis, I intend to demonstrate that the presence of a woman in such an environment aims to subvert the genre and the patriarchal societal expectations, making it “a principal forum for the literary exposition of a feminist and female-centred problematics” (Gosland 7).

A number of feminist scholars of crime fiction have shown skepticism in considering the potential of women’s detective novels in challenging and subverting the masculinist conventions of crime fiction (Walton and Jones 86). They maintain that feminist agency is unlikely to occur in such a conservative genre as crime fiction. The terms feminist and crime fiction seem incompatible.

According to Kathleen Gregory Klein in *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1988), the genre of popular crime fiction reaffirmed patriarchal values, and therefore, was antagonist to feminism (225). In fact, Klein contends that a struggle takes place between genre and gender when women authored crime novels necessarily assume the conventions of the male detective, and this conflict ends up with the preponderance of the traditional patterns over feminist ideology. In her words:

The predictable formula of detective fiction is based on a world whose sex/gender valuations reinforce male hegemony. Taking male behavior as

the norm, the genre defines its parameters to exclude female characters, confidently rejecting them as inadequate women or inadequate detectives. A detective novel with a professional woman detective is, then, a contradiction in terms. The existence of the one effectively eliminates the other. (223)

Other critics such as Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple agree with the impossibility of a feminist hard-boiled narrative, as they point out that the violence, the individualism and the prejudice against women in the genre prevents from any feminist rendition of hard-boiled. In particular, the two critics lament that in novels such as Paretsky's and Grafton's, although the heroine is an independent, emancipated woman investigator, there is no judgment of the use of violence. For these scholars, "gender and genre are necessarily at odds, and feminist intentions (however well-placed and sympathetic) simply cannot resist the hard-boiled genre's traditional power as a misogynist mode" (Walton and Jones 88). Other critics, such as Priscilla L. Walton and Manina Jones, oppose Klein's assumption and argue, instead, that

feminist agency is possible not just within the confines of or despite the conventions of the genre, but *through* those very conventions. The feminist appropriation of the hard-boiled mode can redefine textual and cultural boundaries precisely because it comes into intimate contact with them. (87)

In her classic book, *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1988), Maureen T. Reddy states that female hard-boiled fiction is subversive in its rebellion to genre

conventions and in offering “a woman – centered world view” (Reddy 149). Furthermore, she points out that the women authored hard-boiled novel, in modifying the conventional rigid pattern, also removes “women from the position of ‘others’ ... [opening] up an enormous range of possibilities for portraying women” (Reddy 102).

There are some features of women’s hard-boiled fiction that innovate the model. First of all, the woman P.I. is not merely a substitute of the male investigator. On the contrary, she is a character of action, physically and mentally. She is in charge and thus her character represents a radical challenge to the position of the classic (male) private detective. Descendant “of the action-oriented adventurer common in the dime novel” (Dilley 18) and an antithesis to the traditional English cerebral detective such as Sherlock Holmes (and Auguste Dupin before him), the traditional private eye is a solitaire who seems to have no past and no family. He may live in the same mean streets where the criminals he fights also live, and he is quick with guns and fists. An ‘urban cowboy’, he follows his own moral code, and perceives the women who are available and good-looking as dangerous and manipulative, as the character of the *femmes fatales* exemplifies. In this extent, the genre has been considered as conservative, with a rigid form represented by masculine models and that celebrated masculine values.

The woman P.I. breaks this tradition and destroys traditional expectations of law and order restored by the ‘urban cowboy’. In fact, these novels show the woman investigator’s perspective and focus on her skills and competences, involving the readers in a process of revising the received assumptions on women’s roles (Reddy 3). This big challenge to the *femme fatale* character introduces a series of questions never approached before, the rejection of the traditional role as victim, such as the problem of violence, the



issues on gender and on justice. What's more, scholars have observed that the female hard-boiled narrative can be an instrument for social criticism.

The woman P.I. complicates the gender assumptions of both men and women, as well as the prioritization of traditional (masculine) definitions of the heroic, as, for example, the use of violence. She challenges violence as an unquestioned part of masculine heroism in using it for personal defense and in avoiding carrying a gun (which she knows how to use, anyway). Another challenge to the conventional gender arrangements is the web of relationships that the woman has, for example, family, friends, lovers, and neighbors. Although they may not have a family of their own (for different reasons, as, for instance the difficulty to develop a lasting relationship, Dilley 29), the women P.I. feel however part of the community in which they live. Even when they admittedly proclaim themselves as loners or outsiders, as Grazia Verasani's P.I. Giorgia Cantini, they maintain "deep attachment and commitment to others" (Dilley 52).

Dilley pointed out that some of the heroines as Millhone and Warshawski, manifest a father figure issue (Dilley 31). This seems recurrent also for some Italian women P.I. heroines, as in Grazia Verasani's and Elisabetta Bucciarelli's. Their heroines struggle with disruptions within the family, and find in their father the first opposer of their careers. Despite the destructive relationships of the male P.I. fiction, for most of the women investigators, love is an enriching experience, making them learn more about themselves and their life. In fact, the novels that dictated most of the features of the female P.I., such as Paretsky's and Muller's, highlight "the human drive for connection, the potential flexibility of social roles, and the primacy of commitment" (Dilley 34). The

women's detective narratives "examine and highlight life. They involve relationships, the details of the everyday, and the construction of community" (Dilley 139).

One of the distinguishing features of female crime fiction is its attention to the society and their surroundings. Female detective do not only find the villain, "but also the institutional and cultural causes, the social roots of tragedy" (52). In this way, I agree with Dilley when she affirms that the women P.I. are "a vehicle for social commentary" (Dilley 52). This characteristic is particularly relevant for Verasani's Giorgia Cantini and Bucciarelli's Maria Dolores Vergani, who, offer their 'eye' and detection to the criticism of the society in which they live and, especially, the social condition of women in Italian society.

These characteristics emulate those of the characters of V.I. Warshawsky by Sara Paretsky and of Kinsey Millhone by Grafton, from novels published during the 1980s and 1990s. As Peter Messent observes, they played a major role in the development of the character of female P.I. because

[They] act and are liberating characters for the woman reader in their unified subjectivity, with an ability to be unquestioningly active, and to be blunt and direct rather than exhibiting conventional 'female' qualities of tact, diplomacy, politeness and the like. Above all, they have no need to be liked, and have thus liberated themselves from that quality so subversive to female self-confidence. (Messent 65)

One of the features is the status: the female investigator is single by choice and because it is difficult to maintain a solid relationship with her job. She has short relationships

sometimes, and prefers to be single to avoid falling in the cage of a traditional patriarchal marriage, as for V.I. Warshawski, who divorced from her lawyer husband because he wanted her to quit her job. In this she resembles the loner male P.I. However, although she does not have a family of her own, she is very independent and she is able to keep a circle of supporting friends who act like a family. In fact, in the case of Warshawski and Millhone, who are both orphans, some of their friends take on the role of parent. Also, very often, they display female solidarity with a character in the story: Warshawski is always supported by her friend, Lottie Herschel, and Millhone has her friend Henry Pitts (Messent 75). In addition, both investigators find another father figure in one of their neighbors or in their landlord. Warshawski has her older neighbor Mr. Contreras who watches over her, keeps an eye on her apartment, provides her food and even saves her life in some occasion (Dilley 32). Messent notes that from the role of surrogate father, Mr. Contreras takes on the female role, especially when providing food to the investigator (Messent 73). As for Millhone, her old landlord becomes a father figure and friend, and, keeps on taking care of her particularly after the explosion of her apartment.

The relationships that the two investigators maintain with these two older men are based on mutual respect and care. The men do not exercise control and authority over the women: “These are examples, not just of how contemporary women take on traditional social definitions of gender, but also how it is possible for older generations to reconfigure their own ideas of gender roles” (Dilley 32). Messent also observes “However these female detectives are not quite the ‘tough guy’ equivalents of their male counterparts and often admits to feeling afraid, bullied and disaster bound” (Messent 65). This contrast is actually another typical element of their characterization: they appear to

be strong and courageous but also vulnerable and in need of someone else's care. As in the case of Warshawski, she is "tough talking and resolute" as the male P.I. (Messent 65), and this is in contrast with Warshawski's moments of weakness, especially when she is injured and needs to be taken care of (Messent 68-9).

Also, critics have underlined the issue of violence within the female P.I. narratives. Taking violence as expression of male authority and power, some scholars criticized the use of violence by Warshawski and Millhone, who would then act as the traditional hard-boiled P.I. would do. Again, Messent points out:

a feminist hero performing excessive acts of violence ... [poses] ethical ambiguities for the Paretzky reader. For if she may empathize with the justified rage and aggression of the hero, the feminist context of the novels implicitly condemns and questions such violence, leaving such a reader off-balance and uneasy about identification with the protagonist. (Messent 68)

Finally, a point that critics of the female hard-boiled investigator have underlined in opposition to the male detective narratives is the effort of conveying social criticism through the novels. In traditional male hard-boiled fiction, reality is represented by the "mean" streets of the cities where the private eye lives (Dilley 36), with a clear separation between the good and the bad, these ones being the "corrupt, wealthy men and femme fatales" (Dilley 36). In female hard-boiled fiction instead, the representation of the world is much more complicated. The female investigator walks "streets [that] have a past, present, and future. They are inhabited by people with dreams, expectations, and failures"

(Dilley 36). The investigator describes and comments on the place where she lives, because [s]he cannot conduct her investigations without critiquing the external factors that created the evil she investigates” (Dilley 36). There is no such clear opposition between the villains and the victims, because the heroine knows that there “are institutional and cultural causes that must be investigated” (Dilley 36), in the attempt to expose the “social roots of the crime to the characters in the books and the readers” (Dilley 36).

### **Italian context of women authored crime fiction**

As in Anglo-American crime fiction, in Italian crime fiction women authors have been writing since its beginning and they have played a big role in its development. However, there are no critical studies dedicated to their production. The only studies that examine women’s crime fiction seem to be the articles by Raffaele Crovi (“Le signore del thriller italiano” in *Le maschere del mistero: storie e tecniche di thriller italiani e stranieri*, 2000), by his son Luca Crovi (“Le dame in nero” in *Tutti i colori del giallo: il giallo italiano da De Marchi a Scerbanenco a Camilleri*, 2002), by scholar Carol Lazzaro-Weis (“Cherchez la femme: Feminism and the giallo” in *From margin to mainstream: Feminism and Fictional modes in Italian Women’s Writing, 1968-1990*, 1993) and, more recently, the book by scholar Maurizio Pistelli, *Un secolo in giallo*, 2006.

In recent international crime fiction the figures of the female detectives in novels written by both men and women authors have increased. This phenomenon occurs also in

contemporary Italian crime fiction, which seems to incorporate an increasing number of more women writers creators of female investigators. The media are sensationally suggesting that it is now fashionable to publish crime novels by women authors who offer female investigators.

One of the few sources, for example the writer Fabio Lotti, in his article “Signore e signorine in giallo” published on the Italian online magazine *Thrillermagazine*, affirms that women writers of crime fiction

Portano nelle storie il loro intuito femminile, la loro delicatezza, la loro dolcezza, il loro acume, la loro sottigliezza psicologica, la loro cultura. Oppure le loro fragilità, i loro fantasmi, le loro incazzature, la loro sessualità, le loro perversioni. Tal'altra vengono semplicemente mascolinizzate fino a perdere quasi completamente i tratti caratteristici della femminilità.

From Lotti's words it seems that the perception of women is still based on the duality in which they have been inscribed for centuries – the angel and the hysteric, sweet but dangerous at the same time. Lotti concludes his review of the many women authors of detective fiction, by stating that “la donna dovrà ancora combattere per affermare certi suoi imprescindibili diritti nella società ma nell'ambito della cosiddetta letteratura poliziesca un bel posto se l'è già conquistato da sola.” Furthermore, in another article published in a blog, Lotti argues that these women authors brought more sentimental plots into the story, and, especially, love stories that do not end well. Also, with his typical ironic style, he seems frightened by this ‘invasion’ and alarmed that those themes

might somehow ruin detective fiction. If on the one hand, women writers lend themselves to commercial schemes and employ explicit sex in a pornographic way, on the other hand, from the writer's words one can evince a hasty generalizations and prejudice against those novels and themes. In fact, from reading his articles, it would seem that women writers have ruined the genre, bringing either 'junk themes' with unbridled sex or sentimentalism. Finally, disguised by the writer's humoristic vein, a certain feeling of fear for this 'invasion' seems to appear. Lotti seems to defend himself by this threat by belittling the themes (or, what he thinks are the themes) of women writer's novels. Lotti's opinion contrasts visibly with the point of view of one of those women authors who belong to this threatening invasion. In fact, Elisabetta Bucciarelli, one of the authors explored in this study, does not seem to perceive the outburst of women's crime fiction as a threat to crime fiction. In an interview about her latest novel with a woman detective, she was asked, "Un'altra protagonista donna, va di moda?" This clearly brings into question the fact that, still, having women protagonists in what it has been usually a male dominated genre is still regarded as an exception, or an advertisement stunt to attract more readers, being it cool and new to have a woman in that role. Bucciarelli answers "Direi che da molto tempo vanno di moda i protagonisti uomini. Sono molto contenta che finalmente si raccontino anche le donne. Per quanto riguarda la mia scelta è avvenuta molto tempo fa. Quando le donne protagoniste (in Italia) erano al massimo tre. Due delle quali raccontate dagli uomini (in modo molto maschile...)." (Mannella, "Intervista").

Since the birth of the genre, Italian women detectives have been fortuitous investigators on the case, a characteristic common to the early Anglo-American literature as well. The first creator of an amateur investigator is Carolina Invernizio, who in 1909

published *Nina, la poliziotta dilettante*, a *feuilleton* in which a young girl unfairly charged of the murder of her fiancé attempts to solve the case (Pistelli, “Un secolo in giallo” 55). Another amateur heroine is Matilde Serao’s Teresa Vargas, in *Il delitto di via Chiatamone*, 1907. These *feuilleton* are similar to the Cletto Arrighi’s, Luigi Natoli’s and Emilio De Marchi’s (Luca Crovi 195). As well as Erminia Bazzocchi’s *Il cappello del morto*, 1899, the plots come from the judicial columns of the time. The publications of novels with female heroines flourished until 1939 with the writers Madga Cochia Adami, Gianna Anguissola, Eugenia Consolo, Luciana Peverelli, Elisa Trapani (Luca Crovi 196). After the censorship of Mussolini’s *ventennio*, in the 1950s the productions of detective fiction (with or without female heroines) goes on, starting with Laura Grimaldi’s *Attento Poliziotto* in 1956. Grimaldi will become a very popular name in detective fiction, for more than twenty years. A translator, editor and writer, Grimaldi (who died in 2012), wrote detective novels for more than twenty years and is perhaps the only Italian woman author known abroad. The 1970s are another prolific time for female-authored crime fiction, with publications from Paola Chiesa, Nicoletta Bellotti, Giulia Sarno, Luciana Attoli, Gloria Zoff (Luca Crovi 200-202). As Luca Crovi points out, the success of women’s detective narrations is confirmed by some novels winning the Alberto Tedeschi Award. In fact, a series of female writers have been awarded since the 1980s: Carla Fioravanti Bosi (1982), Francesca Clama (1983), Maria Alberta Scuderi (1984), Domizia Drinna (1985), Claudia Salvatori (1987), Danila Comastri Montanari (1990), Diana Lama (1995), Linda Di Martino (aka Domizia Drinna, 1996), Anna Maria Fassio (1999). A female investigator is the heroine of one of Salvatori’s recent novels, *Sublime anima di donna* (2001), the P.I. Stella Fante.



Despite the flourishing of Italian women authored crime novels, there remains a lack of critical studies on them is largely evident. Another of the very few scholars to examine Italian feminist novels is Carol Lazzaro-Weis, who dedicates a chapter of her book “*Cherchez la femme: Feminism and the Giallo* (in *From Margin to Mainstream: Feminism and Fictional Modes in Italian Women’s Writing, 1968-1990*, 1993) to two writers, Fiora Cagnoni and Silvana La Spina. These two writers create two female investigators, Cagnoni’s detective Alice and La Spina’s commissario Maria Laura Gangemi in *Uno sbirro femmina* (2007). However, one of the most representative Italian female detectives is the one created by Grazia Verasani, the private investigator Giorgia Cantini. Despite the popularity of her books,<sup>5</sup> few critical studies address this series and its main character. Nonetheless, Grazia Verasani has given an important contribution to the development of the genre in the Italian context, tackling the issue of women’s status in contemporary Italian society.

### **Grazia Verasani’s woman detective**

Grazia Verasani, born in Bologna, Italy, is a multitalented artist (actress, writer, screenwriter, musician), Verasani is the author of four novels dedicated to the private investigator Giorgia Cantini: *Quo vadis, baby?* (2004), *Velocemente da nessuna parte* (2006), *Di tutti e di nessuno* (2009) and *Cosa sai della notte* (2012).

Verasani exploits the hard-boiled tradition creating an Italian female version of the classical private investigator that lets her address current issues regarding the situation of

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<sup>5</sup> The first novels of the series on the female pi, *Quo Vadis baby?*, inspired a movie directed by the Academy Award winning film director Gabriele Salvatores, and a spin-off TV series in 2008 by Guido Chiesa.

women in Italy. A lonely but independent woman, the female investigator Giorgia Cantini, through her cases, tackles the pressing social problem of violence against women, especially domestic violence, which have been exacerbating the already high levels of *femicide*<sup>6</sup> in the last thirty years. Linda Laura Sabbadini<sup>7</sup> points out that since the 1990s the number of women killed by men has increased (Sabbadini 7).<sup>8</sup> The report on violence against women in Italy conducted in 2012 by the United Nations human rights expert Rashida Manjoo paints a grim picture of the situation, “which demands serious attention” (22). According to the report, “domestic violence is the most pervasive form of violence that continues to affect women across the country” (7):

96 per cent of women are victims of violent acts by non-partners and 93 per cent of victims of partner abuse do not report cases to the police. Similarly, most cases of rape (91.6 per cent) are not reported to the police. Moreover, 33.9 per cent of women who have suffered violence at the hands of a partner and 24 per cent by a non-partner have never talked about what happened to them (7).

She states that the “separation of a couple, conflict within the relationship, honour, men’s unemployment and jealousy by the perpetrator” (8) are the principle causes resulting of femicide. Despite the Government’s adoption of new policies and new laws, the

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<sup>6</sup> The term *femicide* is defined as “the misogynous killing of women by men” and its emergence “can be seen as part of the 1970s feminist movements” in the United States (Josie Kaye, *Femicide*, Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence, [online], published on 3 November 2007, accessed 19 September 2014, URL : <http://www.massviolence.org/Femicide>, ISSN 1961 – 9898.

<sup>7</sup> Director of Social and Environmental Statistics Department (Istat).

<sup>8</sup> Linda Laura Sabbadini, *Gender Violence, discrimination and economic statistics: new challenges in measures based on a gender approach* (ISTAT, 2007).

country's cultural attitudes towards women's rights are still difficult to change: "Gender stereotypes are ... deeply rooted. Women carry a heavy burden in terms of household care, while the contribution of men thereto is amongst the lowest in the world" (6).

Women are still associated with the stereotypical image of the nurturing woman, and their role is confined within the family. The hardest fight is still against the cultural bias that does not perceive women as equal to men. The UN Special Rapporteur underlined also the role of the Italian media in feeding the stereotype: "With regards to their representation in the media, in 2006, 53 per cent of women appearing on television did not speak; while 46 per cent were associated with issues such as sex, fashion and beauty and only 2 per cent issues of social commitment and professionalism" (6). This reflects the question of women's employment: "women are underrepresented in the public and private employment spheres, whether at the national, regional or local levels" (6). Men still prevail in high rank positions, while women do not dominate "even in sectors where [they] form the majority of workforce, such as in school and health services" (20).

Manjoo goes on to explain:

only 50 per cent of management staff in schools and 38 per cent of doctors are women. Within the State Police, women in various ranks constitute 14.9 per cent of the personnel, while in the Armed Forces female officers constitute 3.48 per cent of the total personnel. In the Carabinieri corps, female officers above the rank of non-commissioned officers constitute 1.37 per cent of total personnel. (6)

### **Woman private investigator Giorgia Cantini within the hard-boiled tradition**

Private investigator Cantini's novels follow the features of the hard-boiled tradition, which are re-adapted for her character (Pieri and Rinaldi 121): the lonely, disenchanted private investigator with a hard heart, who drinks and smokes; the femme fatale (the escort Vanessa in *Velocemente da nessuna parte*) and the prostitute Franca in *Di tutti e di nessuno*; the 'main street' in the city where the sleuth lives. In addition, she also shares the typical elements of female private investigator as they appear in the novels by the American writers Paretsky and Grafton: she is an independent woman, single, without a family of her own, but with supporting friends and, among them, a parent figure; she is not a static character, she can evolve and change during the novels, and there are also several moments when her past is revealed; finally, she is committed to giving her own social comment on her surroundings and a wider critique of contemporary society. Cantini succeeded her father in his investigative agency in Bologna. Although her job consists mainly in "casi di infedeltà, ricerche di persone scomparse, figli che marinano la scuola e finiscono in brutti ambienti, mariti che vogliono sapere se le mogli vanno, come dicono, alla partita di calcetto o al giovedì del poker" (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 16), she often helps police chief Luca Bruni on murder cases.

She is a single woman in her forties, not married and not dating. She defines herself ironically as a woman with a "femminilità atipica" (*Di tutti e di nessuno*, 35) because she does not generally care about her appearance: she is overweight, she wears no make up, no feminine outfits but only pants and hooded sweaters. She is an alcoholic and a smoker, enjoys music and movies, and, when she was younger, she was politically

committed as a left-wing activist. She resembles the traditional male private eye, because she is a loner who shies away from relationships and commitment:

Seduta sullo sgabello di un bar di via Goito tengo tra le mani il quarto gin  
lemon della serata ... Ho la vista appannata dall'alcol e non riesco a fare  
una panoramica completa del locale né di chi lo occupa ... Mi stringo nelle  
spalle e volto la schiena al ralenti; cerco di tendere i muscoli del braccio  
ma ogni gesto pesa tonnellate, ho lo stomaco contratto dalla nausea ...  
Non so come riesco a uscire dal bar. Mi appoggio alla portiera della mia  
vecchia Citroën e mi accendo una Camel. (*Quo Vadis, Baby?* 7)

She is tough and withdrawn because of the pain for her mother's and sister's violent deaths. Having gone through depression for the death of her mother in an accident and the suicide of her sister, Cantini is constantly on the defensive, and she tries to anesthetize the pain with alcohol:

Bevo da quando mia sorella si è stretta al collo una cinghia ed è andata via  
senza salutare, ma questa è la solita scusa. ... Ho bevuto per anni. Perché  
quando succede qualcosa che ti fa un male cane ci devi bere su. Ho  
continuato a bere per sentirmi fuori dalla vita degli altri; fuori da quelli  
che ti marciano stretto, che ti fanno sentire in colpa, che ti mettono in  
castigo dietro la lavagna. E credo che non smetterò. (*Velocemente da  
nessuna parte* 45)

Cantini, as Warshawski, is haunted by the ghosts of her mother and her sister. Cantini and her father have both been suffering for the trauma of their losses; she considers herself and her father as: “due superstiti che bevono per dimenticare” (*Quo Vadis, Baby?* 102). She is not a ‘traditional’ woman. In her forties, and disenchanting, she has not identified herself with the conventional roles of wife and mother – two roles she does not believe in. Cantini decided to live her life without a family of her own because of her pain, in an attempt to shut down her feelings to avoid suffering again. In fact, she has short relationships or one-night stands with improbable partners like married or younger men, or ladykillers: “vivo di libere alleanze, non ho legami forti” (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 10).

An alcoholic like his daughter, the former *maresciallo* Fulvio Cantini retired and moved to the countryside, beginning a new relationship. He left his *Agenzia investigativa Cantini* to her daughter and Cantini has been working there for fourteen years already. Both Giorgia and her father are deeply suffering for their losses, and try to drown their pain in alcohol: “Non è più l’uomo che esercitava il suo bisogno di controllo su due ragazzine orfane di madre; la vita lo ha trasformato in un bevitore depresso dallo sguardo vago e risentito (*Quo vadis, baby?* 49). Mr. Cantini seems to not offer support to her daughter. The two American investigators, Warshawski and Millhone, are orphans, and in their novels the issue of a father figure is often approached. Both the American detectives have older neighbors that somehow take care of them and seem to play the role of the parent (Dilley 31). Cantini, too, has a similar situation. In the second book of the series, *Velocemente da nessuna parte*, Cantini meets her new neighbor, Johnny Riva. They become friends, and soon enough he invites her for dinner, cooking delicious foods

for her, such as *fiorentina* steaks, even though he is vegetarian. As for Warshawski and Millhone, Johnny Riva is a reassuring father figure for Cantini, someone who “[le] ispira sicurezza come nessuno” (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 25).

Finally, unlike Warshawski and Millhone, Cantini does not like violence and in the novels there is seldom use of it. In every novel Cantini affirms she does not have a gun and that she would never have and use one. In fact, she is very rarely in situations where her life is at risk, save for when her youth friend Lauro, in *Di tutti e di nessuno*, confesses to her his crime and threatens her with a knife, but she is immediately rescued by Bruni.

### **Italian crime fiction as womens’ *romanzo sociale***

In Cantini’s hard-boiled series there is an explicit presence of contemporary issues, such as human relationships, the change of society, and the condition of women. Verasani’s novels are, in fact, a social commentary on the current situation of women in Italy, in the last ten years, when the condition has deteriorated so that it seems the women’s movement never took place thirty years earlier. Her encounters show how women are not really emancipated, with issues that are still currently relevant in Italian society.

It is also through her style that Verasani addresses these issues. She uses a fast-paced, descriptive narrative with short sentences and colloquial language to convey a realistic representation and she expresses her criticism through irony. Verasani adopts the typical first person narration. In choosing this, she follows the features of the hard-boiled genre, which are “commonly associated with realism in its use of a terse, tough, and dolly

descriptive style. The apparent clear-sightedness of the detective (with the reader's view commonly filtered through her or his perception) seems to exist at one remove from any 'official' version of events" (Messent 7).

Notwithstanding the artificiality of the fictional character, Cantini makes sure to stress that the readers are reading a realistic story. She underlines the realism of her character, for example, when she describes herself as being "un'investigatrice sovrappeso, non ho l'agilità che ci si aspetta da una che fa il mio lavoro" (*Happy Hour* 9). When her father, Fulvio Cantini, who established the investigative agency, makes the remark that she should lose weight, the investigator wishes to answer to him that she is not "come le detective dei suoi gialli americani, che si alzano all'alba per correre sulle spiagge dell'oceano" (*Happy Hour* 49), remarking that she is a real woman, not a projection of an ideal. Paradoxically, Verasani's novels aim to portray realistically a world where television has invaded people's minds and lives, establishing the reality in which people believe. In fact, about the supposed singularity of being a woman private investigator, Cantini explains "Il fatto che io sia una donna non ha mai sorpreso nessuno: tutti hanno visto le *Charlie's Angels* e tanti si stupiscono addirittura che non abbia una pistola" (*Quo vadis, baby?* 39). The society that Cantini sees is has been leveled by television and has lost its culture and values.

Her criticism is conveyed by the first person narrator through her interior monologue, which sometimes appears between parentheses in the text. Many times her critical comments towards herself and on society are cynical and pessimistic. For example, it is with a sort of melancholic cynism that she describes herself: "Ho



quarant'anni appena compiuti, non ho l'anestetico della religione ma ho quello dell'alcol” (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 12), and the people around her:

Entro nel bar di piazza Mercanzia e ordino un gin lemon, poi mi siedo fuori, su un trespolo libero, a osservare l'assembramento di quarantenni appena usciti dai luoghi di lavoro o di ritorno da un viaggio in barca o nel Mar Rosso. In attesa che l'alcol mi anestetizzi, assisto alla messinscena della giovinezza trattenuta a forza. (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 53)

Other times she makes self-deprecating comments, comparing herself to a “vecchio veicolo in transito”, (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 39) or to a non-inviting dish: “... è questa la sintesi della mia vita: cancellarmi dal menu all'ultimo momento, come una portata che non fa gola a nessuno” (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 82). She comments with cynicism towards her reluctance to move away from the past and stop the bitter memories of her personal life from haunting the present, such as when she tries to forget her loneliness by getting drunk with her old friend, Mel:

Mentre ci inoltriamo verso piazza Santo Stefano, so già che tra un paio di bottiglie daremo il via al nostro party della nostalgia e parleremo male dei nostri ex amici che si sono sposati e hanno fatto figli. ... Innaffieremo le piantine del rimpianto con la cura dei capogiardinieri: il rimpianto dell'altra vita, di quella che avremmo potuto avere, delle cose che avremmo potuto fare. (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 43-44)

In some moments, also a sort of dark irony is present. It is displayed, for example, in *Quo vadis baby?*, when her customer Lattice is pathetically trying to commit suicide by throwing himself out of her office window, because he cannot face the consequences of having killed his adulterous wife. In order to persuade him to stop, she offers him her Beretta to commit suicide, because, she argues, “Se la infilerà in bocca o la punterà al cuore, alla tempia, dove preferisce. Sarà più rapido e indolore di un salto nel vuoto, mi creda. Dal quinto piano c’è il rischio che lei resti vivo. E storpio.” (*Quo vadis, baby?* 211-212) and “Prenda la Beretta e si spari dove vuole lei, sull’autobus, al parco, a casa sua. Sarà il suo modo di pagarmi per il mio lavoro. Un conto che non ha ancora saldato, ricorda?” (*Quo vadis, baby?* 212). The dark humor is a strategy to deal with particularly difficult situations, showing perspicacity and courage, although she minimizes it in her distinctive interior dialogue with herself between parentheses, [“(Vorrei dirgli che no, non ce l’ho [il coraggio], e che mi sto cagando sotto)” (*Quo vadis, baby?* 212).

Through her cases she comes closer into contact with the common men and women and it is in this context that Verasani can talk of today’s condition of women. The author does not publicly make feminist claims, but her concern and commitment to women’s cause can be evinced using the first person narrator and the dialogues the protagonist has with different people.

In almost all the novels there are many female victims. In the third novel of the series dedicated to Giorgia Cantini, *Di tutti e di nessuno* (2009), Cantini is investigating the disappearance of Barbara and, unofficially, the ferocious murder of Franca, a prostitute and fortune-teller, whom she had met in her adolescence. Barbara has disappeared after a friend raped her outside of a disco, but does not want to press charges out of shame and

fear of judgement: “Ero ubriaca, fuori da un club privé ... mi dipingerebbero come non sono. Vedo già i titoli sui giornali, che squallore...” (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 214). In this occasion, the private detective visits the Bolognese *Casa Delle Donne*, an organization that helps women victims of violence and that is now present in many large Italian cities, such as Milan. The novel and its topics are created after the author’s visit to the *Casa Delle Donne*. As she explains in an interview to the newspaper *Repubblica*, “Frequenti passaggi alla *Casa delle Donne* mi hanno aiutata ad aprire una finestra su una prevaricazione - fisica e culturale - che necessita di un'informazione costante”.<sup>9</sup>

The many female characters in her novels are fragile and unconventional. The writer stresses in the interview that there are: “Nessuna dark lady, nessuna wonder woman. Donne che si muovono in una realtà complessa e cercano di decifrarla non solo emotivamente, in antitesi con gli stereotipi che le suddividono, ancora, in fate/streghe, 'sante/poco di buono' ”, but on the contrary fragile and vulnerable, and impossible to reduce to a mere dicotomy (*donna per bene /prostituta*).

Using the first person narration, the readers, women and men, are introduced to *La Casa delle Donne*. The point is clear: in our contemporary society, women are still the victims of domestic violence, and gender equality remains to be achieved: “I diritti delle donne non sono tutelati, e questo non incide solo nei casi di violenza. Guadagnamo il quaranta

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<sup>9</sup> Verasani chose the crime novel, the *noir*, as a tool for making her criticism because she believes that “uno scrittore dentro il mondo - e non dentro il "suo" mondo - debba, attraverso la propria intuizione e fantasia, essere un 'testimone di verità'. In una società dominata dalla furbizia e dall'ossessione dell'immagine, in un mondo cioè dove realtà e tv rischiano di essere la stessa cosa, e molte giovani donne usano il proprio corpo come un aspirapolvere porta a porta, comparse di una dittatura del desiderio di cui si rendono, più o meno consapevolmente, complici orgogliose, penso sia importante trattare anche in un romanzo tematiche che riguardano la misoginia di un potere dove i veri talenti delle donne non trovano spazio” (Mazzocchi “Un nuovo caso per Giorgia Cantini”)

per cento in meno dei nostri colleghi, senza contare il problema della maternità. Destra o sinistra non cambia. Al potere, sono sempre gli uomini” (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 121).

Moreover, when investigating on Barbara’s case, Cantini meets Barbara’s mother, who has been an active feminist years before. The comparison between the ideals of the mother and the rape of her daughter points at the failure of the women’s movement in Italian society: “Ma cosa penserebbe sua nonna, se fosse ancora viva, di tutte le battaglie che sembravano vinte e che invece ... conquiste che credevamo solide, immutabili. E a farne le spese, tra le altre, è sua nipote...” (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 222).

The same title of the book, *Di tutti e di nessuno*, is a comment by Cantini regarding the prostitute Franca, and, at the same time, a reflection on the condition of women: they are nobody’s, they belong to everybody and to no one at the same time, and, what’s more important, they don’t belong to themselves. Furthermore, this is perpetuated and amplified by the superficiality of the media, when reporting a case such as the death of a fifty-year-old prostitute and clairvoyant, Franca, stabbed to death: “Lo squallido feuilleton di una maga da due soldi non più nel fiore dell’età che forse se l’è cercata, se l’è meritata, perché il passato è un creditore che torna a chiederti il conto quando gli pare e piace, con tutti gli interessi” (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 46). For Cantini, the woman is “disarmata come la gruccia di un armadio, senza più una chance di offrire una versione attendibile della sua vita: morta due volte per questioni di scoop” (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 46). With her cynical remark, Cantini states,

Ecco una buona ragione per evitare di crepare ... perché appena ti sbattono la testa contro una panchina o ti trapassano il cuore con una coltellata, arriva l’offesa numero due: la peggiore istantanea che ti hanno

mai scattato su copie e copie di giornali, corredata da note biografiche e dall'analisi spicciola di psicologi che con tre aggettivi fanno il punto della tua personalità. (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 46)

As Alessia Risi suggests, together with the main plot, in Verasani's novels *Quo Vadis, Baby?* and *Velocemente da nessuna parte*, the main plots – the investigation on Cantini's elder sister, Ada, in the first novel, and the case of the murder of the prostitute Franca, in the second, are joined by the parallel stories of Cantini's customers. These are “veri e propri microcosmi familiari o meglio piccole tragedie quotidiane” (Risi “Dalle microstorie di Grazia Verasani” 194) as they involve men and women in their everyday life. As Risi observes, the author “dissemina queste microstorie di crimini privati nei due intrecci principali con leggerezza e con un movimento che procede a scatti, come quello di un riflettore che si accende e si spegne su diversi personaggi”. These minor characters remain however in the readers' attention as “personaggi-tipo, caratterizzati da pochi ma significativi tratti o riferimenti stereotipati” (194). This mechanism is especially efficient for the female characters, so that it leads to the creation of stereotypical characters such as “*la vittima, la prostituta, la madre*” (194). According to Risi, the result of this strategy is

duplice: da un lato offrono ritratti femminili sommari che, potremmo dire, si completano da soli, andando ad incastrarsi velocemente nell'orizzonte di un immaginario collettivo stereotipato sulla questione femminile; dall'altro viene suggerita a chi legge una riflessione critica sulla concezione della donna oggi, sollecitata dall'incontro-scontro di queste

figure con quella oppositiva della protagonista. (Risi, “Dalle microstorie di Grazia Verasani” 194)

Another example is in *Quo Vadis, Baby?*, when Cantini’s client Giordano Lattice needs to know if his wife is cheating on him. During her investigation, Cantini finds out that actually Lattice’s wife, Donatella Verzè, has several lovers. When Cantini reveals him the results of her investigation, the man reacts with a series of verbal insults towards the woman. However, Lattice confesses he also cheated on his wife, but he justifies himself by saying that “per un uomo è diverso” (*Quo Vadis, Baby?* 140). Cantini asks why it should be different for a man, but receives no answer. According to Risi, the dialogue between the two recalls:

una significazione (...) ancestrale, nel senso che ci riporta subitamente a quella che dovrebbe essere una distinzione di ruoli di genere superata, ma che è invece ancora troppo facilmente riconoscibile, a livello di immaginario collettivo, attraverso il luogo comune e che mantiene, dunque, un filo diretto con il passato e con l’idea che, all’interno della coppia, per il maschio è tutto lecito. (“Dalle microstorie di Grazia Verasani” 196)

However, not only are men and women not on equal ground: other statements by Lattice confirm again the traditional view of the wife as a husband’s property. Complaining about his wife, Lattice says: “Non l’ho mai fatta lavorare, sa? La trattavo come una signora (...) Non le è mai mancato nulla. Due volte a settimana dal parrucchiere andava.

Pure dall'estetista" (*Quo vadis, baby?* 139). Eventually, Lattice kills Verzè out of jealousy. This episode is significant because, as Risi highlights, "funziona bene su due fronti, quello della macchina del giallo, che da sempre si avvale della rappresentazione di una donna bionda, procace e morta ammazzata, e quello dell'immaginario collettivo, in cui il destino riservato alla Verzè va a incastarsi senza troppe forzature" ("Dalle microstorie di Grazia Verasani" 196). Based on the traditional patriarchal system of values, Verzè, who has been cheating on her husband has deserved her violent death. Thus, Verasani highlights the ambiguity of a civil society such as that of the Italian, in which, despite the achievements of women's movements, still live old biases.

A further example is in *Velocemente da nessuna parte*. In this text, among other clients, is Clara Esposito, an old acquaintance of Cantini. Clara Esposito is the mother of Giuliano, a young man who is addicted to heroin. Even though Cantini had already refused the case, Esposito keeps coming to her office to ask for advice. The dialogue between the two reproduces the dilemma of "essere madre o essere donna, laddove essere madre significa annientarsi come donna" (Risi "Donne e contesto storico e sociale" 200). Clara Esposito suffers from the sense of guilt she feels for her son's addiction. She has been trying to help him, but without success. Cantini suggests her to "vivere la sua vita e non quella di Giuliano" (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 62), since "non siete la stessa cosa. Glielo hanno tagliato trent'anni fa, il cordone ombelicale. Se lo ricorda?" (62). However, her words do not succeed and Clara answers, resigned, "Si vede proprio che non siete una madre" (62), because as a mother, she would challenge "le malattie, la morte, Dio e il destino" for her son, and never give up (60). Motherhood is a controversial issue in contemporary Italian society. It is still regarded as the center of a

woman's life and women are still esteemed by their being on not being a good mother (Lipperini 95).

Cantini also deals with other female characters (although in her memories): her mother, Ilaria, and her sister, Ada, who both committed suicide when she was younger. The two characters show another stereotypical representation of women, the figure of "la suonata", "la pazza" (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 58), "la matta" (*Di tutti e di nessuno* 48). Unable to conform to the patriarchal myth of the 'domestic angel', Ilaria and Ada, with their apparent inexplicable eccentric behavior and suicide, are described as being 'crazy' by their husband, father, boyfriend, lover, thus perpetuating the old Victorian figure of the hysterical female.

Despite the bleak atmosphere portrayed, in the last page of *Di tutti e di nessuno*, there is a glimpse of hope towards the new generation of women. Barbara, the young victim of rape, who went missing because of the shame of the violence, ultimately decides to attempt to press charges against the friend who raped her. Possibly in a naïve way, but hopeful, Cantini comments: "E allora penso che se Franca era di tutti e di nessuno, Barbara forse, imparerà a essere, prima di tutto, di se stessa" (237). The book suggests that it is with the help of social organizations such as *Casa delle donne* that this can be possible.

### **The other protagonist of Cantini's series: Bologna**

The city and its spaces are particularly significant in crime literature. As Barbara Pezzotti points out, the crime novel developed during the Industrial Revolution and with "the growth of big cities [...] [t]he concentration of people in limited spaces led to a



growth in the crime rate, and, with it, the necessity of an established police force that performed for the first time investigations as we know them today” (Pezzotti *The Importance of Place* 7). The importance of the city in Italian detective fiction has been demonstrated by many Italian authors; among them, Lorianò Macchiavelli and Carlo Lucarelli who set their novels in the city of Bologna and established its “literary reputation as a city of crime” (Pezzotti *The Importance of Place* 91).

Lorianò Macchiavelli has set in Bologna his series with police detective Antonio Sarti, which, begun in the 1970s, is the longest-running series with the same detective in Italian crime literature (Somigli, “Fighting crime” 312). Carlo Lucarelli’s books set in contemporary Bologna are the two series with detective Marco Coliandro and the policewoman Grazia Negro. With his novels, inspired by local crime news (Pezzotti *The Importance of Place* 92), Macchiavelli aimed to illustrate the dark side of Bologna and “to denounce and uncover what he considered the hypocrisy of a city that, behind a respectful facade, hid dishonesty and corruption” (Pezzotti *The Importance of Place* 92). For Pezzotti, Lucarelli, instead, portrayed “a new image of Bologna as a sort of megalopolis stretching from its traditional center to the coastal town of Rimini, almost 120 kilometers away” (Pezzotti *The Importance of Place* 91).

Grazia Verasani gives an image of the city in opposition to its past. Cantini’s resigned and sharp look at life, expose the author’s image of Bologna and the differences between the current Bolognese society and the Bologna of the protagonist’s adolescence. Cantini’s Bologna is represented as a metropolitan space where “local colour and flavour are lost, replaced by a more composite, globalized, urban culture” (Rinaldi 121-122):

Ormai sono pochi i locali che frequento. Le antiche osterie si sono trasformate in ristoranti dove si mangia male e si spende un occhio della testa. A parte via del Pratello, dove universitari e punkabbestia fanno chiasso tutta la notte occupando la strada con cani, canne, bonghi e lattine di birra, la Bologna notturna e presa d'assalto da un mare di riccastri in Range Rover. E dove ci sono le Range Rover non può esserci una gran sete di conoscenza (*Quo vadis, baby?* 16).

According to the author, Bologna is the co-protagonist of the novels, because “Giorgia, cambia e invecchia con lei, si trasforma o si paralizza. Ne è il parafulmine umorale e sociale. Il contenitore bellissimo e disperato. Insomma, è molto più che uno sfondo...” (Interview wuz.it). In fact, as Pieri and Rinaldi note, Bologna acts “as a cultural and political looking glass to the social and cultural changes in Italian society” (121). Very often Cantini, who was a political activist (“a me premeva il mondo” *Quo vadis, baby?* 59) recalls the spaces where she used to hang out: “Scendevo in piazza contro Almirante, partecipavo alle riunioni della FGCI, ballavo coi compagni nella sala della sezione Grieco alla festa del tesseramento, parlavo di aggregazione giovanile al Piccolo Bar di via Toscana e andavo al Palazzo dello Sport a sentire Dalla cantare *Com'è profondo il mare*” (*Quo vadis, baby?* 59). The landscape of the city is interiorized by Cantini; for example, “il muretto”, the place where she used to meet her friends and talk about music, politics, movies, etc, has become for her not only a symbol of her youth, but also a symbol of her passionate commitment and integration in her city and a symbol of sense of community (“una volta questa città aveva un'anima”, *Velocemente da nessuna parte* 14). Now, instead, she feels lost and disoriented: “non c'era più l'alimentari, né il lavasecco, né la

merceria. Al loro posto: negozi di borsette cinesi, rosticcerie cinesi, maglierie cinesi” (*Quo vadis, baby?* 31). The process of globalization and foreign immigration erased its specific features (“davvero Bologna è diventata piatta, incolore, senza piu distintivi di diversità”, *Quo vadis, baby?* 32) and brought together different cultures without integration (“Il bar è affollato di trentenni nell’ora dell’aperitivo, e poco importa se dall’altra parte della strada c’è la malinconia di uno spaccio alimentare pakistano; bolognesi e stranieri a pochi metri di distanza che sembrano un abisso” *Di tutti e di nessuno* 39). For Cantini, Bologna is a restless and complex amalgam of fragments:

Abito in una zona di periferia dove incrocio mescolanze umane dalla mattina alla sera. Gli autobus notturni sono pieni di disperati di ogni razza e colore; nel parco sotto casa c’è chi dorme all’addiaccio tra cacche di cane e siringhe. La polizia è sempre all’erta: spari, risse da coltello e accapigliamenti vari sono il reality show quotidiano. (*Velocemente da nessuna parte* 22)

The representation of contemporary Bologna conveyed by Cantini reflects on the dramatic transformations of Italian space and culture, and aims to question contemporary Italian society.

## **Conclusions**

Throughout the novels of the Cantini series, the author drops a hint at unspecified writers of crime fiction and at the publishing industry. In *Cosa sai della notte*, criticizing Bruni of negligence for the unsolved case of Oliver, she says

Un lavoro d'indagine davvero eccellente... Dimmi una cosa, Bruni, li passi tutti a Di Leo gli omicidi di serie B o C? Tu avevi da fare cose più importanti, tre anni fa? Hai un poliziesco nel cassetto, come molti tuoi colleghi? Forse è per questo che tanti casi restano insoluti, con tutti i poliziotti e i magistrati che aspirano a fare gli scrittori. (123)

Also, in *Velocemente da nessuna parte*, while investigating on Vanessa's murder, Cantini enters a bookstore next to the victim's house. She is surprised to see the lack of

libri dei politici né quelli dei cantanti o dei cuochi, nessuna faccia televisiva, nessun breviario del manager, nessuna autrice erotica minorene, nessun ricettario della presentatrice, nessun manuale d'istruzione per il rimorchio sessuale, nessun Pansa che fa a fettine un vecchio partigiano né Vespa che adocchia un Crepet invitandolo, già che c'è, a *Porta a Porta*. Qui non ci sono né best seller, né long seller, né copertine che attizzano come spogliarelliste. Evviva. (38)

The author criticizes the publishers who look to make profit with massive publications of trendy genres and those writers who follow the trend, as for example, the crime novel, to make profit as well. Within the discussion on crime literature the problem of market-generated publications of crime novels is central. In fact, one wonders, "How much is it the product of marketing?" And is there a real social commitment? It is undoubtful that popular fiction and market are tied together. As Dilley observes, "[the] format, conventions, style, and look [of the crime novel] were developed with an eye to reaching

the widest possible audience” (12). Italian women crime writers could offer an answer to the debate regarding whether contemporary Italian crime fiction represents “the new socially and politically motivated literature” (Pieri and Rinaldi 124). As Pieri and Rinaldi underline, Grazia Verasani’s novels, which focus on the especially urgent social crisis that is women’s rights in Italian society, could be the proper example of how crime writers and especially women writers, “display the signs of an equally profound engagement with the most pressing issues which Italy is facing in the new millennium with a particular focus on marginal and marginalized characters” (124).

### CHAPTER III

#### ELISABETTA BUCCIARELLI'S INSPECTOR VERGANI: THE SOCIAL PROBLEM OF FEMALE BODIES

In this chapter I analyze selected books by Elisabetta Bucciarelli, author of serialized novels on a woman police officer, the police inspector Maria Dolores Vergani. The novels are *Happy hour* (2005), *Dalla parte del torto* (2007), *Femmina de luxe* (2008), *Io ti perdono* (2009) and *Ti voglio credere* (2010). At first, I examine the character of the inspector, who works in Milan, Italy, and her distinguishing features. Secondly, I show that her novels serve as a social commentary by addressing women's issues and the representation of the city of Milan. I argue that the themes of her novels, violence against women and the female body, articulate concerns about the status of women in contemporary Italian society and are an example of social realism because they explore issues central to the existence of women in Italy today. I also argue that the author represents the city of Milan, protagonist of many novels of the Italian tradition of crime fiction, as the ultimate metaphor of a sick society. Finally, I analyze Bucciarelli's use of some stylistic features that distinguish her novels from mainstream crime fiction.

#### **Overview of traditional police procedurals with women detectives**

Kimberly J. Dilley, in her *Busybodies, Meddlers, and Snoops. The Female Hero in Contemporary Women's Mysteries* (1998), discusses the figure of the woman

private investigator as well as the female “police-trained detective” (57). Dilley analyzes a number of novels by American women writers of detective fiction<sup>10</sup> and makes a distinction between two types of detectives: while the private eye is a loner and investigates privately her cases, and might sometimes break the law, the policewoman works in a team of male and female colleagues in the police system. She represents the law and uses the language of the law (Dilley 58). But, because the police system is a male institution that uses a male language, scholars have argued that the figure of the policewoman cannot be revolutionary and express a woman’s experience. However, as Dilley argues, women “learn this ‘language’ and work to make it fit their experiences” [retaining] “their own sense of identity and language” (Dilley 57). Bucciarelli’s series on police inspector Maria Dolores Vergani belongs to the police procedural genre. The novels of this genre display the typical police activities of investigating a crime (or more than one), and depict a number of police-related topics such as the collection of evidence, the use of search warrants, autopsies, forensics, etc. Maria Dolores Vergani is an inspector in the Questura of Milan and works with a number of male colleagues. Vergani works with her assistant, Achille Maria Funi, later promoted to inspector. Police procedurals with woman inspectors follow the conventions of the genre: the depiction of the struggle or fight for power, which is typical of work places where women have only recently been admitted.<sup>11</sup>

According to Dilley, there are three main characteristics in women police-trained detective fiction written by female authors: the avoidance of guns, the gender conflict

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<sup>10</sup> Susan Dunlap, Margaret Maron, Dana Stabenow, Joan Hess and Patricia Cornwell.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, in Italy, the employment of women in the police force has been allowed since 1960, but only in the latest twenty years has the number become significantly statistically relevant (“Le donne che scelgono la polizia”. *Corriere della Sera*. 2010).

within the police system between female and male officers and the attention to people's lives and the investigation of the social causes of crime. Concerning the first point, Dilley argues that in women's police procedurals the fictional policewomen perceive the use of guns as a very serious matter (63). Women police officers do not count on weapons as the only means to save themselves in critical dangerous situations, and they do not think that the use of weapons is a necessary tool for investigations, as it has also been argued in the case of female private investigators in the previous chapter. They do consider the use of guns for self-defense, but it is unlikely to have gun shooting as in fictionalized male police procedurals, because, as Dilley puts it, they "are more likely to rely on brain than brawn" (63). Also, because women are occupying a space, the police institution, that has been exclusively male, the "interaction with male colleagues, witnesses, suspects, and the general public is an everyday obstacle" (Dilley 71). So not only must female officers perform their job as well as their male colleagues, but also they are committed to working harder than them in order to be able to defend their gender and show that they are suitable for the job. Finally, in women's police procedurals, together with the investigation on the perpetrator of the crime, there is also a stress on "the treatment of certain people or the consequences of feelings, policies or relationships" (Dilley 77), because, although these novels deal with violence and death, "these are stories really about people" (Dilley 77). Women detectives' investigations are conducted by "reading the clues from human behavior and the small details of everyday life" (Dilley 81) which can shed light to the complexities of society. As for the detective stories with a woman private investigator, the novels with a female police officer do not simply narrate the path to solving the



crime. In these novels, the investigation into and the analysis of the social causes of the crime are important as well.

### **Elements of social realism: an anti-heroine, gender issues, and the city**

Elisabetta Bucciarelli's novels on Inspector Vergani present some of the characteristics described by Dilley, such as gender conflict in the workplace and avoidance of violence, but she is portrayed as a realistic image of woman for her humanity, weaknesses and faults.

As in the traditional female detective fiction, Inspector Vergani does not carry a gun. She keeps it locked in her office. She also has to face gender conflicts in her work place. There are three main episodes where the woman detective is considered inadequate for her job and objectified because of her gender. Just as P.I. Giorgia Cantini does in Grazia Verasani's novels, Vergani, too, has to face the still prevailing notions of what constitutes 'proper' work for women and men in her own family. In fact, Vergani's father wanted her to continue the career as psychiatrist and not become a policewoman, because, he says: "La testa è il tuo potere, il corpo no. L'azione e il danno non sono fatti per le donne" (*Ti voglio credere* 58). Although he acknowledges her intelligence, her father denies her physical ability, her "brawn" (Dilley 63). He repeats the common stereotype of women being intuitive and affirms the stereotyped of the tough detective from of the hard-boiled tradition, all fists and muscles, and does not consider intelligence the best quality of a policeman. His statement also repeats the prejudice according to which women cannot control their body because they do not own it. This recalls the title of Verasani's novel *Di tutti e di nessuno* and it is a pivotal sentence because it expresses

the issue of women and their body that has already been addressed by Verasani in the book above mentioned.

In the novels there are significant allusions to and criticism of stereotypes on women. For example, when Vergani arrives at the Questura in the morning, she usually greets everybody and “ guarda, sfacciata e intelligente, gli occhi dei maschi” (*Ti voglio credere* 13). This hints at the fact that the male officers look at her in a different way than they look the other male colleagues, not just because she is a woman, but because she is a woman in charge. The example also shows Vergani’s strength and her way of coping with the sexism, which is defiance. Particular attention here is to be given to the choice of words, “sfacciata” and “intelligente” because they seem to belong to different points of view. “Sfacciata” could be from the male point of view, while “intelligent” from the female. The choice of putting together these two adjectives is a way to express the conflict between genders.

Another example that relates to the issue of gender conflict is in *Io ti perdono* (2009), when Vergani and her assistant Funi interrogate an old man in the police station in the investigation on a cold case, the murder of a young woman, who revealed to be a prostitute. The two officers ask the man if he has met some prostitutes that live in the same area of the victim and if they might have met the woman. The scene is sordid because the man is filthy and smells. After answering some questions by Vergani and Funi, the man asks Vergani if he can go to the toilet. Vergani is offended by the man’s questions, as the narrator comments “In quel momento l’uomo chiede di andare in bagno. Lo chiede proprio a lei, come se fosse la guardiana dei cessi in autogrill” (135). The man does not acknowledge her status as inspector. His question destabilizes her authority. He

has not asked Vergani the authorization out of respect for her charge and status, but because she is a woman and it is taken for granted by him that for those needs he has to ask a woman, as if that could be the only profession that a woman can have, and not Funi, who was questioning him as well.

Another example illustrates the classic reference of a woman as object, in a conversation between Vergani and her lawyer, at Vergani's place. Vergani needs a lawyer because, during a fight with the suspect who intended to kill her, she defended herself by stabbing the killer to death. An investigation on the incident soon follows and the inspector is put under house arrest, and seeks a lawyer for her defense. The lawyer, "il miglior penalista in circolazione" (*Ti voglio credere* 31), was recommended to her by a friend, Marta. The man begins the conversation by making advances: "Maria Dolores, la chiamo con il suo nome ma continuiamo a darci del lei. Non voglio implicazioni di altra natura nel nostro rapporto, almeno fino a che il processo non è concluso" (*Ti voglio credere* 31). Vergani is upset and assumes that the man, who has had with Marta "una notte di sesso che si perde nella notte dei tempi" (*Ti voglio credere* ) has taken for granted that she would condescend to sexual intercourse "per proprietà transitiva, [trasferendo] la possibilità di accoppiamento" (*Ti voglio credere* 31). The man also addresses the inspector by her first name, "Maria Dolores", and not "Inspector Vergani", as her position would suggest. But Vergani rejects his sexual advances by answering firmly: "Se ne può andare. Anche se lei è il più bravo, non me ne frega niente. Cerchi di stare al suo posto, chiamandomi per nome" (*Ti voglio credere* 31). With her uncompromising answer, Vergani is able to defend herself and restore the appropriate professional distance. So she differentiates herself from her friend Inga, who presumably

follows the pretension that if the lawyer has a business relationship with a woman, he must have sex with her.

### **The problem of the body**

Vergani's character has more depth than a conventional inspector of a mainstream crime novel, because she is portrayed with her flaws and merits and, throughout the series, she grows and acquires more self-awareness. She is depicted as an assertive, astute and intellectual woman, esteemed by her assistant Funi, but she is also painted as fragile, cold, insecure, as well as proud and conceited. She does not feel self-confident and uses the formal style when addressing to people because "Si sentiva di fronte ad alcuni, decisamente piccola, più piccola a rischio di risultare ridicola" (*Dalla parte del torto* 205). The narrator reveals her weakness: Vergani "[n]on si drogava. Non beveva, pressoché astemia. E adesso si costringeva a rimanere un ex tabagista. Ma la sua bestia aggrappata alle spalle erano le emozioni. Tenerle lontane, contenerle, dominarle" (*Io ti perdono* 123). The narrator stresses often her weaknesses: she was a "professionista della rinuncia" (*Femmina de luxe* 15). This characterization makes her more an anti-heroine, than a heroine of a police procedural, and helps paint a realistic representation of the world she lives in.

A recurrent theme of Vergani's series is the manipulation of female bodies, which she addresses investigating on cases where young victims die because of self-harm, eating disorders such as anorexia, and drastic cosmetic procedures. These cases let her investigate the social causes behind the death of these young women, so that the readers

not only enjoy the thrilling part of the novel, but can also reflect on some of the most widespread problems regarding women in our society.

In *Femmina de luxe* the author deals with the issue of the perfection of the female body through the characters she meets during the investigations: the young victim Marta; her friend Claudia and her lover, doctor De Marchi; the rich man Fausto di Maio and his friend La Baronessa, a 70 year-old woman from Switzerland. Vergani investigates the death of Marta, a physiotherapist, who dies from medical complications after cosmetic surgery, a double liposuction. Seemingly, her death cannot be filed as a murder, but Vergani is chasing “una ragione, un motivo” (95) because she suspects that the girl did not receive the appropriate treatment after the operation. Eventually she learns that Marta was one of the women who were supposed to follow the “istruzione” to become a luxury escort for the rich Di Maio. La Baronessa is the one who finds the girls and trains them to become the best ‘product’ on the market. The narrator uses an effective metaphor to convey the sense of objectification: “La Baronessa amava i cavalli e sceglieva le donne con lo stesso stile dell’amazzone che era in lei. Puledre nervose, recalcitranti, ancora da domare (...) Erano forti, asciutte, lineari, tenevano sulle lunghe distanze. E si nutrivano senza accumuli” (46). Marta’s friend Claudia supported the idea of cosmetic surgery, because “aveva fatto anni di palestra. Poi massaggi e diete ma lì, sui fianchi, il grasso non va via. Si ferma e aumenta. Non sta bene è antiestetico. Ero d’accordo con lei” (66). It is La Baronessa the one who expresses the most distorted view during the interrogation with Vergani, because she says: “*Le femmine hanno valore solo se sono di lusso (...), vuoti a perdere, quando disattendono le aspettative*” (114). It could be possible to argue that her sense of inadequacy has been transmitted to the younger generation of women

(Marta, Claudia), with the result of creating a sort of mutation which generates a self-destroying disease, the cult of perfection, and of a ideal body. The result of this symbolic gene modification is the ideal woman: “Asciutta ma formosa (...) Un assoluto equilibrio tra l’essere estetico e le sue possibilità. Bella che mangia. Magra e mai a dieta” (29). A state of the art toy always available to play: “Una donna perfetta quella che ha sempre fame, che non digiuna, che non è mai a dieta, che vive gioiosa il suo atout con il cibo. Che è piacere, massimo e supremo” (57).

Another urgent issue in the current society regarding the female’s body is the problem of anorexia. The author chooses to talk about it using the experience of inspector Vergani and three young victims of the disease, Anna, Chiara and Giulia in *Ti voglio credere*. In this last novel, the alternation of points of view in the narration creates a nuanced representation of the psyche of the anorexic girls. The alternation of a third person and a first person narrator, in fact, serves multiple purposes: to dig deeper in Vergani’s character when in first person, and to criticize and denounce anorexia.

In *Io ti perdono* the narrator explains the dynamics of her disease:

Inizì facendo piccoli scongiuri. Calpestando le linee tra una piastrella e l’altra. Toccando tre volte la porta di casa. Trattenendo il fiato per tutti i minuti possibili. Bevendo fino a mezzo litro d’acqua di seguito. E i fioretti. Niente dolci. Niente cioccolato per una settimana, poi un mese, infine un anno. Niente pasta. Niente pane. Niente cibo colorato. Niente. E si abbruttiva. Capelli legati. Pantaloni larghi. Maglioni ingombranti. (58)

What's more, she relates to the young victims because she has been an anorexic herself. In the courses of the series, the readers learn that she is an "anoressica sotto controllo" (*Io ti perdono* 245) and that a part of her problems derives from events happened in her past. When she was a child, she revealed, unintentionally, information about her dad's schedule to a terrorist group who was planning to kidnap him. Later, at 18, she was told she has been adopted, but she was never told the identity of her biological mother and father. Finally, at the beginning of her career as a psychiatrist, she made a serious mistake because of her pride and ambition. When a young patient of hers, Valeria Rella, confessed to her that she wanted to kill her boyfriend after he cheated on her, Vergani did not report her to her supervisors. When Rella committed the crime, Vergani was suspended and then started her career in the police. She developed a strong sense of guilt related to these events. The sense of fear and of guilt for her involuntary involvement with the criminal group was influential in her developing anorexia. Her sense of guilt and inadequateness encompasses also the incident with her former patient. Connected to these events and feelings is the issue of forgiveness. In fact, in *Io ti perdono* and *Ti voglio credere* the theme of forgiveness relates to the events and the characters of the plot and to her personal life: "Il perdono a se stessa che non riusciva a concedersi. Per la sua presunzione. Il perdono alla madre che non l'aveva voluta. Il perdono ai genitori che avevano scandito le sue verità come meglio pareva loro" (*Io ti perdono* 213). Vergani cannot forgive her parents for not telling her the truth about her adoption; she cannot forgive herself for her professional mistake as a therapist. For these reasons, she punishes herself. Eventually, she stopped, because she got scared of what she has become and so she started eating again (*Ti voglio credere* 258). However, in *Ti voglio credere* when she

is under house arrest, she starts smoking and losing weight again: “Peso meno di cinquanta chili. (...) Non mangio quasi niente (*Ti voglio credere* 9). The illustration of Vergani’s own anorexic experience is not sensationalistic or pathetic: her reflections give a realistic representation of the disease: “Comunque non si guarisce mai. Poco o tanto la fissazione ti rimane, se non era feroce da ucciderti è lì, sempre in agguato. Appena c’è qualcosa che non va, arriva” (*Ti voglio credere* 259). The story of the three victims expresses the issue of violence in a twofold way: their self-violence and the abuse by the doctor of the private clinic where they were hospitalized. The self-violence is described by the third person narrator: “Chiara non ha mestruazioni. Neanche ciglia. Le strappa una a una. Le tiene per poco tra l’indice e il pollice della mano destra, esprime un desiderio. Sempre lo stesso. *Specchio, specchio delle mie brame, chi è la più bella del reame?*” (*Ti voglio credere* 86); “La bocca è una porta. Tra il fuori e il dentro. Il sopra e il sotto. È riuscita a rigettare capelli, chiodi, aghi” (*Ti voglio credere* 99). To add more realism and raise the consciousness, the author reports the words of anorexic girls who write on the clinic’s website, as Miriam’s: “Sono una ragazza di 21 anni, l’incubo del cibo mi perseguita. Dall’età di 14 anni sono in lotta con il mondo o meglio con me stessa per essere magra, magrissima, per essere quello che non potrò mai essere”(177).

Another theme addressed through the inspector’s experience is domestic violence. Vergani is in a relationship with Conti, a policeman of the Italian Central Security Operation Service (Nocs). The relationship is problematic because of his bad temper. Vergani fell for Conti, probably dazzled by his ideal image representing the strong, macho male: “[t]iene il ruolo atavico di maschio” (*Ti voglio credere* 94). The narrator describes him in stereotypical and ironic terms: “forte. Protettivo. Determinato. Occhio-



braccio. Lo sguardo e l'azione. Con la divisa dei corpi speciali. Con la pistola e la licenza di usarla. Con le missioni ad alto rischio. E anche la moto. E poi i capelli. Una chioma folta di ricci. E i Ray Ban" (*Ti voglio credere* 93).

If Conti may represent the expectations that a man needs to fulfill, according to society, (he looks "rassicurante", *Io ti perdono* 50), his personality and behavior show features that would not be called ideal. In fact, he is "[i]rascibile, sanguigno" (*Ti voglio credere* 94) and violent. He shows up unannounced at Vergani's place and he is the one who decides what to do for them. Vergani hates not having control of her life.

Eventually, with an uncanny twist of the plot, she learns that she has been abused by him, although, because of a memory lapse, she does not remember it. She suspects he did it out of jealousy after he discovered her email correspondence with a colleague of hers.

One could speculate that her not remembering the violence could mean her effort to deny what happened, in an attempt to avoid to face it. However, in the last novel, they have a harsh argument and she leaves him. This event is significant because she realizes that she has started to change: "L'aggressività che finalmente riesco a rendere azione. I gesti che non avrei mai compiuto prima. La rabbia che mi riconosco. Questo mi fa pensare che sto cambiando pelle" (*Ti voglio credere* 236). The growth of the character throughout the series makes it unconventional, as Vergani is not a fixed character in a literature genre. In fact, the author manages to make her more credible and realistic with her gradual change and awareness.

### **Milan, an urban monster**

Bucciarelli makes Milan a prominent character of her series and explores the

issues of the evolving condition of a post-industrial city. She reinforces the notion of Milan's dark side describing the city as a sick world. Overall, the readers are given an image of the city as a monstrous creature, with multiple faces and of its inhabitants as mutating creatures. The depiction of the city in these terms is connected to the society she describes in her novels. The author represents the Milanese upper class and their snobbish world of fashionable bars and art galleries, and depicts the members of their society whose values are money, opulence, and ephemeral fashion. Moreover, her criticism focuses on the obsessive attention towards appearance, the abuse and the mistreatment of the female body, a commodity that becomes a luxury item or waste product, symbol of the frantic cult for perfection.

The city of Milan has been the protagonist of Italian crime fiction since its starting point with Augusto De Angelis's Commissario De Vincenzi and his investigations in Milan in the 1930s (Pieri, "Milano nera" 124). In the 1960s, Giorgio Scerbanenco established the image of Milan as a noir city, "reinforcing the idea that the *Milano nera* is the ideological mirror of the whole country" (Pieri, "Milano nera" 124). A number of crime writers in the 1990s such as "Pietro Colaprico ... Pietro Valpreda ... Andrea G. Pinketts ... and Sandrone Dazieri" (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 8) established the city as the "Italian capital of crime" (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 8). Bucciarelli continues in this tradition, and highlights the evolution of Milan as "the locus of isolation, alienation and criminality" (Pieri, "Milano nera" 123), portraying a hallucinated image of the city in the early twenty-first century. As Pezzotti highlights, "Milan is a place where changes occur sooner and faster than in the rest of the country" (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 7). Historically, the city "has always been the prototype of the modern city born from the

Industrial revolution” (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 7). Milan has been the industrial center of the country since the 1960s, when the economic boom attracted massive immigration from the southern regions of Italy. After a process of deindustrialization, the city transformed, in the 1980s, into the capital of “service industries, fashion, stock market, investment banking, private television and advertising” (Pieri, “Milano nera” 123-124). The label given to the city in those years, *Milano da bere*<sup>12</sup> reflects the “new values of the decade: Milan was the city of the yuppies and the nouveaux riches, of political and economic corruption, and the stronghold of Bettino Craxi, the Milanese Socialist leader, who made the city his political and economic power base” (Pieri, “Milano nera” 124). The political scandal of Bribesville (*Tangentopoli*) in 1992, resulted from the investigation into the involvement of politicians and business in a network of bribes and corruption, transformed the city again, rechristened as *Milano da rubare*<sup>13</sup> (‘Milan to steal’). In the following years, Milan became Silvio Berlusconi’s city because of his large housing developments and advertising agency, and the establishment of his private television networks (Pieri, “Milano nera” 124).

The presence of Milan as a character in Bucciarelli’s novels begins in the first book of the series, *Happy Hour*. Here the narrator describes one of the most common habits of Italian social life, the *aperitivo al bar*, but the narrator’s comment does not portray it as a means to interact within the community. In fact, for the narrator, *happy hour* is considered a ritual of alienation, self-deception and illusion:

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<sup>12</sup> It is an advertising slogan of a drink, which can be translated literally as “Milano is good enough to drink” (Pieri, “Milano nera” 124).

<sup>13</sup> Marco Travaglio, *Passaparola* 21 February 2011, collected in *Silenzio si ruba*, Milano: Chiarelettere, 2011.

È questo che l'happy hour vuole, meglio di uno spot: sono il porto sicuro, il tuo punto di riferimento, l'unica speranza che si presenti nella tua grigia esistenza, proprio davanti ai tuoi occhi, l'uomo giusto per te, la principessa dei tuoi sogni, l'incontro che ti cambierà la vita, la soluzione di tutti i tuoi problemi; vieni da me e non ti sentirai mai solo..." (129)

Moreover, the author underscores the metropolis as a dissociated and unrecognizable place: "Milano è un mutante, ricicla e trasforma, esaspera gli oppressi sbagliati e condanna i criminali fasulli. Elastica e collaborativa, non ha più basi fisse, non ha più nomi certi, né carrieristi del crimine" (112), stressing the alienation and the deceptiveness of the city, where justice does not take place. Also, Milan is described as a sick, rotten, place: "Le finestre a Milano servono a prendere luce, ma aria no. E' malata, chiassosa, molesta" (*Io ti perdono* 36); "Scorre il Lambro. Movimento semicupo, lento e sinuoso. Ricettacolo degli scarichi di undici milioni di abitanti. I resti di sé, gli avanzi putrescenti di una giornata sbagliata" (*Ti voglio credere* 95-96) and, finally, as a threatening place: "Milano è una trappola. Chi la conosce lo sa. E la evita" (*Io ti perdono* 238). Furthermore, the author reveals another aspect of the depiction of the city. In fact, she is anthropomorphically represented as a "signora" (*Ti voglio credere* 262) and a "donnaccia" (*Io ti perdono* 238), a place that charms and attracts its citizens to eventually discard them after having used them:

Si lascia accarezzare i fianchi, Milano. Massaggiare i piedi, i polpacci, le cosce. Pettinare i lunghi capelli. Si fa cospargere di olio profumato, voluttuosa e desiderata. Munge i parvenu incapaci di scegliere. Non

svende certo le fanciulle bene ma le veline d'importazione. (...) Milano ti culla se la sai volere. Ti abbraccia se le dai rispetto e soprattutto ti sostiene se ti riconosce. Ma se la sfrutti, bada a te, la pagherai. Prima o poi ti espelle, come un foruncolo, una cisti, uno stronzo. (*Io ti perdono* 238)

For Bucciarelli, the Milan of the years 2000 is the ultimate symbol of a sick, dissociated, schizophrenic, society that has long lost any sign of humanity.

### **Stylistic experimentations**

Elisabetta Bucciarelli's series on Inspector Vergani presents a markedly original style. Her novels create suspense and social resonance not only through compelling crime plots but also through choice of style. The style is key in depicting a certain part of society, to convey depth to the characters and to add the author's social commentary. It is characterized by a intertextualized lexicon, figures of speech, multiple narrators and irony. The linguistic mixes are made of words and expressions from foreign languages, mainly English with some French, colloquial words and dialect, citations from literature and poetry, songs and art. The author models a composite style according to the theme and the place of the novel.

In *Dalla parte del torto* (2007), the author uses long sentences with English words, elements from popular culture, movies, television and expressions of colloquial language as well as words from art to portray the Milanese upper class society of entrepreneurs, artists, art galleries, art exhibitions, and fashionable clubs. This elaborate lexicon is considered to be fashionable and indicative of a wealthy, cosmopolitan society:

“Inga very intelligent” (52), “Allora, cosa intendi fare con il baby-Nocs?, it’s the final question” (112), “(...) Ultime opere esposte: zampe di gallina spelate e inchiodate al legno. Is it contemporary art?”(119) and “Se tu frequentassi un pò questo *ambient-Chelsea-contemporary-attitude* ti renderesti conto che il travestitismo è veramente *cool!*” (*Dalla parte del torto* 268). Also, a twirl of seemingly disconnected sentences is used to depict a materialistic and superficial society: “E siccome la vita è una crazy jungle, il coltello è stretto tra i denti, la tigre Sherekan avanza silenziosa, Sandokan è un serial finito, vale il mors tuo vita mea più del porgi l’altra guancia” (*Dalla parte del torto* 184). The sentences contribute to give the sense of superficiality and self-absorption of those who overpower other people in order to pursue their own interest.

Furthermore, the author uses citations from the cinema to show that Inspector Vergani is quite the opposite of the tough, rough policeman and that she does not use gratuitously her fists but, rather, her brains. In *Happy hour*, in fact, a specific title of a movie is borrowed when saying that Inspector Vergani does not use guns: “Dal braccio violento della legge partirebbe un pugno in pieno viso e altri a seguire, ma visto che l’ispettore è una femmina questo non succede” (*Happy hour* 40). *Il braccio violento della legge* is the Italian title of the 1971 movie by William Friedkin *The French Connection*. The movie is a crime drama about two policemen from New York investigating the traffic of heroine and stars Oscar winner Gene Hackman as the typical tough cop who deploys violence to in his job.

In *Femmina de luxe* (2008), and especially in the last two novels, *Io ti Perdono* and *Ti voglio credere*, the style of the narration changes: the sentences are shorter and

very often become noun phrases. The tone of the narration is laconic, yet still rich in nuances to depict the Milanese hinterland in order to show societal change:

Periferie e hinterland. Paesi semiconosciuti. Le nuove avanguardie dell'high society metropolitana (...) L'uscita dalla città permette di mostrare i rombanti gioielli di famiglia. In tutti i sensi. Macchine lustre che possono sfrecciare sulla Paulese, sulla Rivoltana, sulla Milano-Bergamo. Le nuove geografie della metropoli segnalano i ristoranti di paese, e puntano a farne nuove cattedrali del piacere. (*Io ti perdono* 169)

The other feature of Bucciarelli's style is the change of point of view in *Io ti perdono* and *Ti voglio credere* to focus the attention on Vergani's interior struggle. Especially important is when the third person narrator switches to first person narrator and conveys directly the thoughts of the character. She is also tormented by the search for the truth about her assault and her crime: did she intentionally kill the perpetrator as an act of personal justice or was she just defending herself? Which is the truth? The one created by her lawyer for her defense or her scattered memories of the event?: "(...) Mi sono girata. Forse non volevo guardare la morte in faccia. Mi sono girata. Una volta sola. D'istinto. Ho colpito. Un gesto nuovo. L'ho fatto. Ho estratto dalla tasca il coltello e l'ho affondato nella carne. Fino in fondo. E la mano e il sangue si sono incontrati. Ho ammazzato. Tolto la vita. Ma a chi?" (*Ti voglio credere* 12), and again "Io non voglio mentire. Azzeriamo il discorso. La verità è che credo di non aver inferto una coltellata per legittima difesa. Quella donna si stava avvicinando, forse mi avrebbe aggredita, ma io non posso dirlo. Neanche posso dire che quell'uomo ha sparato per legittima difesa (...)

Questa è la mia verità e devo negarla? Anzi: ometterla?” (*Ti voglio credere* 79). In this way, the narration becomes more realistic and engages the readers in her inner reflections and doubts.

Finally, the narrator employs irony to comment on Vergani and on society with the aim to counterbalance the violence and the dramatic murders of the novels, as well as to depict a more realistic representation. The inspector is constantly one of the main targets of the narrator’s irony. With the narrator’s ironic comments on her weaknesses and faults, the readers have a more realistic portrait of the character and can sympathize with her. The inspector is acknowledged to be smart and to have intuition but the irony makes her more human commenting her faults and weaknesses, such as her vanity, her sense of competition with other women, and her fastidiousness. Her vanity is shown in *Dalla parte del torto*, when her assistant Funi tells her that he has been questioned by a policeman of the *Nocs* squad (the Italian counter-terrorism unit) who wanted to know her age, her marital status, and so on (211). Funi tells her that he answered his questions, but Vergani, who has always been very careful on information regarding her age and private life, asks Funi: «Le ha anche chiesto quanti anni ho?» and the narrator makes an ironic comment: “femmina, femmina, vaga e vezzosa” (211). Here the narrator mocks the Inspector for her wanting to know if Funi revealed her age. The noun, “femmina”, and the adjectives used, “vaga” and “vezzosa”, seem to act as a criticism towards her vanity, following the stereotype that a woman is supposed to be superficial because she cares for her looks. However, it seems to me that the choice of words shows a layered meaning: the narrator is mocking her using the patriarchal language, but is it not a real criticism because it is not said in a negative way.



In fact, although the inspector's attention for her physical appearance is present in all the novels (she uses anti-aging face lotions, she has energizing and regenerating oil baths), it is not addressed as an obsessive unhealthy care for her body. Other instances, instead, show how the narrator criticizes her behavior, for example, when her insecurity and competitiveness with other women appears in *Io ti perdono* when she refers to Carmen, a younger policewoman of her unit, she calls her by a depreciating word, "la Mongola", thus diminishing her intelligence to punish her for her good looks. "La Mongola" comes from "mongoloid" and it is used in colloquial language with a rather offensive meaning because it is used to describe people with Down's syndrome and has the derogatory meaning of 'idiot'. The woman does not have Down's syndrome; Vergani is just being mean because she is probably jealous that men notice her for her looks. For this reason the narrator expresses their criticism of Vergani calling her "Aspide Vergani" (Vergani the asp viper) referring to the malice of her tongue, which is venomous like an asp viper (183).

Another trait of Vergani's personality, her being punctilious with the proper use of the Italian language, is criticized by the narrator when she corrects her colleague on the correct use of a verb. In *Io ti perdono*, Vergani corrects inspector Corsari because he uses the verb 'sentire' (to feel) the tv news show instead of 'ascoltare' (to listen to): Corsari calls her on the phone and says "Ciao Vergani, sono Corsari. Lo stai sentendo?" referring to the tv news. Vergani answers "In ascolto dall'inizio, ma *sentendo* no, direi di no, non riesco a sentire quello che prova"(37). The narrator comments after her answer "sempre attenta alle parole", but later in the story, the narrator calls her "maestrina" (97), using this word which sounds like "little teacher" to criticize Vergani's pedantic attitude.

## **Conclusions**

Elisabetta Bucciarelli has created a series on a woman detective whose investigations address a number of issues regarding the status of women in contemporary Italian society. Among these, the manipulation of the female body is a major concern.

Bucciarelli's female inspector Maria Dolores Vergani is not painted after the American tradition of female detectives, nor is a female version of the male detective. With her flaws and merits, she seems, indeed, a more realistic representation of a contemporary woman. Elisabetta Bucciarelli thus innovates Italian crime fiction, with a woman detective that embodies female agency, providing her reader with visions of empowerment.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**HISTORICAL DETECTIVE FICTION: CARLO LUCARELLI AND LUCIANO**  
**MARROCU**

In the 1990s Italian crime novels investigated a number of issues concerning the new political and social climate that the country faced at the end of the traditional party system and the corruption scandals of *Mani Pulite*. Detective fiction is currently employed not only as a means to assure the interest of the readers, fulfilling their expectations, but also as a particular device through which authors are able to conduct historical investigations, to explore the context for a sense of identity in the complexities of contemporary society. As Giuliana Pieri maintains,

Postmodern noir and detective writers in Italy (...) have taken it upon themselves to expose the evils of contemporary society, tackling issues such as immigration, the increasing violence of Italian society, social exclusion, youth subcultures, together with the revision of the darkest periods of recent Italian history, with a particular focus on the Fascist regime, the rise of extreme right-wing movements, and the terrorism of the 1970s and early 1980s. (Pieri 194)

Fictional narratives are ideally suited to capture the ambiguities and the pluralities of reality. Carlo Lucarelli's works are one of the most representative of this recent tendency, "stimulating interplay between real crimes and fiction in a way that has a particular relevance when in the context of *impegno*" (Pieri 194).

As scholar Luca Somigli points out, novels set during Fascism have to cope with events that happened in a period of time that is still being questioned (Somigli, “The Realism of Detective Fiction” 8). As a matter of fact, it seems that the development of this peculiar type of narrative takes place at the same time as “the recent so-called ‘revisionist’ debate on the interpretation of Fascism and the Resistance” (Somigli, “The Realism of Detective Fiction” 8) occurs. Since the 1990s, historical moments such as Fascism and the Resistance have been prominent themes in contemporary detective fiction, starting with Lucarelli’s *Carta Bianca*, published in 1990, and continued after him by the historian and writer Luciano Marrocu (and also by Corrado Augias and Edoardo Angelino, among others)<sup>14</sup>. The historical setting of their novels is relevant to the context of the country’s historical ‘revisionist’ debate of the 1990s, when public opinion was polarized by the controversial debate on the historiography of Fascism and of the Resistance. According to Somigli, this fact is more than a mere coincidence. The critic argues that some historical detective fiction has participated 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” (Somigli, “Trends” 9). As in Lucarelli’s *Carta bianca*, the detectives of these historical fictions “articulate those very same ethical issues that the revisionist debate has attempted to call into question” (Somigli, “Trends” 9-10).

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<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of Augias’ and Angelino’s novels see Luca Somigli. “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista: note sul revisionismo storico e il giallo contemporaneo” in *Il romanzo poliziesco. La storia, la memoria*. Ed. Claudio Milanese. Bologna: Astrapia, 2009. 79-92.

## **A past that is not past yet**

For the past 20 years, Italy has been continuing to re-examine its modern history, namely: “Fascism, Communism, anti-fascism and anti-communism, national identity and identities, the constitution and constitutional patriotism, the Resistance, the party system” (Orsina 77). What has been called the ‘revisionist’ debate focused on the reconsideration of the value of the Resistance in the creation of the Republic, and on the view that would equalize fascism and anti-fascism. A major role was played by the historian Renzo De Felice and his monumental works on Mussolini (1965-1997). Despite the great contribution that his work has made to the history of Fascism, it has nonetheless ignited a long controversy with the antifascist historiography, nourished by the media and the author’s interviews. The debate stoked by De Felice’s inclination to downplay the role of the Resistance and anti-fascism in the history of the country, and arguing, instead,

la negazione di responsabilità dirette del fascismo italiano nello sterminio degli ebrei; una ricostruzione della politica estera e coloniale fascista che ne attenua le connotazioni aggressive ed eversive dell’ordine internazionale; un riesame dei diversi aspetti dell’operato di Mussolini quale uomo di governo e ‘statista’, [...] giungendo per questa via a valutazioni spesso benevole e giustificative del suo operato.

(Santomassimo 555)

One of the most animated aspects of the debate dealt with the moment of the constitution of the Republic, the Liberation from Nazi-fascism. The argument initiated after Ernesto Galli della Loggia’s publication in 1996 of *La morte della patria* (The death of the

fatherland). He claimed that “the armistice between Italy and the Allies, declared on 8 September 1943 marked the ‘death of the fatherland’ in Italy, i.e. a lethal crisis of national identity” (Orsina 83). According to Della Loggia, the armistice with the Allies caused the loss of the sense of patriotism and the failure of the Resistance and anti-fascism to create national identity, because “it was forced to rely on the Allies, making the ‘deliverance’ of the Italian nation dependent of foreign armies” (Orsina 83).

With time, the revisionist debate has concentrated more on a “prospettiva sul passato molto più precisa e meno neutrale, in cui ciò che importa non è tanto l’accuratezza della ricostruzione storica quanto le implicazioni politiche dell’interpretazione” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 82-83). The outcome of these publications was a mitigated image of Fascism. As Somigli points out, this led to the “rilettura del ventennio fascista come momento di modernizzazione della nazione e di dittatura *soft*” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 83). These views have been shared and amplified by the former Prime Minister Berlusconi, to the extent that in various circumstances, he has given a distorted view of Mussolini. In an interview with the British newspaper *The Spectator* in 2003, for example, Berlusconi appeared to defend Mussolini and his dictatorship, saying that it

[It] was a much more benign dictatorship – Mussolini did not murder anyone. Mussolini sent people on holiday to confine them [banishment to small islands such as Ponza and Maddalena which are now exclusive resorts].’ This, though extraordinary, is more or less true. Unlike the Russian communists, the Italian Fascists did not use mass murder to retain power. There was no need. You see, Mussolini – until he started losing

battles – was very popular. (Farrell “Why being called mad by Berlusconi”)

Some historians argue that these declarations were made in conjunction with his electoral campaign. According to Giovanni Orsina, after Berlusconi’s entry into politics, there developed a “political use of history” (Orsina 80) aimed to rehabilitate the post-fascist party and so to legitimize and support the post neo-fascist components (National Alliance) of his political coalition. In fact, since 1994, Berlusconi’s party *Forza Italia* has been allied with the heir of the fascist MSI, the *Alleanza Nazionale*. The fascist party of Mussolini, which in the new Republic was reorganized in the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), found new life after the political turbulence of the *Mani pulite* scandals under the leadership of Gianfranco Fini. In 1994 Fini renamed the party *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) and fostered a more democratic image, “strategically softening its fascist overtones” (Shin and Agnew 49) and entering in Berlusconi’s center-right coalition. Fini criticized Mussolini’s alliance with Hitler and the racial laws, and visited Israel and Auschwitz. Fascism was depicted as a softer dictatorship “which left much of the liberal bureaucracy in place, made peace with the Catholic Church and did not share Hitler’s obsession with racism and the Jews” (Stille 298).

The revisionist debate was supported by the myth of *il bravo italiano* that has been used to excuse them from the responsibility of war crimes. In particular, it promoted the idea of the difference of the Italian Fascism from the German Nazifascism (Focardi, “The Questions of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 336). According to historian Angelo Del Boca, this myth originated during the Italian colonial experience, in order to deny and avoid

responsibility for their massacres and use of toxic gas (Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* 101). The idea of a good and humanitarian Italian colonialism was nurtured. However, the myth finally collapsed in February 1996 when the Ministry of Defense admitted to using of poison gas in Africa. The *bravo italiano* is a good, common man, “untainted by fascism, including its shameful racist policies, and in fact a victim of fascism and the war itself” (Patriarca 189). Filippo Focardi, one of the historians who have recently published works on the Italian atrocities during WWII, maintains that the creation of this myth was produced in different contexts:

le diverse culture politiche dell’antifascismo unite nell’esaltazione della lotta del popolo italiano contro l’«oppressore tedesco e il traditore fascista»; la galassia della destra anti-fascista impegnata a tracciare la più netta distinzione possibile fra Hitler e il «buonuomo Mussolini», [...] gli apparati dello Stato, coinvolti in pieno nella tragica avventura mussoliniana a fianco del Terzo Reich – in primis, ministero degli Esteri e ministero della Guerra - , solerti nello scaricare sulle spalle dell’ex alleato germanico (oltre che sul duce) il peso quasi esclusivo della responsabilità per la condotta bellica dell’Asse, con i suoi insuccessi e le sue pratiche criminali. (Focardi, *Il cattivo tedesco e il bravo italiano* 180)

From the armistice on September 8, 1943 to 1948, the anti-fascist authorities elaborated an account of the war that would “mark deeply the historical conscience of the country and the national self-image” (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s crimes” 330). They sought to persuade the Allies that Italians were their anti-fascist, democratic co-



belligerents and that they themselves were victims of Mussolini and not complicit in his policy (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s crimes” 336) in order to “obscure the responsibilities of those who had supported the dictator’s rise to power (and who were still in power)” (Patriarca 190). Therefore they began to create and diffuse the distinction between German and Italian criminals, considering the latter as not responsible for their crimes and the Italian people as mild, pacifist, good-hearted and seeing the “Italian people and soldiers as innocent victims” (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 336). In particular, in those years, the expression ‘bravo italiano’ indicated the Italian soldier victim of Nazi fascism, and was opposed to the one of the ‘bad German’:

The image of the ‘bad German’, a fanatical warrior capable of every abomination, was contrasted to that of the ‘good Italian’, who was poorly equipped, catapulted against his will into a disastrous war, who, as a soldier, sympathized with the peoples of the invaded countries, helped them against hunger and misery by sharing with them the little they had and, above all, protected them from the abuses and violence of his German comrades in arms, thus saving many lives. (Focardi, “The Questions of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 336)

As Focardi argues, “The punitive will of the Allies towards Italian war criminals was extinguished after some initial trials by Anglo-Saxon military courts and with the advancement of the Cold War” (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 343). The lack of the trials for Italy, which has been defined as an ‘Italian Nuremberg’, “allowed for the development of an image that hinged on the misleading portrait if the

‘good Italians’ (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 343) who were seen as ‘the saviours of the Jews’ and the ‘defenders of the oppressed’ “but also as far less praiseworthy oppressors and assassins” (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 343). Over the years, the deceptive depiction of the *Italiani brava gente* has become an authentic identifying myth, which has continued to be proposed through the cinema: Giuseppe De Sanctis’ *Italiani brava gente* (1964) summarizes all the clichés regarding the Italian experience in Russia, and, as Focardi points out, Gabriele Salvatores’ famous *Mediterraneo* (1991) “paints a free and easy portrait of Italian soldiers in Greece as boisterous soccer players” (Focardi, “The question of Fascist Italy’s Crimes” 344).

### **Lucarelli and Marrocu do not forget the past**

If the Italian press and cinema have been promoting the myth of the *bravo italiano*, detective fiction has instead been participating in the debate by raising questions on the validity of such myth. In fact, the two authors I examine contribute to the destruction of the myth with their detective stories, which are set in the African colonies and during the Republic of Salò, the Resistance and the political elections after the war.

Lucarelli created the character of a fascist policeman, commissario De Luca, through whom he addresses the topic of justice in the chaos of Italy’s liberation by the Allies. His lack of a clear political position, working first for the fascist police, then for the *questura* and for the police of the new republic, makes him a rather controversial figure because he avoids expressing his political views, in order to save himself. The issue of justice is also addressed in the character of the fierce partisan leader Carcara,

who has been a torturer and killer of civilians as well as of fascist officers. In Lucarelli's trilogy, *Carta bianca* (1990), *L'Estate torbida* (1991), and *Via delle Oche* (1996), it is possible to note the particular quality of Italian crime fiction, namely, the "vocazione socioculturale" (Amrani 363), that has the author confront and raise questions on a moment of Italian history that has shaped the author's present. As Amrani puts it, De Luca's investigation could be seen as "il doppio dell'autore nelle vesti dello storico: una personificazione *en abyme* delle sue intenzioni investigative" (Amrani 364).

Marrocu puts the myth into question with the character of two OVRA<sup>15</sup> policemen, Carruezzo and Serra, who are sent to Ethiopia to investigate the death of a fascist secret agent. There they discover a world of racism and political corruption, and, during their investigation, they discover important facts about the massacre of Debrà Libanòs. A significant issue that Marrocu addresses is the one regarding African women, victims of Italian racist occupation and cruelties, thus contributing to the recent scholarly studies on the Italian crimes of violence on women during the occupation.

### **Lucarelli's commissario De Luca**

Carlo Lucarelli's historical detective novels that are set in Italy during the Fascist regime and in the aftermath of its fall are *Carta bianca* (1990), *L'Estate torbida* (1991), and *Via delle Oche* (1996). These three novels, which form the trilogy of commissario De Luca, are set in its final years, during the period of the *Repubblica of Salò* (*Carta*

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<sup>15</sup> OVRA is the "Organization for the Surveillance and Repression of Antifascism" (Ebner xv). A secret political police, OVRA "was entrusted with investigating, infiltrating, and ultimately quashing anti-Fascist movements" (Ebner 55) and "operated almost completely outside the law, effectively giving Mussolini a free hand over the state, the party, opponents, and dissenters" (Ebner 54). See Michael R. Ebner. *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Print.

*bianca*), during the Resistance (*L'estate torbida*), and the years following the end of the Resistance and the consolidation of the new political system (*Via delle Oche*). The crime novels featuring De Luca convey the author's meditation on guilt and innocence, and the involvement of crimes during Fascism and the Resistance. In *Carta Bianca*, commissario De Luca refuses the accusations of connivance with Fascism, claiming that he has no political alliances, repeatedly insisting that he is a *poliziotto* and that "non si chiedono scelte politiche ad un poliziotto, gli si chiede solo di fare bene il suo mestiere" (74). As Marco Sangiorgi interestingly points out, Lucarelli started off with his 1990 *Carta bianca* in the Sellerio series of books 'La Memoria', devised by Leonardo Sciascia (130), who was one of the first writers and intellectuals to devote himself to the preservation of the memory of historical events. In fact, Sciascia's first detective novel, *Il giorno della civetta* (1961) "heralded a turning point in the history of [Italy's] mystery fiction" (Welgen 30) because, by providing a lucid analysis of the role of Mafia within Italian society and institutions, it established the crime novel as a "powerful means of social and political commitment" (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 76) in order to "restore the truth and justice that are systematically denied in reality" (Di Ciolla 11). Sciascia is also the author of non-fiction *inchieste* on specific historical events, such as *L'affaire Moro* (1978), the pamphlet on the kidnapping and assassination of the Secretary of the Democratic Party by the terrorist group The Red Brigades.

'La Memoria' was not a series dedicated solely to the publication of detective novels, even though many other *gialli* (by Manuel Vazquez Montalban, James M. Cain, Wilkie Collins, etc) had already been published. However, Lucarelli's novel was the first Italian *giallo* to be published in a publishing project that remarked the historical and political

structure of his work (131). In the *Nota* to the De Luca trilogy, Lucarelli explains that the creation of the policeman came out of his previous research of the history of the Fascist police for his dissertation at the University of Bologna:

[E]ro andato ad intervistare un anziano signore che era stato in polizia dal 1941 al 1981, finché non era andato in pensione, e più o meno era stato sempre nelle varie squadre politiche, dall'Ovra, la polizia segreta di Mussolini, in poi ... c'è una cosa che mi colpisce ... perchè il mio maresciallo prima, in quanto *ovrino*, pedina, sorveglia e arresta comunisti e antifascisti. Poi – dopo una confusa parentesi nel periodo della Repubblica Sociale in cui si trova lui arrestato dagli alleati tedeschi – con una alchimia tutta italiana passa nella polizia partigiana ad arrestare ex fascisti, e qualche anno dopo nella polizia democristiana ad arrestare ex partigiani, e così via ... così mi è venuto spontaneo chiedergli: scusi, maresciallo, ma lei per chi vota? (10-11)

The man's answer, "Cosa c'entra, io sono un poliziotto" stimulates the writer's reflection, because "ci sono momenti storici in cui anche una non scelta diventa una scelta di parte, soprattutto se ha comportato azioni e conseguenze" (11). So this motivated Lucarelli to create a character based on the policeman he met, who has been involved, despite himself, in the political situations he did not want to come to terms with. It is my opinion that De Luca's character contributes to debunking the myth of the *bravo italiano*, which has informed Italian postwar identity and still does. De Luca seems to embody the passivity and the lack of commitment, which are some of the aspects of Italian national

character. The commissario De Luca, former police chief of the Brigata «Ettore Muti», special section of the Political Police, is presented in each novel as one of the best detectives of the Italian police. He boasts: “sono stato il più giovane ispettore della Questura italiana. Leggevo Gaborieau, i racconti di Poe, la Rue Morgue...” (*L'estate torbida* 174). This devotion and his erudition make him as kind of intellectual detective, rather than the ideal of physical force and masculinity.

De Luca follows the rule of “impersonalità e obiettività: non giudica gli assassini e i loro moventi, non è il suo compito e non gli interessa neppure (in questi momenti sospende il suo giudizio sul mondo, insegue una sua impersonalità e perfezione di strumento), si limita a scoprirli e braccarli” (Sangiorgi, “Il fascismo e il giallo italiano” 132). De Luca does not want to be involved in political issues, making his profession as *poliziotto* a shield that prevents him from taking political positions. In *L'estate torbida* is set in 1945, in the chaos following the collapse of the regime and the reprisals of the government officers by the new police. In the Emilia Romagna countryside, the fugitive De Luca is rescued by Brigadiere Leonardi, a member of the Partisan Police, who saves him from death by hiding his true identity from the Resistance fighters executing the previous government's employees. In this novel De Luca stresses his own ethics of being devoted only to catching criminals, without being involved in political issues, which, he thinks, are outside his jurisdiction. He declares, “C'è stato l'8 settembre, il Questore si è imboscato e io sono rimasto a reggere la Questura per due giorni, io e un agente e basta, finchè non sono arrivati i tedeschi e con loro Rassetto. Così sono finito in un ufficio che funzionava, a fare di nuovo il poliziotto, per davvero, come prima. C'è da risolvere un

caso, da trovare qualcuno? Io lo risolvo e io lo trovo”(179), as he had already stated in *Carta bianca*:

Quando mi hanno chiamato nella sezione speciale della Muti ci sono andato subito, di corsa. Perché là si lavorava bene, capisci? [...] Là era tutto efficientissimo, c'erano gli investigatori migliori, gli schedari migliori, c'erano fondi ... Da sempre è così il mestiere del poliziotto ed è quello che ho sempre fatto io. Non si chiedono scelte politiche ad un poliziotto, gli si chiede solo di fare bene il suo mestiere. (74)

De Luca does not, or does not want to, grasp the ethical value of his choices; he does not discern the responsibility of his involvement. As a matter of fact, his previous affiliation is with the Political Police:

rimarrà (...) come un marchio d'infamia, un peccato d'origine che non mancherà di produrgli seri problemi, ma soprattutto, ne esemplifica il carattere ambiguo: (...) Privo di ideologia, in un tempo che si caratterizza come assolutamente ideologico, persegue un comportamento professionale dove le regole non siano dettate dalla contingenza sociale e storica, ma dalla normale e consuetudinaria repressione degli atti criminali. (Sangiorgi, “Il fascismo e il giallo italiano”131)

In *Via delle Oche*, at the eve of the 1948 elections, De Luca, demoted and assigned to vice squad in Bologna, is involved, despite himself, in political issues that again interfere with the solving of his case, a murder in a brothel. In this novel, too, De Luca is again

presented as a common man, an individual who wishes to do his job but finds himself trapped in the web of political schemes. In fact, at the background of subtle, powerful forces that work against the election of a communist government, De Luca still reveals stubbornly his ethics: “Non me ne frega niente se mi usano! Io sono un poliziotto, Pugliese, faccio il poliziotto e sto con chi mi permette di fare il mio mestiere!” (249). De Luca is not a mean man, but, however, he does not seem totally innocent as well, because he fails to understand that his avoidance of taking position does not make him as less responsible than those who participated in the tortures without hesitation. Therefore, his helplessness in distinguishing between the demands of his job and the ethical values that each person should have make him an ambiguous character, one that is always between the shadows of innocence and responsibility. These characteristics foster the readers’ interest for him, instead of quickly condemning him. Lucarelli thus created the character of an ordinary man, with his fears and weaknesses, a man who is physically debilitated as he suffers from insomnia and stomachache<sup>16</sup>, an ‘antihero’ as we can find many in Italian literature. Sangiorgi compares De Luca to Don Abbondio, arguing that:

Del pavidò sacerdote manzoniano De Luca mantiene il reverenziale timore degli eventi storici calamitosi e funesti, di fronte ai quali appare indifeso, disarmato. E’ decisamente un anti-eroe spaurito e tormentato, perseguitato dall’angoscia che gli chiude lo stomaco di fronte al cibo e gli impedisce di dormire; è un uomo che non riesce mai a rilassarsi, perchè conscio del pericolo che lo minaccia. (“Il fascismo e il giallo italiano” 133)

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<sup>16</sup> Sangiorgi lists all his physical impediments: “acciacchi, disturbi, sintomatologie, sudorazioni, nausea, batticuore, svenimenti, emissioni di sangue dal naso di fronte a scene violente, inappetenza, insonnia, ipersensibilità.” Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, eds. *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2001.134



The parallel is undoubtedly correct, although, as Sangiorgi again remarks, what differentiates them is “il valore assoluto e insindacabile che [De Luca] attribuisce al proprio mestiere, a volte anche a scapito della propria incolumità personale” (“Il fascismo e il giallo italiano” 133). De Luca “tenta di chiamarsi fuori dal conflitto, ritenendosi al di sopra della battaglia politica” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 86), and justifies his actions continuously repeating that they were “motivate dalle sue responsabilità professionali” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 86) as policeman. However, this makes him blind from realizing that, for the partisans, he is an enemy “da eliminare alla prima occasione” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 87).

His continual avoidance also makes him weak and less virile – not the perfect embodiment of the Fascist man. The antiheroic characteristics of De Luca recall also those of another policeman of the history of Italian detective fiction, Antonio Sarti, the *questurino* created by Lorian Macchiavelli. Suffering from colitis, Antonio Sarti, does not represent, as De Luca, the typical tough policeman, but both express their impossibility of accepting completely the impositions and the injustices that come from their authorities. However, as Sangiorgi points out, Lucarelli’s aim is not to stimulate laughter, as Macchiavelli inevitably does with Sarti, since the author

sembra voler sottolineare piuttosto la normalità del personaggio (...), il suo non essere distinguibile dalla massa di italiani nel periodo storico di cui si sta parlando. Uno come molti, cioè, compromesso con il regime ma senza colpe né responsabilità particolari: ‘Mai torturato nessuno, mai visto torturare nessuno ... non ci crede? Creda un pò quello che vuole. Non sono

stato nella squadra politica perché ero fascista, lo ero come lo erano tanti, non me ne fregava niente'. (134)

With these last declarations, the author depicts the image of many Italians who were not committed but attempted to avoid the encumbrance of assuming responsibility. However, as the author suggests, this behavior does not make them innocent; as Somigli remarks, it is instead “una cecità conscia e deliberata che, ben lontana dall’assolvere il soggetto dalle sue responsabilità, lo coinvolge ancora di più nelle ingiustizie del regime” (Somigli, “Il poliziesco di ambientazione fascista” 87).

### **Marrocu’s Ovra policemen Carruezzo and Serra**

A historian and writer currently teaching history in Cagliari University, Marrocu has created the couple of Ovra policemen commissario Eupremio Carruezzo and his assistant Luciano Serra, who are featured in the novels: *Faulas* (2000), *Debrà Libanòs* (2002), *Scarpe rosse, tacchi a spillo* (2004), and *Il caso del croato morto ucciso* (2010). The novel I am going to examine here is *Debrà Libanòs*, because in my opinion it is particularly representative of the historian’s intention to dig into the recent past, and bring to light those obscure and voluntarily censored events of Italian history in African colonies that have been hidden and forgotten for too many years<sup>17</sup>. The events entail the Italian responsibility for the death of hundreds of people during the Italian invasion of

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<sup>17</sup> See Nicola Labanca. *Oltremare: Storia dell’espansione coloniale italiana*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002. 462-471.

Africa, and especially the gas bombings and the killing of innocent people in Ethiopia (Del Boca *I gas di Mussolini* 1-24)<sup>18</sup>.

Italian colonies in Africa included Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, which were known as *Africa Orientale Italiana*, (Italian East Africa), established in 1936, and Libya, which became an Italian colony in 1911. The Italian imperialistic adventure began in the 1880s when the Italian army arrived in Eritrea, and was intensified during the *Ventennio* by Mussolini. The commander in chief of the Royal Army, Rodolfo Graziani, a loyal supporter of Mussolini, led the Italian troops at the conquest of Somalia in 1935 (Del Boca *L’Africa nella coscienza degli Italiani* 304) and became famous for his fierce methods. In May 1936, Mussolini declared victory over Ethiopia and the constitution of the Italian Empire (Labanca 43). Ethiopians opposed to the invasion strongly, and in February 1937 two students attempted to Graziani’s life. As consequence of the assault, Graziani ordered a fierce retaliation, which included also the massacre of 449 monks in the monastery of Debrà Libanòs, because Graziani believed the monks helped the perpetrators of the attack (Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* 102). Officially, the casualties were reported to be 449, but in the 1990s,<sup>19</sup> it was discovered that they were much more: between 1423 and 2033 (Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente?* 103).

Like Lucarelli’s trilogy, the novel is a traditional detective story, which is set in Addis Abeba, Ethiopia, part of the *Africa Orientale Italiana*, after Graziani’s attempt to his life. Here the two policemen investigate the murder of an Ovrà officer, Bellassai, that occurred after the massacre of Debrà Libanòs. Parallel to the investigation of Carruezzo

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<sup>18</sup> See Angelo Del Boca. *I gas di Mussolini*. Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1996.

<sup>19</sup> By Professors Ian L. Campbell and Degife Gabre-Tsadik (Del Boca *Italiani, brava gente?* 103). See Angelo Del Boca, “Debrà Libanòs: una soluzione finale” in *Italiani, brava gente?* Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005.

and Serra is the depiction of colonial life in Addis Abeba, the behavior of the Italian *coloniali*, and, in particular, the portrait of indigenous women, who are the objects of desire of the Italian officers. In so doing, the novel exposes numerous aspects of the colonial discourse that the historian Giulietta Stefani articulated in *Colonia per maschi. Italiani in Africa Orientale: una storia di genere* (2007), the first study on Italian colonialism from the perspective of gender studies. Marrocu highlights the sexualized representation of the colonies and its inhabitants, thus contributing to emphasize the valorization of the ‘masculine’. Africa was perceived as a female body to conquer and a playground to strengthen the masculine identity. The beautiful, almost naked, disinhibited women represented for the colonial men a “paradiso dei sensi” (Stefani 108), but their ‘wildness’ and fascination were also perceived unsettling and dangerous by the male imagination (Stefani 108).

As commissario De Luca, Carruezzo and Serra do not fulfill the expectations that being a policeman of the regime may demand. On the contrary, far from representing Mussolini’s ideal of ‘uomo nuovo’, they appear confused, insecure and naive in their intentions of ‘discover the truth’ in times ruled by the regime’s firm hand. The Ovrà agents, seen as “eroi cinematografici, e come tali col privilegio di esistere solo nell’azione del film, senza quel fardello ... di mogli, pupi con l’influenza, suocere, cognate, pigioni arretrate” (20), by their colleagues in Italy, in many pages of the novel they are actually portrayed as devoid of heroism and virility, as are the Italian soldiers, who seem only to be *mammoni*. This comes out in the episode of the conversation between Serra and an English journalist who, having spent time in the colonies, draws his reflections on Italian colonial men. According to the English journalist, Italians are not apt to imperialistic

endeavors because, away from their families, they become nostalgic for their families and for their women. After the conversation with the journalist, Serra reflects on his words, and it is interesting to note his conclusions, as he says:

Forse aveva ragione il giornalista sul fatto che gli italiani lontano da casa morivano di nostalgia e che questo li rendeva inadatti a costruire imperi. Però non trovava così riprovevole che gli italiani fossero mammoni e sentimentali ... Ma erano così gli italiani? Ripensò a Debrà Libanòs e alla parziale ammissione di Carruezzo: gli italiani per quanto mammoni e sentimentali, potevano anche massacrare senza battere ciglio trecento monaci ... o ne avevano fatti fuori mille? Un paese di macellai, insomma, ma sempre con l'occhio inumidito al ricordo della mamma lontana. (84)

The policeman's thoughts clearly condemn the Italian massacre that he does not approve. Little by little Serra discovers the horrors of the Italian colonial experience, and feels like a stranger in that context: in fact, he is perceived as being "fuori posto [r]ispetto al mestiere di poliziotto, prima di tutto, ma anche qualcosa di più ... rispetto all'Italia di oggi" (144), and especially at the end of the novel, when Serra, transfigured by the events and by the reaction of the Italian authorities that do not want to acknowledge what happened in Debrà Libanòs, at the process he seems "un personaggio straniero, straniero all'Italia di ieri e a quella che stava nascendo" (147).

Moreover, the narrative structure helps giving voice to those characters who could not be able to express it, as for example, the African population and, in particular, African women. Italian soldiers are perceived as "demoni bianchi" (63) by the African

population, and not as those carriers of civilization, as stressed in Mussolini's colonial campaign. The women of the novel are important characters who are given the chance to speak and to express all their condemnation of Italian men. First of all, when Eulo Fracassi, introduces himself to the policemen of the African colonial cities, indigenous women are seen as objects always available for the Italian colonialist, as facilities of the colonial city:

Le migiurtine, signor Carruezzo! (...) prendete una migiurtina e non avrete di che pentirvene. Flessuose come giunchi e bellissime, ma anche capaci di badare alla casa e prepararvi un pranzo come si deve. Dovete, naturalmente, farle cucinare alla loro maniera. Come regola, poi, sceglietele che non sappiano parlare l'italiano e fate in modo che non lo imparino. Quando sanno la nostra lingua, tendono a comportarsi come mogliettine. Tanto vale, allora, prendersene una di casa nostra. Piuttosto, imparate voi qualche espressione in somalo, non più di qualche parola ... per quello che serve parlare, voi mi capite dottor Carruezzo! (12-13)

and again, forging also the image of the indigenous as animals to tame and domesticate:

Certo, ad avvicinarsi troppo alle indigene c'è il pericolo di farsi coinvolgere, di rimanere intrappolati. Si rischia di dimenticarsi chi deve comandare e chi deve ubbidire, chi è bianco e chi è nero. La nostra generazione ha imparato ad affrontare questo pericolo in lunghi anni di esperienza in colonia. Lasciatemelo dire, dottor Carruezzo: trattare con gli indigeni è un'arte. Bisogna sapere quando è il momento di essere

condiscendenti e quando invece si deve usare la frusta. (Marrocu, “Dalla storia al giallo” 13)

The same Fracassi, before committing suicide, confesses to Serra: “la mia vita è stato un progressivo penetrare dentro l’Africa (...) Voglio essere inghiottito dall’Africa, voglio sparire dentro di lei” (145), thus perpetrating the image of the colony as a woman to conquer and to possess. Fracassi underlines the sexual representation of Italian colonialism. His suicide is an example of the loss of control of the male, his defeat and his submission to the female, and thus the failure of masculinity.

Readers are also given the chance to hear also Fracassi’s African woman, answering back to Serra in an outburst of rage that reveals what the Italians have been trying and will continue to cover, the massacre of civilians and of a larger number of monks:

Ma voi cosa cercate? Cercate la verità? Ve la dico io la verità. La verità è che il giorno dopo l’attentato al viceré, bande d’italiani hanno cominciato a mettere a ferro a fuoco Addis Abeba, spaccando teste, incendiando, uccidendo, sparando nel mucchio. Sono morti migliaia di abissini. A nessuno importava che gran parte di loro non avesse nulla a che fare con la resistenza agli italiani. La volete sapere una seconda verità? A Debrà Libanòs, il vostro glorioso esercito coloniale in ventiquattro ore ha fucilato più di mille monaci. E volete sapere chi, tutte e due le volte, era in prima fila? Proprio lui, Bellasai. Ecco cosa siete, voi italiani, siete dei maiali. Perché non ve ne andate? Perché non ci lasciate in pace? (142)

Inspector Serra refuses his involvement in the regime's politics, answering to the woman, "Non sono stato io a decidere di conquistare l'Etiopia. E neppure a decidere di venirci, se è per questo. Faccio il poliziotto..." (142). Here, in passively obeying his superior's orders without committing himself, Serra resembles Lucarelli's commissario De Luca, and stresses the cowardice and the ambiguous moral code of both characters.

## **Conclusions**

In looking at these writers and their respective novels, I have attempted to demonstrate that in the Italian literary landscape, crime fiction has the ability to express well the complexities and the unsolved issues of the past that are still relevant today. As Lucarelli observes, detective fiction is a special tool that puts readers into contact with the particular issues of the present and of the past, because the writer of historical detective novels has to do the same research as the historian. However, at the same time, he adds other elements that appeal to the reader's shared imagination: "Lo storico è attento a tutta un'altra serie di particolari, sicuramente attento a dei macro eventi che dominano la storia; lo scrittore che scrive romanzi storici, soprattutto se polizieschi, deve essere particolarmente attento a quella che è la realtà quotidiana, a tutti i piccoli punti della realtà" (Lucarelli, "Il giallo storico" 157). Therefore, history should be investigated with the same tools used in a detective investigation, because it is a mystery, and as well as, a reflection and image of reality.

This notion is reinforced in Marrocu's belief that the historian's and the detective's paths are intertwined, since both attempt to investigate 'what really happened':



Utilizzano storico e investigatore, le stesse qualità: fiuto, colpo d'occhio, intuizione (...) Ambedue, infatti, lasciano per strada le iniziali certezze (...) su quali siano le realtà da illuminare, i metodi da seguire, se vi sia un ordine da ristabilire e se, comunque, valga la pena ristabilirlo.

Condividono la stessa sfiducia, l'investigatore e lo storico, che le storie abbiano una direzione e un punto finale a cui giungere e che questo punto finale ne illumini lo svolgimento” (Marrocu, “Dalla storia al giallo” 324)

From these writers' perspective, the parallelism between history and crime fiction is apparent. According to Carlo Ginzburg's seminal approach, in fact, historical knowledge is a product of conjecture, and share, with detection, the method of Sherlock Holmes, the “conjectural paradigm” (Ginzburg 115), a method for reconstructing past events by searching for clues, which are often found by gathering and paying attention to incidental details<sup>20</sup>.

This research and analysis of past events are connected to the present because “esiste una sorta di attualità dei fatti che [lo storico] va a ricostruire, e ricostruisce dei fatti trovando in questi le radici del presente [poiché] non c'è mai un interesse storico (...) che sia fine a stesso”, since the reconstruction and narration of past events is meaningful to the present moment, and this regards especially the more recent past that has “sempre un aggancio molto forte con quello che è la realtà di adesso” (Lucarelli, “Il giallo storico” 154). In this manner, the historical crime novels examined in this study could become the exposition of corruption and abuse of power against justice and truth during the regime

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<sup>20</sup> See Carlo Ginzburg's “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm” in Ginzburg, Carlo. *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*. Trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Baltimore, Md: The John Hopkins UP, 1989. 98-125, in particular 102-108.

and the subsequent chaos at the beginning of the Republic. These crime novels unfold in a “rivisitazione *politically incorrect* della Storia, aggressiva demistificazione degli inganni e della falsità divulgate dalle stesse istituzioni” (Bacchereti 97). As the writer remarks, “questa operazione è sempre e comunque un’operazione di critica, il romanzo poliziesco comunque va a guardare quella che è la situazione che non funziona, il romanzo noir, soprattutto, va a cercare quella verità che non funziona, che non è la verità giusta, ma cerca le pieghe oscure, la metà oscura delle cose” (Lucarelli, “Il giallo storico” 158). This is particularly relevant in a country such as Italy, where as Giancarlo De Cataldo affirms:

Il romanzo poliziesco italiano [...] diventa, nelle sue migliori espressioni, romanzo “politico” e sociale: sulle città, sui Poteri e le loro trame, sulle inquietudini della democrazia imperfetta. Il poliziesco, che già aveva fatto lodevole fronda sotto il fascismo, per almeno vent’anni ha seguito la realtà italiana e in qualche misura fornito utili elementi per interpretare i cambiamenti e la loro sotterranea direzione. Il poliziesco italiano ci ha fatto capire che il Mistero Italiano per eccellenza è mistero politico, d’intrigo affaristico, di trame occulte. (qtd. in Sangiorgi, “il fascismo e il giallo italiano”151)

Flourishing in a literary scene where “serious” literature would offer sophisticated gateways for facing Italian crimes, crime novels have the power of bringing back the realistic qualities that Italian literature has never exhausted. The Italian crime novel enables both author and reader the opportunity to look at and question reality providing a

tool of interpretation. The examples of historical detective novels explored in my study confirm the capability of this genre to interact with some of the most debated issues of Italian history, such as Fascism and the colonial wars.

## CHAPTER V

### MASSIMO CARLOTTO AND GIANCARLO DE CATALDO

Another common myth of Italian history and culture from the 1970s to the present is the one called ‘the double state’ or ‘the state within the state’. This expression refers to describe the enigmatic, dramatic series of events that took place in Italy during the years after the economic boom of the 1960s and the students’ movement of 1968 until today. Particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, the country experienced a series of terrorist attacks and bombings, which caused many civilian casualties. There were assassinations of politicians, judges and journalists and also corruption scandals, an increase in crime and more apparent connections between the mafia and the state. The investigations were for the most part unsuccessful in the face of obstruction of justice, although in some cases the authorities were able to identify the instigators of those murders and attacks. They discovered that a secret web of power, including the world of politics, the criminal world, the Vatican and the mafia, were behind many of these events, and this gave the impression that there existed another state, “*strutture clandestine istituzionali*” (Silj 41), that took control and shaped the course of events, eroding political and economic life.

The novels of the Massimo Carlotto and Giancarlo De Cataldo analyzed in this chapter aim to facilitate reflection on a period of time when the civil and political institutions had deteriorated to the point that the democratic foundations of the Italian republic were in doubt. These novels analyze and critique in particular the issue of power in Italian society and how it is secretly used.

In this way, the relationship that the authors have with their readers is particularly significant. Especially for Carlotto, there is a pact made with the readers, who are

encouraged to “verify facts and study in depth the issues tackled in his novels” (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 164). In the case of the novel *Perdas de Fogu* (2008), Carlotto admits that he was asked by his readers to write a novel about the health issues involved in the Sardinian military range. This displays once more how crime fiction is able to involve the readers, not only for the enjoyment of the structure and plot of the genre, but also for the social function it serves. For Carlotto, as Pezzotti puts it, “truth is the mandatory ethical stance” in writing his works (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 165). Both authors search for truth hidden “beyond official versions” (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 166).

In this way the authors succeed in fulfilling the role of investigative journalism; in fact, they claim their novels are *noir d’inchiesta* that uncover sensitive problems affecting Italian society and inform the readers about them. As the two authors point out, in Italy it is difficult to put into practice the right of information: not only the journalists who do it can be fired or not supported by their editor, but they can also risk their lives. From 1960 to 1993, nine journalists were killed by the mafia. More recently, as Carlotto explains, investigative journalism “è stato ammazzato a forza di querele e dalla trasformazione del mondo dell’ informazione” (Amici and Carlotto 106). Former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, owner of the country’s private televisions, of a large publishing house and a newspaper, has a reputation for being, among other things, a censor of journalists who are critical of him (Ragnedda 19).

## Historical overview

Italian society since the 1970s has changed radically compared to the society of the immediate postwar. The poor, rural, patriarchal society, after the economic miracle of the late 1950s and 1960s became in the following years a very different one. More economically dynamic and free, it went through process of industrialization and urbanization. However, these rapid transformations made society also more individualist; moreover, persisting problems, such as the lack of sense of community and of state, drastically worsened (Mammarella 464). The years from 1969 to the mid-1980s were the years in which the *strategia della tensione* took place. Ultra-conservative left activists and extremists from fascists and right-wing groups started a long series of politically motivated kidnappings, assassination attempts, and bombings, to protest against and subvert the bourgeois, capitalist state and destabilize democratic institutions. Politicians, judges, journalists, and civilians were kidnapped or killed. The so-called *anni di piombo* produced more than 14,000 terrorist acts [...] between 1969 and 1987 (Bolognesi and Scardova 323). Among these, vindicated by the extreme leftist group *Brigate Rosse*, Red Brigades, was the kidnapping and assassination of DC party secretary Aldo Moro in 1978, who was in favor of the “historical compromise” which fostered the participation of the Communist party in the national government. The *NAR* (Armed Revolutionary Nuclei), right wing militants, are considered responsible for the Bologna train station bombing in 1980 where eighty-five civilians died. Other right-wing extremists organized the kidnapping and rape of actress Franca Rame in 1973 and the killing of writer Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1975. Despite the bloody protests, however, in those years important social reforms were made, such as the law on divorce (1970), the law on conscientious

objection (1972), the family law act (1975), the abortion rights law (1978) and the new national health program (1979). Economically, the decade was disastrous because of “rampant inflation, rising unemployment, a weak and volatile currency, an acute balance of payments deficit and growing public debt” (Carter 195). In 1973-4 and 1979-80 the increase of oil prices further accelerated the rise of inflation in the country.

Nonetheless, Italian society in the 1980s seems more hedonistic and consumerist. Corporativism spreads as well as tax evasion, which becomes a systematic way to get rich for entrepreneurs and merchants. A high inflation rate increases public debt. However, Northern Italy becomes a striving industrial area, “where small, family-owned firms proved nimble, efficient and able to collaborate with one another where necessary” (Emmott 76). Berlusconi began creating his media empire thanks to the support of Prime Minister Craxi, the head of the Socialist Party and his mentor. Political institutions evolved for the worse, creating a situation where democracy and freedom were at stake. In fact, the scandal of the political corruption through the investigation *Mani Pulite* (‘clean hands’) in 1992-93, “causing the collapse of the post-war Italian party system” (Emmott 35), is not the only staggering event that causes the breakdown of the ‘First Republic’. In fact, the existence of the secret Masonic Lodge *Propaganda Due* (P2), discovered in 1981 pointed to another enigmatic piece of Italian history. P2 was a secret association joined by politicians, members of Parliament and heads of the army and of the intelligence service, entrepreneurs (including Berlusconi), journalists (and more), that was implicated in many unsolved crimes, such as the 1980 Bologna train station massacre. The existence of this illegal network uncovered a much more complicated situation, behind which it seemed that unknown powers were guiding the country. In fact,

the investigations on the secret Masonic lodge revealed that “[b]ehind the surface of Italian democracy lay a secret history, made up of hidden associations, contacts and even conspiracies” (Ginsborg *Italy and its Discontents* 144). As the former judge Claudio Nunziata observes in the introduction to the book *Stragi e Mandanti*, it is possible today to maintain the hypothesis of the presence of a “sistema politico occulto con il quale si voleva sostituire quello creato nel dopoguerra cristallizzato nel patto costituzionale” (15). This system comprised secret military apparatuses, ultra-conservative areas of the Vatican, the mafia and the masonry (Nunziata 10).

Right after the Liberation of Italy, the re-institution of the Fascist party has been declared illegal. Nonetheless, as observed in the analysis of Lucarelli’s and Marrocu’s novels, in chapter three of this dissertation, the fascist exponents and criminals in Italy have not been systematically expelled from power and/or put on trial. Some of them have been re-inserted in the ‘new’ political class and some others started collaborating legally and illegally with the allies against Communists. The extreme right leaning of these former fascists found protection and worked together against the common enemy, Communism (Flamini 97). The former fascists “entrano nelle nuove formazioni politiche, e nei quadri dirigenti, politici e imprenditoriali, della neonata Democrazia Cristiana anche per la mancanza di una classe politica di ricambio” (Silj 71). Not only did the former fascists fill the executive positions, but also this meant that the public administration of the new republic did not have an antifascist imprint (Silj 71). The government kept, in the normative system, “molti elementi di fascismo vero e proprio [...] In breve, il dibattito sul tipo di amministrazione che deve prendere il nuovo stato si risolve con la scelta di privilegiare la continuità” (Silj 71).



Italy's political situation has been closely watched by the United States since the aftermath of the war because of the threat of the Communist party, that was the second biggest party in the country. The United States federal administrations "felt free to intervene at every level of Italian domestic affairs" (Mignone 110), providing funds to "a variety of individuals, groups and parties", such as the *DC*, the Democratic Christians (Mignone 110). However, they did not realize that their efforts could "result in a substantial restoration of old economic and social structures of the prewar era [...] [and] missed the opportunity to broaden the foundations of Italy's democratic institutions" (Mignone 110). In fact, American secret services had contacts with the right wing and the former fascist currents and they gave support to both legal and illegal organizations fighting against the Communist threat: "Nello spazio di tempo compreso tra il referendum del 1946 e le elezioni politiche dell'aprile 1948 [...] proliferano infatti le organizzazioni fasciste clandestine. Hanno tutte una forte valenza anticomunista e sono nutrite dalla stessa madre: i servizi segreti americani" (Flamini 99). Among these endeavors, was the operation "Stay Behind", which took the name of *Gladio* in Italy, an agreement of collaboration between the Italian secret services and the CIA against a foreign invasion during the Cold War. The mission included "sabotage, guerrilla warfare, propaganda, information collecting" (Ginsborg *Italy and its Discontents* 171). Eventually, it was discovered that it was "above all an instrument for surveillance and possible action against internal enemies (of the left)" (Ginsborg *Italy and its Discontents* 172). Furthermore, the inquiries uncovered the secret collaboration between the secret organization and the right-wing extremists during the *strategia della tensione*. It has been ascertained that *Gladio* was "un'organizzazione mista militari-civili, segretissima, posta

sotto l'ombrello atlantico, che utilizzava gruppi operativi fuori dalla legalità ufficiale e coinvolgeva personaggi illustri delle forze armate, della politica, della finanza”

(Barbacetto 96).

Soon after the uncovering of the secret organization in 1990, another discovery highlighted the deep-rooted duplicity of the Italian state. The corruption scandal of *Mani Pulite* ('Clean Hands') in 1992 in Milan revealed that politicians collected *tangenti*, (kickbacks) from local businessmen in order to grant them public contracts and to "reinforce their own power base" (Ginsborg *Italy and its Discontents* 182). The investigations revealed that almost 60% of politicians participated in these activities. It was such a common practice that it seemed somewhat a 'normal' process in the political world. The Socialist party, headed by Bettino Craxi, was "a highly centralized system of corruption" (Ginsborg *Italy and its Discontents* 186), but the Christian Democrats and the Communists were not spared either.

The years 1992-1993 are critical not only for the revelation of corruption in the political establishment. In 1992 the slaughter of the anti-mafia judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino directed the attention on another aspect of the phenomenon of the 'double state', the allegations of the negotiations between Sicilian mob bosses and state authorities.

### **Massimo Carlotto's *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* and *Perdas de Fogu***

This chapter analyzes the following aspects of Carlotto's two novels *Nessuna Cortesia all'uscita* (1999) and *Perdas de Fogu* (2008): the author's reflections on Italy's debased condition, and the figure of the private investigator in Carlotto's *Nessuna*

*Cortesía all'uscita* and the novel of *Perdas de fogu* as one of the first contemporary Italian *noir d'inchiesta*. First, it is important to note the author's own experiences during the so-called *anni di piombo*, 'years of lead'. Carlotto was the protagonist of a controversial murder case for more than twenty years. In 1976, Massimo Carlotto was a young student and member of the left-wing movement *Lotta Continua*. One night, by accident, he stumbled upon the brutally murdered body of a young girl. Eventually, he was charged with the murder, but fled to France and then to Mexico. Back in Italy in 1985, after other trials, absolutions, changes of judges and laws, Carlotto was charged again with murder but in 1993 the President of the Republic, Oscar Luigi Scalfaro, pardoned him. During the years of his hiding, a committee was organized requesting the review of the trial. These episodes are important because they highlight the drive that the author seems to have in all his novels: the search for answers and for the fact behind the official story, which has proven to be shallow and fictitious. In fact, his literary career began with the publication of *Il fuggiasco* (1994), an autobiographical novel of his days in hiding.

The two novels of this chapter refer to precise moments in recent Italian history. While *Perdas de Fogu* is set in Sardinia in 2008, following the accusations of pollution and use of toxic waste in the Sardinian base with the same name, the plot of *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* (1999) deals with the Veneto, a region in the north of Italy where in the last twenty years transformations in the criminal world have taken place. It features the private investigator Marco Buratti, called *Alligatore*. Carlotto, as well as De Cataldo, choose to address these issues from the perspective of the criminals, creating an original observation of Italian justice. *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* (1999) follows some

conventions of the hard-boiled tradition: the use of physical violence, the pessimistic, gloomy mood and point of view of the narrator, and the realistic narration. In fact, the narration in first person follows the ‘tough’ style typical of the hard-boiled tradition: direct, incisive, without frills: “Il tizio si chiamava Pierluigi Barison detto Gigi Granseola [...]. Era un malavitoso di medio livello e di mezza età; l’avevo conosciuto anni prima in una casa di reclusione e non mi era mai stato simpatico” (*Nessuna cortesia all’uscita* 9). In the following example, during a shoot-out the brisk pace gives sense of realism because of the immediacy of the actions:

Gli inseguitori erano dietro di noi: li sentivo vicini, i passi erano sempre più sicuri. In un punto deserto vidi con la coda dell’occhio un uomo appiattito contro la colonna di un portico. Era il vecchio Rossini. Attese che Menegolli e i suoi scagnozzi gli passassero accanto per uscire allo scoperto. Il suo braccio teso incontrò il petto di Capuano, proprio all’altezza del cuore. Nella mano stringeva la due colpi. Sparò il canne mozze della Barbie e lo bruciò. (*Nessuna cortesia all’uscita* 103)

Also, realism is conveyed by the choice of vocabulary and colloquial language. Finally, the creation of a sense of truth is achieved by the addition of excerpts of real documents, such as, in *Nessuna cortesia all’uscita*, extracts of the sentence against the *Mafia del Brenta*.

### *Nessuna cortesia all'uscita (1999)*

Massimo Carlotto's choice of writing crime fiction is political: the author believes in the potential of dissidence that Italian crime fiction has had since Scerbanenco, Sciascia and Macchiavelli. In fact, their novels are tools for investigating the society in which plots are set. Carlotto's literary production of hard-boiled and *noir* novels are set in a specific time and place "come pretesto per raccontare la realtà sociale, politica, economica e storica" (Amici and Carlotto 26).

Carlotto is regarded as one of the first proponents of the notion of Italian crime novel as *nuovo romanzo sociale*. His career as a novelist began in the 1990s with *Il fuggiasco* and the *Alligatore* series, in a time when Italian crime fiction was bursting with authors such as Macchiavelli, Lucarelli, Camilleri. Carlotto, along with these authors, theorized the crime novel as a genre in which the location is not a passive background, but, fundamental, as if it were a character within the novel. According to Carlotto, those authors also acknowledged the "morte del giornalismo investigativo" (Amici and Carlotto 33) and thus appointed their novels as a means to investigate and represents accurately the real Italian society (Amici and Carlotto 33). In 2008 Carlotto published one of the first Italian *noir d'inchiesta*, *Perdas de Fogu*, on the issues concerning toxic material from the military base Perdas de Fogu, in Sardinia, where NATO tested new weapons whose waste is allegedly radioactive and carcinogenic. All Carlotto's novels center around the search for truth, which is being obscured by political machinations. In fact, in the *Alligatore* series, a recurring theme is the clash between the institutional, official truth and the 'real' truth.

The book consists of five parts. Each of these has a particular epigraph made of excerpts from the sentence issued on December 14, 1996 by the Court of Assizes of Appeal in Venice and from records of the hearings trial on the *Mafia del Brenta*. These excerpts serve as a contrast between facts and fiction and contribute to making the novel more realistic. Another contrast in the series dedicated to the P.I. *Alligatore* is the juxtaposition between the past, the ‘old school’ criminality of the protagonist’s past, and the present, where he is not able to find a place in the ‘new’ the world of crime. Not being able to solve this conflict, he becomes an outsider.

### **The *Alligatore*, crusader of the North-east**

The unlicensed private investigator Marco Buratti, known by the nickname of *Alligatore*, an allusion to for his past career as singer in a blues band called The Old Red Alligators. Although unjustly accused of terrorism, Buratti served seven years in prison. When he got out, he began investigating for lawyers who needed contacts with the criminal world. He is successful in his “job” because he is well respected for his discretion and his experience as *paciere*, peacemaker, between criminal bands during the time he spent in jail.

The *Alligatore* is a further evolution in the history of the character of the private investigator. In creating this character, the author introduced new features to the stereotypes of the hard-boiled tradition. Marco Buratti is definitely a loner, a smoker and an alcoholic. Nonetheless, in contrast with the tradition, l’*Alligatore* is not the “tough guy” that one could assume. He does not like the use of violence and does not bring a gun with him. He is psychologically different from the traditional hard-boiled investigator.

After being jailed for a crime he did not commit, Buratti expresses a sense of defeat from his experience. He is a fragile man: he has been unjustly condemned and now he is tormented by the search for the truth and justice. (Amici and Carlotto 56). He considers himself a ‘criminal gentleman’ because he follows the rules and the code of the old *mala*, which meant, for example, not to hurt children and women and respecting hierarchies and ‘authorities’ like the *paciere*. The world of his youth is contrasted to the contemporary criminal world, where it seems that there is no ‘criminal code’ to follow. This contrast, seen from the perspective of the investigator, is integral to the investigation of contemporary society. Obsessed with justice and truth, called by the nickname of *il crociato*, the crusader, he helps the lawyers by taking advantage of his acquaintances in the crime world. This allows him to have a “una prospettiva non istituzionale sulla realtà in cui si muove” (Amici and Carlotto 58) and to make the character even more problematic, because he operates outside the institutions. In addition, his perspective conveys a sense of refusal and intolerance towards the present, because, in his search for truth, he concentrates on the “zone d’ombra” (Amici and Carlotto 65) or, the ‘grey zone’ that pervades the whole society, that is, “quello spazio che fa da ponte tra le organizzazioni criminali e la società” (Amici and Carlotto 28).

The Veneto region, where *Nessuna cortesia all’uscita* is set, is, together with Lombardia, one of the most industrialized areas of the country. According to Carlotto, the economic growth of the region has been created by the joined action of legal and illegal economies and the practice of tax evasion. Carlotto’s works describe the social and economic transformation of this area, the evolution of crime and the intersection of criminal bands with the legal world, in an attempt to expose the current situation where

crime is inside the legal institutions, and flourishes among the authorities that are supposed to fight it. In his works, in fact, there is no more distinction between the bad ones and the good ones: corrupt policemen and corrupt politicians work in agreement with criminal gangs.

*Nessuna cortesia all'uscita* is set during the time of disruption of the criminal band called *mala del Brenta*. This group of criminals was under the leadership of Tristano Maniero, a local gangster, who lead the band like a mafia mob and who collaborated with Sicilian Mafia and Camorra for some of his crimes. The gang took its name from the area, between Padua and Venice, where it was at the head of arms and drugs trafficking and where it committed kidnappings, bank robberies, and extortions. However, this new, northern version of mob boss does not follow the mafia 'code' of respect within the 'family'. In fact, in 1995, he became a *pentito* and collaborated with the authorities to help take apart his 'men', "come se fosse un'azienda in cattive acque" (Amici and Carlotto 66). With his plan, he managed to reduce his term of imprisonment and be set free in 2010.

The author had chosen to portray this moment in the history of Veneto because it represented the beginning of the transformations of the criminal life in the region. After the dismantling of the *mafia del Brenta*, the criminal organization was substituted by the Albanese mafia, which started to control drug trafficking and prostitution. The Italian gangsters began to work for the 'foreign' criminals, and, according to Carlotto, this is what has been going on so far.

This novel is representative of a particular stage of the whole Italian peninsula, because, agreeing with scholar Claudio Milanese, I see the region of the "Nordest come



metafora” (Milanesi 443). In fact, the North-east of Italy is a symbol of the nation “per due caratteristiche: è stata la locomotiva italiana [of the economical boom] [...] ed è il luogo per eccellenza della nascita e sperimentazione della nuova criminalità” (Amici and Carlotto 67).

Carlotto describes the transformations of the North-east of the past thirty years: a previously mainly agricultural area, it has become a high-industrialized region, acting as “a mirror to Italian society at large” (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 166). As Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli observe for Bologna and Milan, Carlotto points out that the North-east has lost its distinctive features following because of a “wild and uncontrolled capitalism” (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 114). Places such as an old workers’ club, where “si andava a bere e mangiare per poche lire e a parlare di politica con vecchietti che non staccavano mai gli occhi dalle carte” has changed to “una paninoteca, una creperia, una snackeria, una yogurteria” (*Nessuna cortesia all’uscita* 18), following the latest trends of a consumerist society. The Alligator has bought the place, in an attempt to save it from the next transformation, and making it a “refuge from a territory that has lost any humanity and identity” (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 112). The Alligator denounces the physical and cultural impoverishment of the area by representing it in the novel as “a quick succession of apparently empty cities and villages, seen through a car window” (Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place* 112). As Pezzotti points out, Carlotto’s landscape is reminiscent of Giorgio Scerbanenco’s, who described “a 1960s Milan and its hinterland as an undistinguished area of crime and meaningless violence” (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 155).

### ***Perdas de Fogu (2008)***

*Perdas de Fogu* is not only a novel, but as the author himself defined it, is one of the more recent *noir d'inchiesta*, a crime story based on historical events. In *Perdas de Fogu* the real event is the so-called “Quirra syndrome”, that of environmental contamination by “[u]ranio impoverito, nanoparticelle di sostanze velenose, inquinamento chimico ed elettromagnetico” (Pirelli 5) produced by the experimentation of new military weapons. This contamination has led to lawsuits regarding “morti sospette da tumore e malformazioni nei neonati” (Pirelli 6) in the areas around the Poligono Interforze del Salto di Quirra, in the south-east side of Sardinia, one of the largest military rifle ranges in Europe, and the largest in Italy. The novel has multiple authors: a group of ten young Sardinian writers has collaborated in the writing and the collection of data and information on the issue, studying “1.200 pagine d'inchiesta per ricavarne 160 di romanzo” (Amici and Carlotto 105). The *collettivo Sabot*, the name of the group, went through over ten years of data and information on the allegations of toxic contamination (Amici and Carlotto 105). To avoid possible libel for what is disclosed in the text, the publishing house used a disclaimer: the novel is only fiction: “Quest'opera è il risultato di un'approfondita inchiesta, in particolare sull'inquinamento da nano particelle e sul Poligono Interforze Salto di Quirra - Capo San Lorenzo. Ovviamente, trattandosi di un romanzo, personaggi e situazioni sono frutto di fantasia” (Pirelli 6). However, at the end of the book the authors give references to how to get the information. The escamotage used by the authors in order to publish and diffuse information that the authorities and industries involved have omitted, emphasizes the current situation in Italy where the institutional truth does not correspond to reality, and

where its citizens need to find out the truth in other ways, in this case, reading selected crime fiction.

The island of Sardinia became a military outpost during the Cold War, in the 1950s when it was used as military base by NATO. NATO is a recurring protagonist of the history of the island; for Pirelli, “la storia degli insediamenti militari nell’isola si intreccia con quella delle organizzazioni, anche segrete, della Nato, sorte in funzione antisovietica, come Gladio”(64). At the present moment, the Air Force, the Navy and the Army, both Italian and foreign, together with International private companies, are in control of the area for testing new innovative weapons, missiles and for target practice. The main command of the poligono is in the small town of Perdasdefogu.

Since the beginning of 2000 there have been reports of a rise in deaths from leukemia, abnormal diseases and also births defects. One of the first complaints was filed in 2001 by Antonio Pili, the former mayor of Villaputzu, another small town close to the military base (Pirelli 20). Pili notes that in a village very close to the base of Capo San Lorenzo, on the beach, there have been “un’incidenza anomala di tumori al sistema emolinfatico, leucemie e linfomi” (Pirelli 20). Despite other reports that have been done during over the years, the regional and the military authorities have not investigated thoroughly to understand the situation, or, have been hiding the truth. Finally, in 2010 two veterinarians made a sanitary report of the area analyzing data obtained by the study of the health of the farmers, their cattle, and their products such as cheese and honey (Lorrai and Mellis 40). This report disclosed a serious and critical condition of the area, clearly stating that “65% dei pastori che lavorano entro un raggio di 2,7 chilometri dalla base di Capo San Lorenzo a Quirra è stato colpito da gravi malattie tumorali. In alcuni di

quegli ovili sono stati segnalati casi di malformazioni di animali” (Pirelli 6). For ten years the few investigations made claimed no alarming cases and the inhabitants were left with no explanations regarding the diseases and unusual deaths (Pirelli 21).

The protagonists of Massimo Carlotto’s and *Mama Sabot*’s novel are a young veterinarian, Nina, and a deserter, the ex-marshal of *Carabinieri*, Pierre Nazzari. The veterinary investigates in the birth of malformed cattle for a private company, while Nazzari is on the island because of his covert collaboration with a parallel structure of *Carabinieri*, that has ordered him to follow an ex-sergeant major, Michele Ceccarello, whom he had shot in Afghanistan. Years earlier, Nazzari and Ceccarello had been in Afghanistan with the Italian army, but they were also in business with a local “warlord” (*Perdas de Fogu* 16) for drug trafficking. After Ceccarello found out that Nazzari was also secretly playing a double game with the Foreign Legion, the two had a fight, and Nazzari shot him in a leg and ran away, deserting the army. Condemned to serve twenty years, Nazzari has been in hiding until the *Carabinieri* find him and compell him to work for them as “informatore operativo” and look for Ceccarello, who had settled in turnovers “nei quali s’intrecciavano uomini e interessi della criminalità organizzata, dei servizi d’intelligence di vari paesi e nuove bande di professionisti della violenza formati da ex contractor che si mettevano al servizio di chiunque fosse in grado di pagarli profumatamente” (*Perdas de Fogu* 17-18). Pierre’s story lets the authors disclose the intricate web of dealings with the international arms industry to make the most profit in Sardinia.

The authors succeed in mixing fiction and historical facts not only in the plot and setting, but also through the narrative style. In fact, the style, which is straightforward

without being plain, creates a *noir* novel that, despite the amount of information, is not tedious, but captures the readers, who have a large amount of verifiable data that has been voluntarily hidden from them for all these years.

### **Giancarlo De Cataldo's *Romanzo criminale* (2002) and *Nelle mani giuste* (2007)**

Giancarlo De Cataldo is the author of two noir novels, *Romanzo Criminale* (2002) and *Nelle mani giuste* (2007), which refer to actual criminal events of recent Italian history and openly address issues that are still unresolved in Italian society. In this chapter, I analyze the two novels, arguing that they are an attempt to question the official story of those events, and a means to stimulate reflection and resist what is considered the Italian habit of *dimenticare*. The novels are a means to fight the campaign of delegitimization created by the institutions that have been going on in Italian history in order to cover up the real course of events and the individuals responsible for those events.

De Cataldo's novels are not typical detective stories, although there are policemen, criminals and a plethora of murders. The novels do not follow the conventional pattern of the detective investigating a case and chasing the murderer. The two stories take place in two troubled periods of Italian history, the 1970s and the early 1990s, when some of the most brutal assassinations and bloody crimes took place. There has always been an official and an unofficial story about these crimes, but never a definitive one. The real life characters to whom the book alludes are easy to identify. Despite the change of the names or nicknames, the author himself, a judge, created a

narrative of those years with the aid of a number of historical documents, from newspaper news to court sentences, aiming to reinterpret the history of the country.

### ***Romanzo Criminale (2002)***

*Romanzo Criminale* is the story of a gang of criminals based on the so-called *Banda della Magliana*, a group of thugs who controlled a significant part of drug trafficking in Italy in the 1970s. The story is set during the *anni di piombo* (years of lead); from 1977 to 1978, when the criminal band rose to power in Rome and had its first contacts with the Italian secret services, political world and the mafia; and the 1980s, when the criminal organization went from the peak of its power to its divisions and eventually end.

The protagonists of the novel are the leaders of the gang: *il Libano* (the Lebanese), *il Dandi* (the Dandy) and *il Freddo* (the Cool). Around these three main protagonists, there lives a crowd of other criminals, (such as *Ricotta*, *Fierolocchio*, *Bufalo*, *Nembo Kid*, *Trentadenari*, the neofascist activist *il Nero*, *il Sorcio*, as well as exponents from the mafia, *zio Carlo* and *O' Professore*), and a series of different classes of human beings, such as the secret service agents *Zeta* and *Pigreco*, the judge *Borgia*, politicians, freemansons, representatives of the Vatican, the police officer *Scialoja*, the figure of the *Vecchio*, and the prostitute *Patrizia* (lover of the Dandy and *Scialoja* as well). The narration of the story of the criminal gang interlaces with the years of the massacres by terrorist organizations such as the *Brigate rosse* (Red Brigades), their kidnapping and killing of the secretary of the Christian Democratic party *Aldo Moro* in

1978, and their involvement with obscure sections of the secret services, their relationship with the Sicilian mafia and the Vatican.

The novel highlights the conflicts and contradictions of Italian society and expresses the theory of the ‘double state’ and of the *Il Vecchio*, The Old Man. *Il Vecchio* is identified with a powerful secret agent (it has been suggested that it refers to the head of *Ufficio Affari Riservati*, Federico Umberto D’Amato)<sup>21</sup> who is in charge of the relations between the secret services, the criminal organizations, the Masonic lodges. As Gianni Barbacetto observes, *Il Vecchio* is not a specific person, but a system, “è il Network di poteri criminali che ha occupato il Paese. Alla legalità ufficiale si è contrapposta in tutti questi decenni una ‘legalità’ sotterranea, nutrita di regole inconfessabili ma ferree, fatte valere di catene di comando diverse da quelle palesi” (Barbacetto 364).

De Cataldo is able to convey a realistic portrait of the time through style and language. In fact, the novel is narrated by a series of members of the criminal gang. This is made more effective by the use of their language, a mix of Roman dialect, oral speech and the jargon of the criminal world (such as “batteria” for a small criminal band). The result is a collective story of the ‘streets’, in which real characters and real events take place along with fictional ones, accomplishing the verisimilitude which makes the novel realistic and in Andrea Camilleri’s words, a “gigantesco affresco di una sconfitta globale, sconfitta che non riguarda solamente i suoi personaggi, ma tutt’intera, la nostra società” (Camilleri “Camilleri secondo De Cataldo. E viceversa”).

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<sup>21</sup> See Gianni Barbacetto. *Il grande vecchio*. Milano: Bur Futuropassato, 2009.

The historical events that take place in Italy during the *anni di piombo* are also seen through the eyes of the bandits. For example, the Moro kidnapping of 1978 is mentioned indirectly in a conversation between one of the main protagonists, *Il Libano*, and the mob boss Raffaele Cutolo, who wonder where the politician might have been taken and hidden (*Romanzo Criminale* 274). The narration through the point of view of the characters gives the novel a ‘choral’ feature and it contributes to fasten the rhythm of the action and the succession of events (Donati 23). The narration reveals the contacts of the criminal organization, “la strada”, with the other forces, “i palazzi”, as the Libanese points out to the secret agent Zeta: “No, stammi a sentire tu: forse noi abbiamo bisogno di voi, ma non quanto voi avete bisogno di noi. Voi avete i palazzi, noi la strada. E’ questo che vi interessa: la strada.” (*Romanzo criminale* 209). “La strada” is so important because “Ci sono cose che lo Stato non può né fare né ammettere di aver ordinato di fare” (*Romanzo criminale* 164). As Donati observes, the entities of the street and of the palace “finiscono per diventare due categorie endemiche, se non dello spirito, della realtà italiana” (Donati 456).

The novel is missing a clear conclusion: the enigma is not about the gang of criminals, but about the supposed *buoni* of the story, the institutions such as the politicians and the secret services, and their ‘double’, in Donati’s words, “Stato e Antistato”, who

non si fronteggiano, ... si rispecchiano, sono l’uno l’immagine dell’altro.

Il potere costituito si rovescia disinvoltamente nel contropotere eversivo, creando caos e disordine secondo il gioco del ‘tutto cambi perché nulla cambi’ di gattopardesca memoria, mentre a sua volta il contropotere tende



progressivamente a stabilizzarsi, a darsi una struttura, a farsi  
*establishment*. (Donati 456)

There is no conclusion because justice is not made: the politicians and the institutions involved with the criminals are not arrested because of lack of evidence to charge them.

### ***Nelle mani giuste* (2007)**

The novel is set during a single year in Italian recent history, beginning in the fall of 1992, another tense moment for the history of the country. Italy was troubled on many fronts: economically, after the splurge and the consumerism of the 1980s, the country was suffering from an economic crisis; in September 1992 the *lira* was devalued, and the country turned to the ECC for an astronomical loan (Posteraro 46). On the judicial and political fronts, the 1992, in fact, is the year of what has been called the demise of the 'First Republic', the scandal of the corruption in the ruling class, uncovered by the investigation *Mani pulite* (Clean hands). It is the year of the bombing strategy undertaken by the Sicilian mafia, which killed innocent citizens as well as the anti-mafia magistrates Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino. Finally, it is the year of the beginning of the 'second Republic', dominated by a brand new political party, Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* (Let's go, Italy).

De Cataldo addresses some of these events in *Nelle mani giuste*, focusing on particular moments, such as the bombings and massacres by the mafia and highlighting on the theory of the so-called *trattativa stato-mafia*, the cooperation between the government and the mob to stop the mafia attacks, the origin of Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*.

I argue that *Nelle mani giuste* tackles these thorny issues to re-examine the past and to search for the acknowledgment of the real events and demand the truth on an important part of Italian history, despite the campaigns of de-legitimization of the ruling classes and the press. First I will provide an overview of some of the recent historical events represented in the novel; then I will illustrate the themes of the novel through its characters and style.

The historical moments that is necessary to clarify and explain are: the prologue set in 1982 and certain main events and dates of the year 1992: the investigation *Mani Pulite* begun in February; the summer of 1992 when the negotiation with Sicilian Mafia started; the creation of a new political party, *Forza Italia*, and the arrival of its leader, Silvio Berlusconi in 1993.

The book has a prologue, set in 1982, which connects to *Romanzo Criminale*. It brings the reader back to the climate of the previous novel by introducing the secret service agent Stalin Rossetti, who is after a camorra killer, *Settecorone* (Sevencrowns). Sevencrown is a character from *Romanzo criminale*, while the secret agent Stalin Rossetti is a new character, but he is familiar with the story because he has been the head of the *Catena* (the Chain), the illegal branch of the secret services, created by *il Vecchio* (the Old Man). Il Vecchio represents the ‘puppet master’ who controlled an array of “personale fidato su cui poter contare in ogni settore dello Stato e della società civile, esercito, servizi segreti, magistratura, polizia, politica, industria, comunicazione” (Barbacetto 359).

The book begins a year after the end of another kidnapping by the Red Brigades. In 1981, after three months, the Christian Democrat politician Ciriaco De Mita, was released after a

ransom payed by the government to the Red Brigades (Silj 386). The release of the politician caused a great controversy, not only because the government allowed a negotiation with a terrorist group, (a negotiation that had been strongly denied three years earlier, in 1978, in the kidnapping of the secretary of the Christian Democrat party, Aldo Moro), but also because the details of the deal were never made clear. It is suspected, in fact, that the camorra boss Raffaele Cutolo mediated negotiations (Silj 386). The secret connections between the sections of the State and the camorra has been already seen in *Romanzo Criminale*, where one of the protagonists of the criminal band, is an affiliate of Cutolo's NCO (*Nuova camorra organizzata*, New organized camorra).

For the successful outcome of the mediation with the Red Brigades, Cutolo obtained money and favors from the State. However, after a while, Cutolo, who had been held in jail since 1963, in addition to what he obtained from the deal, dared to claim his release, threatening to reveal the truth if the State would not satisfy his claim (Sili 386).

Because of this, the State planned to eliminate Cutolo's supremacy in the criminal world by letting Cutolo's rivals get over his men and weakening his clan, beginning with the assassination of Cutolo's lieutenant (Silj 386), who in novel is called Sevenscrowns. In the novel, the secret agent Stalin Rossetti has been called by the Old Man to make sure that the plan succeeds. It is clear here that the novel is reflecting the theory of the 'double state' and of the existence of a secret illegal organization, unknown even to the services authorities, which operates in the dark, guided by 'dark powers' (Barbacetto 58), represented here by the Old Man. In fact, Stalin Rossetti, complaining about his task, says that the plan of weakening Cutolo was not exclusively "un affare di camorra" (3), but, instead, "un affare di Stato" (4), clearly alluding to the theory that a part of the State has

had relations with illegal secret services organizations, such as the Chain, which did for the State, as it has been seen in *Romanzo Criminale*, the “il gioco sporco” (4).

Among the historical events mentioned in the book, one of the principal events that took place in 1992 was the disclosure of the system of corruption through the investigation *Mani Pulite*. One of the characters in the novel, businessman Ilio Donatoni, has the function of addressing the topic of the Clean Hands investigation, whose scandal is regarded as the cause of the collapse of the First Republic: “Non c’era area del paese né ramo di attività che risulti immune e via via confessano, o sono accusati da solide prove, esponenti politici, personaggi di rilievo dell’imprenditoria o figure giunte al vertice dell’amministrazione dello Stato” (Crainz 186). The judicial investigation, led by judge Antonio Di Pietro, began in February 1992, when Mario Chiesa, a member of the Socialist Party, whose leader was Bettino Craxi, was arrested for bribery in Milan. Chiesa revealed an extensive network of corruption with kickbacks in the assignment of public works to private contractors and exchanges of illegal favors (Mammarella 555-6). Many parties disappeared ruined by scandal, including the Christian Democrats, politicians such as Giulio Andreotti and Arnaldo Forlani, who had been ruling Italy since the aftermath of the Second World War, and the Socialist party led by Craxi, who, in May 1994, fled to Tunis to escape jail and lived there until his death in 2000.<sup>22</sup> Many under investigation committed suicide. One of these, Raoul Gardini, a powerful businessman in those years (together with Silvio Berlusconi) is represented in the novel by the character of Ilio Donatoni, who, involved in the scandal, shot himself to death in 1993.

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<sup>22</sup> A comprehensive account, with an extensive bibliography, can be found in Gianni Barbacetto, Peter Gomez and Marco Travaglio. *Mani pulite. La vera storia, 20 anni dopo*. Milano: Chiarelettere, 2012.

After the prologue, the policeman Nicola Scialoja, now advanced to head of police, provides a sort of summary of the situation, in one of his many interior monologues: “Marzo. Omicidio di Salvo Lima. Il vecchio equilibrio fra politica e mafia saltato una volta per tutte. Falcone a maggio. Due mesi dopo Borsellino. In mezzo, Scalfaro eletto Presidente della Repubblica. E infine, a settembre, omicidio dell’esattore Salvo. Ultimo della lista. Almeno per il momento”(19). Here Scialoja is referring to the series of murders and attacks that the Sicilian mafia perpetrated since the beginning of 1992, which led to the so-called *trattativa stato-mafia*, the negotiations started by State officials and politicians with mafia bosses in order to stop the attacks. In 2007 the prosecution at the court of Palermo began an investigation on the negotiation, and in 2012 the trial, which is still ongoing, charged twelve defendants: mafia bosses Salvatore Riina, Bernardo Provenzano, Leoluca Bagarella, the informant Giovanni Brusca and the middlemen Antonino Cinà and Massimo Ciancimino, together with politicians Calogero Mannino, Nicola Mancino and Berlusconi’s collaborator Marcello Dell’Utri, and former ROS carabinieri Antonio Subranni, Mario Mori and Giuseppe De Donno (*Travaglio E’ stato la mafia* 37).

The names mentioned, Scialoja, Salvo Lima, Falcone, Borsellino, Scalfaro, Salvo, belong to some of the main protagonists of this critical historical situation. Salvo Lima, former mayor of Palermo, leader of DC in Sicily, congressman of the European Parliament, was a close collaborator of Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti. He was shot by the mafia on March 12, 1993 on his way to Palermo. In trials on this case, prosecutors convicted Salvo Lima, as well as Vito Ciancimino, another former mayor of Palermo and protagonist of the *trattativa*, for having been the intermediaries between the Sicilian

Mafia and the Christian Democrats in Sicily (Travaglio *E' stato la mafia* 58). Both politicians were convicted of affiliation with the mafia. According to the magistrates, this murder signals the end of the 'pact of cohabitation' between the State and the mafia, and marks the beginning of the mafia retaliation towards the State (Lo Bianco and Rizza 28). The reprisal was the consequence of the 1987 *maxi-processo*, the large-scale trial of mafia figures led by the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, which resulted in the conviction of hundreds of mafiosi and several top figures for mafia affiliation, drug trafficking, murder and extortion. Mafia bosses such as Salvatore Riina and Leoluca Bagarella felt that the State betrayed their pact and started a wave of threats and assassinations to punish their 'betrayers'. The conviction, widely considered as the first important attack against the Sicilian mafia, ended abruptly the "regime di impunità nei confronti della mafia" (Fasanella 161) that the State held since 1947.<sup>23</sup> According to former Deputy Prosecutor of Palermo Antonio Ingròia, "L'uccisione dell'eurodeputato De [...] viene eseguita non per terrorizzare l'Italia, ma per terrorizzare alcuni uomini politici" (Galluccio 29). The trial has been successful not only because the investigation was made through innovative strategies adopted by Falcone and his collaborators, but also because it was based on the collaboration with one of the first informants Tommaso Buscetta, whose information gave the magistrates a deep understanding of the complex system of the criminal organization, its structure and chain of command (Fasanella 162). The negotiation was started by the Carabinieri officials General Mario Mori and Captain Giovanni De Donno, who tried to meet the former mayor of Palermo, Vito Ciancimino, a

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<sup>23</sup> For a longer explanation, see Giovanni Fasanella, *Una lunga trattativa*. Milano: Chiarelettere, 2013.

mafia affiliate, in order to make contact with the bosses. After Lima's murder, a mafia campaign of murders began as a consequence of the trial which ended in the conviction of a huge number of mob bosses. It began on May 1992, when judge Giovanni Falcone was killed by a bomb<sup>24</sup>. According to the prosecutors, on July 13 the negotiations were interrupted because the Carabinieri officials and politicians found Riina's requests too high. Prosecutors believe that, in the meantime, Falcone's colleague, Paolo Borsellino came to know about it and opposed it. Because of this, on July 19, Borsellino was also targeted and killed.<sup>25</sup> At the end of the summer of 1992, Ignazio Salvo, one of the main mediators between Sicilian politicians and businessmen and the mob, was killed.

In the novel, Scialoja is the character that looks for a contact with the mafia in order to negotiate; in fact, he concludes that, in order to stop the attacks, it is necessary to “trattare con la mafia” (20). The Court of Assizes of Florence stated that the *trattativa stato-mafia* took place between 1992 and 1994.<sup>26</sup> According to former magistrate Antonio Ingroia, the deal with the mafia began after the murder of Salvo Lima and not after the death of magistrate Falcone and has continued for twenty years (Lo Bianco and Rizza 79). For investigative journalist Marco Travaglio, the *trattativa* is still going on: “Ora la tragedia delle stragi e della trattativa tra lo Stato e la mafia, iniziata nel 1992 e mai purtroppo né interrotta né conclusa, è un pezzo fondamentale della storia d'Italia” (Travaglio *E' stato la mafia* 4).

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<sup>24</sup> On May 23, a bomb device of 500 kilos of explosives, hidden in a tunnel under the motorway connecting Punto Raisi airport to Palermo, killed Giovanni Falcone, his wife Francesca Morvillo and three bodyguards.

<sup>25</sup> On July 19, a car loaded with 100 kilos of trinitrotoluene exploded in the outskirts of Palermo, killing Paolo Borsellino and his five agents.

<sup>26</sup> See Marco Travaglio. *E' stato la mafia*. Milano: Chiarelettere, 2014. For a list of court documents see [http://: antimafia.altervista.org/sentenze.php](http://antimafia.altervista.org/sentenze.php)

The feeling of disorientation in the new political situation after *Mani pulite* and the bombings, is conveyed by Scialoja, who needs to know “chi comanda in Italia” (124) in order to begin the negotiation and re-establish the web of corruption. The Christian Democrat Party, discredited by *Mani pulite*, loses the elections in April 1992. In May, the Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti, leader of the Christian Democrats, loses the election, despite being the favorite, as President of the Republic to Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (Travaglio *E' stato la mafia* 27). Another pivotal moment represented in the novel is, in fact, the search for this new man, a new contact who would replace the old ruling class, and this man is found in the businessman and media tycoon Silvio Berlusconi. In June, 1993 the party *Forza Italia! Associazione per il buon governo* (Let's go, Italy! Association for the good government) is founded. According to many informants, the boss Provenzano, abandons the project of a separatist party, *Sicilia libera* (free Sicily), and decides to give his support to *Forza Italia*, with Marcello Dell'Utri, creator of the new party with Berlusconi and his close collaborator. In January 1994, Berlusconi announces his decision to become a politician and in March he becomes Prime Minister. According to Marco Travaglio, since the date of Berlusconi's first elections, there has been a “long ‘pax mafiosa’” (Travaglio *E' stato la mafia* 43). In the ongoing trial, former senator Dell'Utri is a defendant with the charge of being the new referent for the mafia in this new political setting (Travaglio *E' stato la mafia* 48).

Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* was more similar to one of his commercial companies than a political organization. His agenda was free-market capitalism, a reduced role of the state in the economy, a wider privatization, and lower taxes (Mammarella 555-6). The novel underlines the alleged ties of Berlusconi with the mafia through his friend and



collaborator Dell'Utri<sup>27</sup> and with freemason association *Propaganda 2*, of which he was a member.

Some of the main characters in *Nelle Mani Giuste* have already appeared in *Romanzo Criminale*, for example, Scialoja, the unlucky detective, and the prostitute Patrizia. Scialoja is the protagonist of *Nelle Mani Giuste*. He is left with the difficult charge of substituting the *Vecchio*, who, in the meantime, has died of cancer. Other characters are: Angelino Lo Mastro, a mafia affiliate, Stalin Rossetti, a secret agent, Carù, a journalist and strong supporter of *Forza Italia*, and Berlusconi and the entrepreneur Ivo Donatoni (who represents Raoul Gardini, involved in the *Mani pulite* investigations).

Angelino Lo Mastro represents the new generation of mob leaders, a “uomo nuovo” (43). He has lived in Northern Italy and is familiar with the ‘good society’ but is still loyal to “la cosa nostra” (74). Another character is an important key figure of this period of time: Stalin Rossetti, representing a former secret agent working for the Old Man. Rossetti was the head of “la Catena [...] Il fior fiore degli agenti operativi!” (89) during the time of the secret operations against Communism. *La Catena* (The Chain) was an even more secret operation than *Gladio*, “Qui stiamo parlando della Catena (...) Qui stiamo parlando della Sporca dozzina!” (90). It had “Gestione autonoma di fondi pressoché illimitati. Carta bianca in ogni sorta di operazioni. Unico referente: il Vecchio. Un solo compito: impedire, a ogni costo, la diffusione del morbo rosso” (90). After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, with the dismantling of the operations to hinder the ‘Communist threat’, Rossetti’s job is finished; however, he believes he deserves to be the

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<sup>27</sup> On May 9, 2014 the Italian Supreme Court of Cassation has convicted Marcello Dell'Utri to seven years in prison for conspiracy with the Sicilian mafia, false accounting, tax fraud.

successor of the Old Man and intends to destroy Scialoja, because he has inherited the Old Man's position instead of Rossetti.

### **The theme of power**

Nicola Scialoja can be seen as the contemporary, updated version of Carlo Lucarelli's commissario De Luca: a man with a basic genuine struggle against the evil and the *cattivi*, but also with a deep weakness and lack of morale. The vulnerable Scialoja gives up for the prestige of taking the Old Man's position, which makes Scialoja greedy and ambitious. Nevertheless, Scialoja is not quite like the *Vecchio*: he is not as resolute and determined, but fragile and dull. An example of his weakness is his infatuation with Patrizia, who, in this novel, is involved with Scialoja's alter ego Stalin Rossetti. According to the Old Man, Scialoja fails for what he called the "fattore umano" (75).

These characters expose one of the principal themes of the novel: power. As historians, magistrates and scholars point out, the history of Italy has always been connected with the dichotomy between 'official power' and 'secret power', *potere occulto*. According to the magistrate Roberto Scarpinato, the latter is the one that created the history of the origins and development of the country, and "si è declinata dall'Unità d'Italia a oggi su tre versanti: la corruzione sistemica, la mafia e lo stragismo per fini politici" (Lodato and Scarpinato 6). The title of the book, in fact, *Nelle mani giuste* (In the right hands), alludes to the last sentences of the novel, when Scialoja's lieutenant Camporesi wonders about the existence of 'the right hands' that could keep safely the huge archive of information created by the Old Man. This archive was started by Mussolini's secret police OVRA and collected all sorts of information and data since the

Second World War. With the corruption scandals and the mafia war against the State, the continuous question throughout the novel is, “Chi ha il potere in Italia?” (44, 124-5), that is, “Who are the politicians to corrupt and affiliate now?”. The novel suggests that the country is run by the *potere occulto* (secret power), that manages to continue to live and recreate itself despite the blows of justice. For Scarpinato, power and ‘evil’ (evil from mafia, terrorism, massacres, corruption), are “espressione di una mostruosa ‘normalità’ italiana” (Lodato and Scarpinato 42), as the investigations and the trials have demonstrated. In fact, another important reflection that De Cataldo’s novel incites is one on Italian identity. As I have shown in Lucarelli’s and Marrocu’s novels, contemporary Italian crime fiction tackles questions of Italian Identity. In De Cataldo’s novel, the corrupt politician, the mob affiliate and the intermediaries between these two, are looking for, paradoxically, the new man to replace the decayed ruling class, and they identify him, eventually, in Berlusconi, “l’imprenditore che diventa manager di Stato, anzi, dello Stato [...], così simpatico ... così furbo ... così *italiano*” (274). And again, “Oh, Berlusconi! E’ così ... così perfettamente italiano! [...] L’Italia cercava un padrone. L’Italia cercava un padrone italiano. Berlusconi era il più italiano di tutti. Berlusconi sarebbe diventato il padrone dell’Italia” (194-195). This new man, Berlusconi, is the antithesis of, as Scialoja observes, “Falcone, Falcone ... Borsellino, Borsellino ... gli eroi ... i modelli ... le icone dell’Italiano Come Dovrebbe Essere. Come non sarà mai” ( 21).

The complexity, uncertainty and confusion of the time is conveyed by the author through a more interiorized narrative than the one in *Romanzo Criminale*. The author also gives a deeper psychological representation of the protagonists, which reveals their

difficulty of dealing with a society that has changed and is confronted with other ferocious events.

The psychological insight often unveils the tension of the situation. A clear illustration of this strategy is alternating narrators and therefore points of view without a clear distinction. For example, in the chapter during the first meeting between Scialoja and Lo Mastro (pp. 42-48), in which Scialoja is supposed to ask for a truce to the mob, the readers are introduced to their thoughts and expectations about each other. The narration in third person begins with Lo Mastro's perspective, then changes to Scialoja's and comes back to Lo Mastro without any explicit indication of the change in point of view. For example, in Lo Mastro's perspective, he comments on Scialoja's behavior and his thoughts are characterized by his jargon and Sicilian dialect, such as, respectively in "Lo sbirro era *sperto*" (42), or, noticing Scialoja's surprise when Patrizia opens the door interrupting them, "La fimmina di classe che aveva intravista sulla soglia ci faceva sangue, al dottore Scialoja!"(45). Then the third person narration goes on with Scialoja's point of view, as in the following example: "Scialoja sorrideva. Come avrebbe reagito Camporesi nel sentir definire la mafia un'istituzione, e per giunta di rango pari allo Stato?" (43).

Concerning this stylistic choice, Marco Amici maintains that

l'intenzione di De Cataldo è proprio quella di andare a rimestare in un immaginario collettivo anestetizzato dalla superficialità televisiva, di narrare un periodo decisamente poco frequentato da storici e romanzieri, fornendo al lettore, appunto, una prospettiva da dietro lo schermo. (Amici, "Noir su Noir" 445)

In fact, De Cataldo's choice of constructing the novel around these characters and their attempts to take their place back in the society of that time is effective in depicting those unclear and difficult moments, which are still under debate in Italian society. Another distinctive characteristic of De Cataldo's style is the use of figures of speech such as emphasis, inversion, list, paronomasia and anaphora (Wuming1 "Nandropausa 12"). The latter, the repetition of one or more words at the beginning of two successive sentences (or more), is used constantly to portray each character, as, for example: "Stalin Rossetti era un uomo ricco. Stalin Rossetti era un uomo depresso" (93), and

Carù considerava spazzatura il pensiero di destra.

Carù considerava spazzatura il pensiero di sinistra.

Carù considerava spazzatura ogni forma di pensiero.

Carù pensava che l'uomo intelligente non si vende mai a un'idea.

Carù pensava che l'uomo intelligente si concede in locazione a un'idea per il tempo necessario a trarne il massimo profitto. Non un minuto di più, non un minuto di meno. (192)

The use of this figure of speech gives different angles from which the reader can perceive and see the character, "scansionandone la personalità" (Wuming1 "Nandropausa 12"), as in the depiction of Berlusconi:

Berlusconi aveva fascino. Carisma. Spregiudicatezza. Chi lo conosceva ne vantava la simpatia umana irresistibile. Era un anticomunista tenace. Era convinto che la Sinistra gliel'avesse giurata. La vittoria dei rossi per lui poteva significare la rovina. Berlusconi era anche pieno di debiti, e una

soluzione politica poteva rivelarsi provvidenziale per la sua azienda.

Berlusconi era un uomo amato dal popolo. (194)

The author creates “un’oscillazione continua tra pubblico e privato, tra i conflitti segreti del momento storico narrato e i conflitti interiori dei personaggi del romanzo” (Amici, “*Noir su Noir*” 443). This alternating perspective helps provide psychological insights into the characters, which conveys the confusion and the disorientation after infamous connivance with the organized crime has ended.

### **Conclusions**

Giancarlo De Cataldo’s complex crime novels create a distinctive narrative of the last thirty years with the aim of clarifying certain parts of the Italian history which are still confused and unresolved for the current society. The trial on the negotiations between part of the institutions and the Sicilian Mafia in the early 1990s is currently taking place; as Amici observes, *Nelle mani giuste* “è un’opera più ‘coraggiosa’ di *Romanzo criminale*, poiché ambisce a metabolizzare il presente in letteratura” (Amici, “*Noir su Noir*” 441). Once again, in a time of crisis, Italian crime fiction or *noir* literature can provide, in authors such as De Cataldo, a representation and explanation of history that is deeper, more accurate and controversial than the official historiography with the use of fiction.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

With my study *Crime fiction of crisis: new neo realism in the age of Berlusconi from 1990 to 2010*, I intended to show how selected Italian crime fiction authors of the decades 1990-2010 articulate specific concerns about Italian contemporary society with their novels, thus contributing to the creation of a sort of new realism in contemporary literature. The aim of my analyses was to see if these novels could serve the function of *romanzo sociale* and tackle specific social and political issues such as the concerns about the role and status of women in Grazia Verasani and Elisabetta Bucciarelli's novels; social transformations, corrupt institutions, organized crime and environmental problems by Massimo Carlotto and Giancarlo De Cataldo; and the problematic relationship with the past, Fascism and Colonialism, history and memory in Carlo Lucarelli and Luciano Marrocu's historical novels. These novels, as Monica Jansen observes, are "portavoce di una riflessione critica, di una resistenza e di un antidoto contro una globalizzazione che rischia di diventare omologante e condizionante per la produzione culturale" (qtd in Mondello, "Il *noir* degli anni Zero" 13).

The novels constitute a reflection on specific topics of recent Italian history and the contemporary society aiming at informing the readers and involving them in a more active relationship with the novels. Not only are the readers entertained by the successful conventions of the genre, but they are also called to continue the reflections rose in the novels; in Goffredo Fofi's words, crime fiction spurs the reader to "capire, a chiedersi, a cercare un senso, a reagire" (Fofi 3). In this perspective, as Lucarelli points out, the

novels are fiction but in reality they bear a political stance: “Le nostre sembrano fiction ma sono reportage, inchieste alternative. [...] In un paese pieno di domande senza risposte troviamo un pubblico sempre piu appassionato e numeroso” (Vincenzi, “Da Camilleri a Lucarelli”). For Alessandro Perissinotto, crime fiction absolves the function of “fornire un vocabolario alla realtà, ... fornire parole per sconfiggere l’omertà collettiva, ma soprattutto ... di coprire con la propria voce il silenzio delle istituzioni e dei media” (Perissinotto, “Grandezza e limiti del poliziesco di denuncia.” 256). As I have shown for Massimo Carlotto’s *Perdas de Fogu* (2008), crime fiction can become “uno strumento di lotta, l’espressione di una forma di resistenza, di sabotaggio” (Mondello, “Il noir degli anni Zero” 33), which is much needed. In the case of this novel, *Perdas de Fogu*, in fact, the readers suggested that the author write about the controversies at the military range in Sardinia, in order to “infrangere il muro di silenzio imposto dal segreto militare steso intorno alla base missilistica” (Mondello, “Il noir degli anni Zero” 32). Carlotto, writing the novel with his group of Sardinian writers called Mama Sabot, has investigated thousands of official documents and created a *noir d’inchiesta* in order to serve as: “una delle funzioni principali della stampa: informare il lettore” (Mondello, “Il noir degli anni Zero” 21). It is clear that for Carlotto and the authors of this study, crime fiction is “capace di esercitare una funzione di disvelamento, di essere una contro-narrazione senza tentare di blandire o di assecondare il lettore” (Mondello, “Il noir degli anni Zero” 35).

My work demonstrates that these novels are *romanzi sociali* that continue the tradition of social commitment of Italian crime fiction. They show that Italian crime fiction continues the “close relation with Italy’s political and social environment”



(Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 183) that has started with Augusto De Angelis' novels, first published in 1936. Despite the censorship of the Fascist regime, De Angelis' series "was able to describe the social divide of his times and comment on an unfair judicial system" (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 183).

The tradition continues in 1960s with Giorgio Scerbanenco, Leonardo Sciascia from the 1960s and to the 1980s and Lorian Macchiavelli, from the 1970s to today. Scerbanenco addresses the consequences of Italy's late and accelerated industrialization in his novels set in 1960s Milan. A provincial town, the city became a polluted metropolis scarred by unauthorized buildings and criminality. Sciascia dealt with organized crime and the judicial system. In times when the institutions declared that "la mafia non esiste", Sciascia's novels exposed the mechanism of the mafia and how it was corroding Italian institutions. For critics, Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* (1960), is "il primo romanzo di denuncia" (Perissinotto, "Grandezza e limiti del poliziesco di denuncia" 225).

Macchiavelli, with his popular series dedicated to Antonio Sarti, has inaugurated the *topos* of Bologna as the dark side city" (Pezzotti, "The Importance of Place" 101), and criticized the left-wing administration of the city (Pezzotti, *Politics and Society* 184).

As I pointed out in my introduction, the new neorealism brought by crime fiction mirrors the recent international philosophical debate provoked in 2011 by the publication of the article "Ritorno al Pensiero Forte" by Italian philosopher Maurizio Ferraris. As I argue throughout my study, this necessity of realism stems from a need to face the disastrous social conditions of Italian society, conditions that have worsened in the last twenty years with the rise to power of Silvio Berlusconi.

Women authors of detective fiction are not new in the tradition of the genre; as

British and American research point out, women began writing since the half of the 1800. If recent research maintains that the first American detective novel written by a woman dates back to Metta Victor's *The Dead Letter* in 1866 (Hubin 28), the British production of women authored crime novels seem to date back, according to Lucy Sussex, to 1841, the same year of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", but thirty years before the Sherlock Holmes series by Conan Doyle, which begun in 1887. In Italy, the very few studies that are dedicated to this topic, point out that the first creator of an amateur investigator is Carolina Invernizio, who in 1909 published *Nina, la poliziotta dilettante*, in which a young girl unfairly charged of the murder of her fiancé attempts to solve the case (Pistelli, "Un secolo in giallo" 55). The character is not unlike those of the Anglo-American tradition, the conventional amateur detective such as Miss Marple, who is model of "the curious old lady, the spunky spinster, or someone's girlfriend" (Mizejewski 17) and hat has reached notoriety during the so-called Golden Age of detective fiction, from the 1920s to the end of 1930s, with the classical whodunits by Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers and Ngaio Marsh (Coward and Simple 40). Classic detective fiction and, therefore, earlier women detective fiction is typically conservative, because it follows the coordinates of the classic detective formula, with "a disruption of the status quo ... [and the] discovery (and eradication) of the perpetrator of this disruption. Usually the 'establishment' – the police, and the judiciary – are the forces which restore order and stability" (Coward and Semple 44). Even when the detective is a woman, there is no advancement for the female role, and the worldview remains essentially male, because, in those cases, the female detective is basically a replica of the male. The creation of the character of a woman policeman and private investigator is more recent. It dates back to

the 1970s, after the Women's Movement. For some critics, these characters do not alter the conventionality of the more common Miss Marple, and expresses skepticism in the potential of women detectives to challenge the masculine conventions of crime fiction (Walton and Jones 86). In fact, the presence of a woman in a traditionally male environment aims to subvert the genre and the patriarchal societal expectations, making it "a principal forum for the literary exposition of a feminist and female centred – problematics" (Gosdland 7). As I show in the second and third chapters, this is the case of Grazia Verasani's and Elisabetta Bucciarelli's novels. Through the creation of the character of a single, independent and strong woman, the authors address questions concerning the injustices and inequalities affecting gender roles and relations. These works show the woman detective's perspective and expose her insight, competences and skills, involving the readers in a process of revising the received assumptions on women's roles (Reddy 3). However, the characterizations of the two detectives make them more two anti-heroines than heroines, and, therefore very distant to the American traditional female detective, because they are portrayed more realistically, with their faults, weaknesses and mistakes, and this facilitate the realistic representation of the world they live. In fact, through the complexities of these characters, the authors highlight not only the discrimination of women, but also the dynamics of violence and the patriarchal power structures. In the fourth and fifth chapters of this study I explored historical crime fiction novels by Carlo Lucarelli and Luciano Marrocu which demonstrate the "remarkable adaptability of the detective novel: the author uses the conventions of the genre to investigate" (Di Ciolla 17) a historical period with which contemporary Italy has not reconciled with. Both authors tackle Italy's problematic

relationship with the Fascist and colonialist past, and address “broader questions of personal and political responsibility in the administration of justice” (Di Ciolla 17). The novels speak to the recent revisionist debate begun in the beginning of the 1990s: the re-evaluation of the Fascist regime and the critique of anti-Fascism and the Resistance (Di Ciolla 19), which has been instrumental “to the mid-90s restructuring of the political system, one of its most salient characteristics being the full legitimation of the party that traced its origins directly to back to Fascism, namely, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*” (Di Ciolla 27), that changed its name to *Alleanza Nazionale* in 1996 and allied with Berlusconi’s *Forza Italia*. Furthermore, they address another thorny aspect of the regime: the denial of responsibility for the mass murders in the African colonies, which is still a controversial topic, because the “postwar Italian governments not only eluded their obligations to clarify but actively impeded the emergence of truth” (Del Boca, “The myths, Suppressions, Denials” 18). As I analyzed in the chapter, through the characters of Lucarelli’s commissario De Luca and Marrocu’s Fascist secret police officers Carruezzo and Serra, the novels criticize the idea of Italian colonialism as “different, more tolerant and more humane than other colonialisms” (Del Boca, “The myths, Suppressions, Denials” 20) and the myth of the good-hearted Italian, the belief that Italians have, “a fundamental banality of goodness that prevented them from perpetrating inhuman and criminal acts” (Fogu 147), which has been deployed to alleviate Italian responsibilities during the wars of conquest. As Fogu points out, “[t]he brava gente image of Italians can be traced across so many media ... and post war generations ... that it could be easily mistaken as the quintessential expression of a truly collective memory” (Fogu 147-148). However, despite “the lack of debate on colonialism and the failure to condemn its most

brutal aspects”, Palumbo observes that in the last two decades Italian scholars have given more attention to Italian colonialism (1), although only in 1996 the Ministry of Defense admitted the use of gas in Ethiopia (Del Boca, “The myths, Suppressions, Denials” 20). Finally, I have shown how the crime novel can give insights into other heated debates of postwar Italy. In fact, the novels in my fifth chapter offer an alternative narrative of crucial events and periods of recent Italy: the years from the Years of Lead to Tangentopoli (Giancarlo De Cataldo); the networks of powers in the north east of Italy and the issue of toxic contamination in Sardinia (Carlotto). What these novels have in common is the attempt to make a history of the networks of power in Italy, exposing, through the plot, its dynamics and ramification. By addressing the mingle of different foreign mafias in the north-east of *Nessuna cortesia all’uscita*; the collusions of the criminal world with the State, the Church, the Sicilian mafia, the secret services in *Romanzo criminale*; the international economic interests in the exploitation of the Sardinian military base in *Persdas de Fogu*, and, finally, the attempts of some of the institutions to re-establish the agreement with the Sicilian mafia and the rise to power of “un nuovo italiano”, Berlusconi, to paradoxically re-establish the old government and cohabitation with the mafia in *Nelle mani giuste*, the authors of these novels have proposed a narration (or counter –narration) of the recent past and of the present with the aim to contrast the silence of the media and the institutions, and provide the reader with the words to make sense of the reality.

As I make clear throughout my dissertation, women’s issues are one of the hot social concerns that need immediate confrontation. My work analyzed the series of two female detectives that, through their investigations, tackle specific topics regarding the

objectification of the female body in Italian contemporary society. What my work does not offer is a wider analyses of crime fiction by Italian women authors. Since the number of these writers is vast, I think it is necessary that scholars expand their studies, giving the attention that this literature deserves. For example, I think it is important to finally have a history of Italian women mystery writers, the lack of which makes undermining all the work of the many women writers of the country.

My study analyzes the representation of the city by the two women writers. However, because of the close relationship that Italian crime fiction has with its setting, I think it would be interesting to study how this relationship unfolds in women-authored crime fiction.

Furthermore, another aspect that my work did not include is the comparison of the cinematographic and television version of some of the novels, for example, the movie and television series produced after Grazia Verasani's *Quo vadis, baby?* or of Giancaldo De Cataldo's *Romanzo criminale*, and investigate if the transpositions preserves the features of social critique that the novels have.

Finally, I think it would be necessary to look at more recent developments in the evolution of the crime fiction genre. At the forefront is Massimo Carlotto, the promoter of *romanzo sociale* and creator of *noir d'inchiesta*, who is now proposing with his more recent works, and with the team of writers in the project Sabot/Age, a new project regarding the *noir* novel. For the writer, the role of crime fiction in the form of *noir d'inchiesta*, "romanzo della crisi", is now over. According to the writer it is now time to write about how people are living the conflict in such a transfigured society, "e i suoi effetti collaterali" (Amici and Carlotto 48):

Il modello narrativo del *noir d'inchiesta* ha avuto il merito di raccontare la crisi dal momento in cui ha iniziato a prendere forma, e veniva puntualmente negata. Il problema è sorto quando la crisi conclamata è diventata il terreno di una novità urgente da raccontare: il conflitto. Il conflitto non è solo quello sociale, economico, ma anche le modificazioni antropologiche che la crisi sta determinando nelle persone (Carlotto, “*Noir*” 104).

Carlotto advocates for the insertion of crime fiction in a wider context, as he explains, “il passaggio dalla letteratura di genere alla letteratura dei contenuti, dove la discriminante è la qualità della storia, nel senso di adesione alla realtà del conflitto” (Carlotto, “*Noir*” 105). For Carlotto, the topics of the story is prevailing: “[l]a questione si sposta sui contenuti: [raccontare] il conflitto odierno, in maniera molto precisa, dotandosi degli stessi strumenti che aveva finora usato il *noir*” (Carlotto, “*Noir*” 106). However, for Carlotto, this necessarily means a contamination of genres, because “contenuti e intreccio” (Amici and Carlotto 117) become predominant, at the expenses of the “strutture narrative vincolanti” such as the conventions of the crime novel. For Carlotto, “l’intenzione è di utilizzare il noir come punto di partenza per poi mescolare, all’interno della stessa narrazione, generi diversi” (Amici and Carlotto 114). Carlotto said that this project began with his collaboration with the team of writers for *Perdas de Fogu*. I think that, for future studies, it will be stimulating to study the evolution of his project.

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