

Italy in crime fiction

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Summary

- A Brief **History** of Italian Crime Fiction
- **Geography** and Crime Fiction in Italy
- The **Early Masters**: Gadda, Sciascia and Scerbanenco
- The new wave of the **1990s**
- **Carlo Lucarelli (b. 1960)**
- **Andrea Camilleri (b. 1925)**
- Conclusions

A short history

- **1887:** first Italian detective story: “Il cappello del prete” (The priest’s hat) by Emilio De Marchi
- **1910-1930:** the first Italian detective story series launched
- **1929:** birth of “I libri gialli” by the Mondadori publishing house, which gave birth to the name “giallo” to mean “detective story” in Italian

I GIALLI MONDADORI

E' UN DELITTO!

120



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SPEDIZ. IN ABBON. POSTALE (2)

di RICHARD ELLINGTON

A short history/2

- **1931:** the Fascist regime imposed autarky in culture as well as economics.
- **1941:** the Fascist Ministry of Culture (Minculpop) forbade the publication of detective stories set in Italy.
- **1941:** all detective stories forbidden.

A short history/3

- **1946:** gialli appeared again in bookshops.
- **1946-1957:** *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana (That Awful Mess on via Merulana)* by Carlo Emilio Gadda
- **1961:** *Il giorno della civetta (Day of the Owl)* by Leonardo Sciascia
- **1966:** *Venere privata [Private Venus]* by Giorgio Scerbanenco

Geography and c. fiction in Italy

- Italian polycentric history generated **local** literatures and languages/dialects.
- Italy is still a still fragmented country, with a **clear separation in culture and mentality among cities and regions.**
- 'Giallo' follows a **geographic pattern.**
Massimo Carloni *Italia in giallo: storia e geografia del giallo italiano contemporaneo* (1984)

Part 2

The Early Masters

Giallo with no solution: Gadda

- Carlo Emilio Gadda (1893-1973)
- Engineer, student of philosophy and then full time writer.
- Detective story: *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de Via Merulana* (1946-1947, 1957, *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*)
- Two crimes occur in the same buildings in Rome within a few days of each other. Inspector Ingravallo investigates.
- Linguistic experimentation, impossibility to know the truth.



Political committment: Sciascia

- **Leonardo Sciascia** (1921-1989)
- A writer, an essayist and a politician, he has always been involved in Italian political and social debate. He was councillor in Sicily, a member of the Italian House of representatives and, later, a member of the European Parliament.
- Detective stories: “Il giorno della civetta” (Day of the owl, 1961); “**A ciascuno il suo**” (To each his own, 1966) , “Todo modo”,(Equal Danger, 1971) “Il cavaliere e la morte” (The Knight and Death, 1988).
- **The phenomenon of the Mafia**



Sciascia: the topic of the Mafia

“What we call humanity...I divide into five categories: men, half-men, pigmies, arse-crawlers – if you’ll excuse the expression – and quackers...

They [the Quackers] ought to just exist, like ducks in a pond: their lives have no more point or meaning”

Don Mariano to Captain Bellodi in *The Day of the Owl* (p.102).



Boom of the 1960s: Scerbanenco

- **Giorgio Scerbanenco** (1911-1969)
- **Traditori di tutti** (1966, Duca and the Milan murders)
- Part of a series with Duca Lamberti as main character.
- A foggy night in Milan, a car with a drunken man and woman inside is pushed into a canal. Duca Lamberti, a doctor disbarred from his profession, works with his friend, Police Inspector Carrua, against the violent underworld of the city.
- **History: Milan in the 1960s**



Boom of the 1960's/2

Mention Marseilles, Chicago or Paris, and everyone knows you're talking of a wicked metropolis, but with Milan it's different. Surrounded as they are by the unmistakable atmosphere of a great city, there are still idiots who think of it in terms of local colour; looking for *la brasera*, *la pesa*, and perhaps *il gamba del legn*. They forget that a city of two million inhabitants is bound to acquire an international flavour. There's precious little left nowadays of the old local colour. From all over the world, spivs and layabouts are converging on Milan in search of money. They all come, madmen, drunks, drug-addicts, even those who are simply without hope. (*Duca and the Milan Murders*, 1970, p. 108-109)

The Navigli area



The new wave of the 1990s

- Detective series give “multiple opportunities to create a distinctive sense of place” (Geherin, 2008).
- A new wave of detective fiction series first published in 1992. Main writers: Carlo Lucarelli; Andrea Camilleri, Massimo Carlotto and Marcello Fois.

Carlo Lucarelli

- Carlo Lucarelli (b. 1960)
- A former crime reporter, he is a writer and a TV host.
- Two series set in contemporary Bologna.
- *Lupo Mannaro* [The Warewolf, 1994), *Almost Blue* (1997), and *Un giorno dopo l'altro* (2000, *Day after Day*).



Characteristics of his series

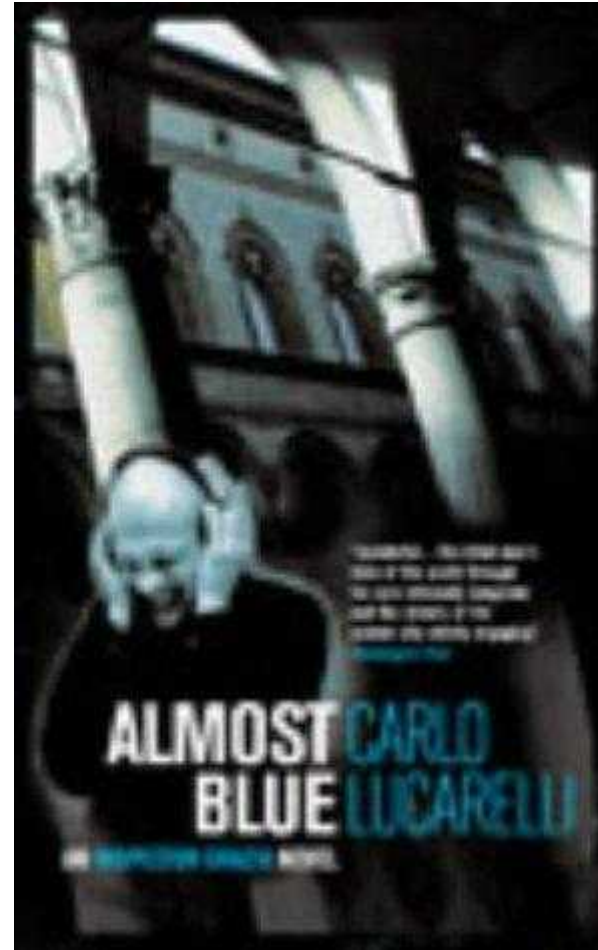
- He introduces the figure of the serial killer in Italian crime fiction
- CSI-style investigation (before CSI!)
- A woman investigator: Inspector Grazia Negro.
- A modern, cinematic, writing style.
- The idea of the urban sprawl.

Piazza Maggiore



Almost Blue (1997)

- Hunt for **the Iguana**, a serial killer who assumes the features and identities of his victims, all Bologna University students. The author wanted this story to be an Italian version of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1988) by Thomas Harris.



Almost Blue: a clandestine city

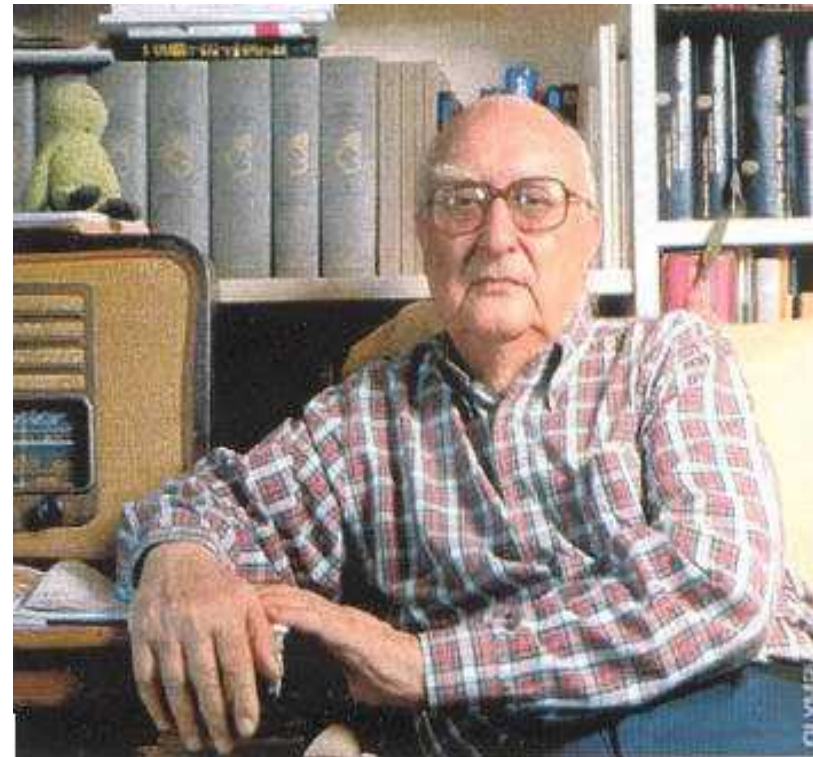
- You say you want to search the university – OK- we'll search the university, we'll sift through the students, we'll check out their clubs, apartments, cafeterias...but you know what, Ispettore Negro? **The university isn't what it seems, either.** The university has another side to it, and not much is known about it, either. Students come to Bologna from all parts of Italy. They start studying and then quit, then they start up again. They stay at friends' or relatives' houses, they sublet apartments illegally, with no guarantees or contracts. Did you know that most of the terrorists in the seventies lived in Bologna? Anywhere else in Italy someone would have noticed a weird looking kid with a strange accent, coming and going at all hours of the day and night, with no apparent job, disappearing for long stretches of time. But not here. Here, that's your basic student. You want to get to know the University, Ispettore? **The University is its own clandestine city.** (106-107).

Bologna University



'Giallo' and Commitment: Camilleri

- Andrea Camilleri (1925-)
- He worked as a theatre director, a producer for RAI, the State TV, and teacher at the *Centro sperimentale di cinematografia* and at the *Accademia nazionale d'arte drammatica*.
- In 1994, at 69, Camilleri made his detective fiction debut. His novel *La forma dell'acqua* (The shape of water) was the first in a successful series that features **Inspector Salvo Montalbano**.
- He has so far published **13 Montalbano novels** and three collections of short stories



A big international success

- In 1999 seven out of 10 books on the Italian best-seller list were by Camilleri.
- By 2002 he had sold 6.5 million books in Italy
- More than 120 translations of his books have been published.
- A successful TV series.



Characteristics of his series

- Set in an imaginary town: Vigàta (Porto Empedocle?)
- A new language
- The representation of a new *sicilianità* (Sicilian identity)
- Humour as *impegno* (commitment)

Camilleri's Sicily

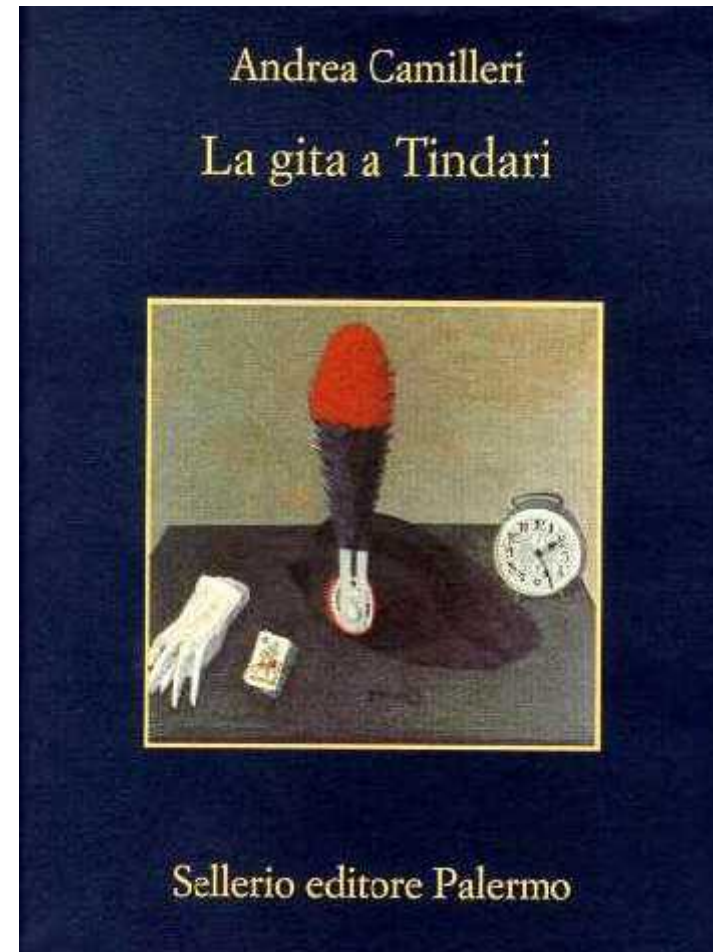


Targets of Camilleri's humour

- The idiocy of bureaucracy
- Cliché and prejudices against Sicilians
- Evils of contemporary politics (the Northern League and prime minister Berlusconi in particular)
- The Mafia

Excursion to Tindari

- **Excursion to Tindari** (2000), translated into English in 2005
- A young Don Juan is found murdered in front of his apartment building early one morning. An elderly couple, living in the same building, is reported missing after an excursion to the ancient site of Tindari. During his investigation Montalbano stumbles onto **Sicily's brutal "new Mafia"**.
- The new **Internet** Mafia



Ridiculing the Mafia

Japichinu, son of Masino and beloved grandson of Don Balduccio, a boyish thirty-year-old endowed by nature with a face so sweet and honest that the retirees would have trusted him with their life savings, was forced to go into hiding, pursued by a slew of arrest warrants. [...] Don Balduccio's younger son, 'Ngilino, had gone completely mad, and began speaking an incomprehensible tongue that he claimed was Arabic. And from that moment on, he'd begun dressing like an Arab as well, so that in town he became known as 'the sheikh'. The sheikh's two sons spent more time abroad than in Vigàta. Pino, known as the 'reconciler' for the diplomatic skill he was able to summon up at difficult moments, was constantly traveling back and forth between Canada and the United States....(p.113-114).

A New Sicily/2

- “Giulio was against our meeting. He didn’t want me getting mixed up in things that, in his opinion, were no concern of mine. For decades my respectable people here did nothing but repeat that the Mafia was no concern of theirs but only involved the people involved in it. But I used to teach my pupils that the ‘see-nothing, know-nothing’ attitude is the most mortal of sins. So now that it’s my turn to tell what I saw, I’m supposed to take a step back?” (*The Snack Thief*, p.63).

Why Italian Crime Fiction of the 1990s?

- In Italian detective fiction, the city is “more than a backdrop by weaving it into the very fabric of the novel” (Geherin, 2008).
- All the cities are represented **with their specific characteristics and flavour**.
- Each author **gives a different and personal representation** of the same city.
- My writers cover a **wide range of representations** from the exaltation of a unique city to a pessimism typical of the American hard-boiled sub-genre.

Discussion

- Are you a crime fiction reader?
- Why do you read crime fiction?
- What do you expect from a crime story?
- Which is your favourite author? Why?
- Did you read crime stories set in Italy?
- Why are you interested in crime stories set in Italy?