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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE DETECTIVE: THE PROTAGONIST'S POWER TO
CHALLENGE, SHAPE AND MEND THROUGH SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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BY
ELIZABETH ANNE FIEDLER

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Abstract

In the *giallo* (Italian detective novel), this study finds an elevated capacity for social critique, joining a conversation about literature's role in upholding or critiquing and ultimately working to change social constructs and institutions. It also explores the role of the detective character in determining the viewpoint, attitude, and scope of the Italian detective novel in this activity of critique. Collectively, the novels in this study reveal two main patterns among the most intensely characterized Italian detective protagonists: the first is a strong sense of localism, understood as the tendency to give one's allegiance to local entities rather than the state, and to adhere to not national but local traditions and customs. The second is a complex attitude toward official institutions involving mistrust of the same combined with cautious optimism in moral judgments, resulting in the necessary separation of the concepts of absolute and official justice. This study focuses on the detective's relationship to institutions of law and order and to concepts of abstract justice, on his relationship to place and setting and thereby to identities and center-periphery paradigms, and on the detective character's use of humor as social critique. The detective emerges as the focal point from which the *giallo* engages in a modern iteration of the *poeta vate*, the civic poet concerned with writing the way to a better state. When one treats the *giallo* detective character as a guide for reading the work as a whole, it emphasizes the *giallo's* potential for social critique and even social healing; the genre employs Nussbaumian narrative tools to form an ethical, compassionate, and emotionally intelligent readership as well as promoting problematic reflections on local and national Italian culture, identity, and official institutions.

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Introduction

The early history of the Italian detective story is intertwined with the history of imported detective stories from other languages, especially French and English. Certain details in that early history of the genre (the early 20th century) reflect a complex rapport full of tensions between the characteristics and tendencies of the genre on one hand and the prevailing social values or cultural and civic priorities of the institutions in power at the time on the other. For the purposes of this project I focus mainly on more recent *gialli* by Italian authors, and I argue that the genre's emphasis on social meaning and critique developed in large part in response to the political and cultural environment of the Fascist period in which the *giallo* emerges in Italy.

The most easily discerned event signaling the birth of the Italian *giallo* is the inclusion in the Mondadori series *I libri gialli* of *Il Sette Bello* by Alessandro Varaldo in 1931, two years after the inception of the series. *I libri gialli* was not the only series instituted by an Italian publisher to

meet high popular demand for the genre, but it was the largest, continued the longest, and was most prolific; the books' distinctive yellow jackets also gave the genre its name. In the 1930s, the series was dominated by foreign authors from countries with a more established mystery/noir literature; the inclusion of *Il Sette Bello* and other Italian works was largely due to a law that required at least 20% of the works in a given series to be Italian productions. Mussolini's Minculpop (Ministero della cultura popolare) instituted a ban on the *giallo* in 1941, and although some works in the genre were published regardless, the Mondadori series itself was on hiatus from 1941 until the after the end of World War II, in 1946. Of the *gialli* that were published during the ban, most had notable fascist, nationalistic, or anti-Semitic overtones. Italian *giallisti* at the time also set many of their novels in foreign settings, as a way to avoid violating other restrictions on the genre (e.g., the culprit must not be Italian). The regime's suspicion of the genre was rooted in the idea that it had the capacity to cast doubt on or criticize the official, idealistic narrative of the fascist state as peaceful and orderly, through the depiction of crime and criminals, as well as through explicitly or implicitly pointing out shortcomings on the part of the police and other organs of law and order.¹ Even if Haycraft's assertion that crime fiction can only be written in democracies because it relies on concepts of absolute justice is an oversimplification,² overlooking as he does the possibility of multiple concepts of justice, he is onto something important; the *gialli* produced in the fascist-era are many of them formulaic or

1. This distrust of the *giallo* forms a strange counterpoint to the common stereotype of the genre, also present since its origins, as superficial, escapist literature. The conventional wisdom that the *giallo* is not "real literature," whatever that means, is belied by this contradiction on the part of the fascist government: how can shallow escapism pose such a threat?

unconvincing, and it took a few more decades for the genre to regain a solid footing and to mature to a level comparable to French- and English-language detective novels. Augusto De Angelis is one of a very few *giallisti* of that time whose works are still read, re-published, and studied today, and it seems no accident that he saw his work as a modern *far versi*, the undertaking of the great civic poets of the past. His incarceration for anti-fascist activities and his death at the hands of a fascist activist should come as no surprise, either.

Early Italian *gialli*, including Varaldo's novels, utilize striking stylistic improvisation that crosses genres (e.g. a "*rosa*" romantic happy ending, or paranormal elements that provide essential clues),³ but also strong influences from foreign literature: aspects of Anglo-American tradition beyond the detective novel, and especially elements borrowed from the Anglo-Saxon positivist detectives in the tradition of Sherlock Holmes. Common to all *gialli* is the impetus to restore order, to discover a narrative of the facts of the case that makes logical sense and reassuringly upholds ideas of justice and law; in the literary narrative of the *giallo*, this is achieved by retelling the testimonies and realities of victims, witnesses, and criminals alike, primarily through the detective's point of view. On the other hand, the characteristics of irony and distance also demonstrate the *giallo*'s early tendency toward a political and social critique that belies the possibility of always *finding* that comforting or all-explaining narrative; while valuing an abstract or ideal justice, the genre is also skeptical of official narratives of justice and law from the start. Such is the case in the novels of Augusto de Angelis featuring the police

2. Howard Haycraft, *Murder for Pleasure*, 1941.

3. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 19.

detective De Vincenzi, whose repeated efforts to get inside the criminal mind run counter to the Fascist distrust of psychology, and who carries out investigations by scrutinizing the details of a scene and the behavior of persons of interest to an extent that his colleagues never consider, instead preferring the most obvious narrative, if not the most coherent. The *giallo* presents itself as the literary alternative to institutional narratives of justice and order, and it may even have the potential to contribute to the formation of a more just and compassionate society.

Precursors and cousins to the Italian *giallo* have also featured distinctive, specific characterization of the detective figure almost since the beginning. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes from the English tradition is one of the most internationally recognizable characters in literature and on stage and screen.⁴ Inspector Morse and Hercule Poirot, created by Colin Dexter and Agatha Christie respectively,⁵ are just two of many other iconic fictional detectives in the same tradition. In French, we have Maigret created by Georges Simenon,⁶ and in the Scandinavian tradition, Kurt Wallander in the novels by Henning Mankell.⁷ In each of these and many others of the most popular works of mystery and crime fiction, the detective is the central character in the sense of providing the main point of view, but also the driving personality and intellect behind the investigation; the character's traits, both psychological and external, influence the approach to investigation as an intellectual and civic activity, the kind of clues that will be significant, and ultimately the interpretation of the crime and violence at the

4. The first Sherlock Holmes novel is *A Study in Scarlet*, 1887.

5. Morse first appears in *Last Bus to Woodstock*, 1975, and Poirot in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, 1920.

6. The first Maigret novel is *Pietr-le-Letton*, *The Strange Case of Peter the Lett*, 1931.

heart of the narrative. In this way the detective character exercises powerful influence on the reader's interpretation of the narrative and the investigation, as well as of the other characters, institutions, settings, and locations.

A positivist detective like Sherlock Holmes (positivist, at least, in the earlier novels and stories before Doyle begins putting more of his personal interest in spiritualism into the Holmes stories) drives an investigation centered on the idea that the facts of the case can be objectively examined and known, depending largely on observable material evidence. Holmes' physical presence is energetic, intense, restless, austere, authoritative, and emotionally cold; he abuses his body in the service of the intellectual pursuits that define his detective work, and all this is apparent in his appearance as a tall, gaunt, gray man of about sixty. His treatment of other characters is another essential trait of the character Holmes, being emotionally aloof, even machine-like; a rich emotional life would be a distraction from his kind of positivist approach to crime solving.

Detectives like Maigret and Wallander who have more interest in the psychology of crime and in the emotional and social aspects of violence lead investigations involving very different problems of interpreting the motives and behavior of suspects, victims, and other characters. Maigret in particular offers a stark contrast to Holmes; the French detective has a portly figure, a relatively conventional domestic life, and a love of food and drink that goes beyond simply being in character with typical French food culture. He also has strong relationships with his loyal police colleagues, is humble regarding his own abilities and

7. Wallander's first appearance is in *Mördare utan ansikte*, *Faceless Killers*, 1991.

affectionate toward his wife, but is surrounded by clutter and disorder. These comfortable, affable personal characteristics are intertwined with his psychological approach to crime, involving a great deal of sharp perception of behavior and even more intuition.

Despite the enormous success that the Holmes stories have always enjoyed in translation in Italy, the latter examples are more spiritually akin to the Italian detective, the psychological approach to crime allowing more room for questioning the institutions and values that both create and counter crime and violence.

Of course, detective novelists and crime authors do not exclusively focus on one singular and highly characterized detective, but often crime-centered novels without a central, distinctive detective figure are thought of as thrillers or suspense rather than “mystery.” Recent examples of this, such as certain of Stephen King’s novels, might lead one to assume that this fluidity within the established conventions is the result of only recently increased acceptance of genre-flouting in the public readership, but “mysteries” (to use as broad a term as possible) involving a crime or puzzle in need of resolution but without a central detective figure have been present since the early days of the genre as well. Wilkie Collins’ novel *The Moonstone* (1868), for example, does include a police detective character, but the story is told from multiple points of view, and the police detective is hardly central to the plot or the solution of the mystery. Agatha Christie, famous for several distinctive detective characters including Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, also wrote *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), in which the narrator initially seems to be a sort of sidekick or key witness for Poirot but turns out to be the murderer, subverting the convention of having the detective and protagonist be one and the same. The

novel succeeds so well in large part because the narrative convention it subverts is so prevalent to begin with. In Italian, Barbara Baraldi's *A Casa di Amelia* (2009) is a beautifully constructed psychological crime thriller without a detective; the main character also turns out to be the guilty party, unknown even to herself at first. But by and large the international mystery genre, or family of genres, is home to a remarkable number of highly recognizable and specifically characterized detective characters.

In the Italian tradition, we see the same pattern emerging, with most popular *gialli* featuring intensely characterized detective protagonists, although the manner of characterization and the relationships between the character and the relevant settings and institutions are particularly, specifically Italian. By this I mean two main tendencies: the first is an extremely strong sense of localism, understood as the tendency to give one's allegiance to local entities rather than the state, and to adhere to not so much national but rather local traditions and customs. The second is a complex attitude toward official institutions involving mistrust of the same combined with cautious optimism in moral judgments, resulting in the necessary separation of the concepts of absolute and official justice; this attitude that takes into account different frames of reference when it comes to narratives of crime and justice is what gives the *giallo* its heightened capacity for social critique. The role of the detective character in shaping the worldview and key issues of the novel as a whole is an important and highly effective one, which is why I have chosen to examine those characters specifically and their relationships to place and setting, to institutions of law and order, and to humor as social critique. It is also the reason why I have chosen literary works that fall firmly within the *giallo*

end of the spectrum, rather than series that tend more toward the *noir*, if we accept for the sake of convenience the simplistic distinction that the former focuses on investigation and problem-solving while the latter emphasizes the thrill of the chase and the danger involved in hunting for the guilty party, always admitting that such rigid distinctions are ultimately unsatisfactory. The *giallo* detective's drive to find out the truth and resolve the irritating "kernel of doubt" surrounding violent events seem to allow the most room for the influence of his character on the shape of the investigation and the narrative as a whole, since the ending of the *giallo*, even in more psychologically-centered cases, is generally less open-ended, ambiguous, and inclined toward circularity and narrative *mise-en-abyme* than the *noir*.

The texts at the center of this project are Andrea Camilleri's Commissario Montalbano series, Maurizio de Giovanni's Commissario Ricciardi series, Gianrico Carofiglio's Avvocato Guerrieri series, and Carlo Lucarelli's Ispettore Coliandro series. Montalbano, the gourmand detective with impeccable personal integrity, is so well liked as a character that the television series has aired on the BBC, and there are now Montalbano-themed tours of Sicily featuring the locations where favorite scenes were shot for the series. Ricciardi is distinctive for his near-crippling melancholy and peculiar ability to see and hear ghostly images of the dead. Guerrieri is a sarcastic lawyer-detective, chosen because non-police detectives are somewhat more unusual in the Italian *giallo* than in other national literatures. Coliandro was chosen over other Lucarelli's other detective characters because of his highly unusual female co-protagonist Nikita, who is the titular character of the first story in the print series (1991) and appears sporadically on screen. I have omitted true-crime and nonfiction works (e.g. Lucarelli's

television series *Blu Notte* (1998)) because I am primarily interested in these fictional, constructed detective figures, which is not to say that the same social and cultural questions would not apply in the contemplation of nonfiction works.

I would have liked to examine detective characters in this body of literature in light of gender-related issues, but have found it difficult to examine a broad spectrum of gender representation in the genre due to the relative scarcity of both female writers and female detective protagonists. Some notable exceptions within the crime fiction world are authors Barbara Baraldi and Silvana La Spina, but they remain the exception rather than the rule, in contrast to the well-established Anglo-American tradition of numerous and prolific female crime writers. This is beginning to change in the last few years, with increased sales of *gialli* in general and the emergence of more female *giallisti* such as Alessandra Alioto, Rosalba Repaci, and Alessandra Carnevale. Hopefully the trend continues and studies of gender and femininity in the *giallo* will be fruitful and numerous. In the meantime, I am able to make some gestures in the direction of gender issues in the *giallo* in the context of gender-related humor in Lucarelli's *Coliandro* series in print and on screen. Coliandro's exaggerated form of heterosexual masculinity is an object of tentative ridicule, and the two iterations of the series treat the character Nikita very differently; in print, she is a second protagonist and a foil to Coliandro's misogyny, while on screen she is a problematic occasional sidekick.

Below are just some of the arguments that can be made about the Italian detective character's role in the *giallo*. The same inquiries could also be applied to English and German depictions of Italian detectives, such as the Aurelio Zen mysteries by Michael Dibdin, or the

Guido Brunetti series written by Donna Leon and adapted for television in Germany (2000).

Indeed, a study contrasting Italian detectives created by Italian and non-Italian authors could well provide significant additional depth to the issues I discuss in this project, but for now I am laying the groundwork with exclusively Italian depictions of Italian detectives.

In the first chapter, I explore the detective character in his roles as rule-breaker and rule-enforcer, social critic and mender in his relationships to institutions of law and order. When and under what conditions is the detective willing to stretch and bend the protocols of his investigation, ignore the instructions of his superiors, break the law himself, or overlook similar transgressions in others? Under what circumstances does he rigorously follow the rules when breaking them could make his task easier? Martha Nussbaum's work on the literary imagination and the ethical and moral implications of narrative is crucial to understanding the role of the detective in potentially enhancing the reader's moral development because of how the character confronts social and moral difficulties and draws the reader into doing the same. Since "literature focuses on the possible" rather than only on what has happened, and because it demands "a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions,"⁸ it is capable of contributing to moral and ethical arguments in ways that history cannot. The Italian detective and his particular attitude toward conventional authority structures make an excellent case study for the potential and some of the limits of Nussbaum's ideal poetic judge. In the many examples of rule-breaking in these works, the detective almost always transgresses in

reaction to some flaw or lacuna in the system that might result in the wrong judicial outcome; his transgression, in fact, has the motive of ensuring justice is done while institutional justice is too blind or bureaucratic to arrive at the “right” solution to the puzzle. The reader instinctively approves of these transgressions against rules and law because the detective is represented as working in the interests of a more abstract, universal form of justice that brings the guilty to account and does no harm to the innocent.⁹ Equally important are instances in which the detective upholds the law, follows protocol, and rejects corruptive influences when these courses of action could remove obstacles in the investigation or personal obstacles. The detective’s conscience is frequently the standard by which the reader is led to judge his own actions, calling into question the effectiveness of the law and protocol and the institutions that dictate and enforce them. In this way, the *giallo* becomes a powerful medium of critique, not only on the social level, but also on the level of the intensely personal, in its power to inspire the development of the capacity for moral judgment and self-reflection.¹⁰ Despite criticisms of Nussbaum that suggest her concept of the literary imagination is too idealistic or overstates the ethical properties of literature, the core of her argument is more concerned with a responsive reading of texts and works of art, rather than ascribing moral value to any of those works

8. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 5.

9. Note that I specify “does no harm,” rather than “protects,” because in cases such as Carofiglio’s novel *Ad occhi chiusi*, this proves to be tragically impossible.

10. Mussolini and his MinCulPop (Ministro di Cultura Popolare [Ministry of Popular Culture]) anticipated and feared this in the earliest years of the Italian *giallo*, placing severe restrictions on the genre and eventually banning it from being sold in Italy, see section I of the first chapter.

themselves.¹¹ In a similar way, I am primarily interested in the *giallo* detective's habit of questioning how to live in relation to the community and to bodies of law and order, rather than any particular action on his part, since it is the former that models the kind of moral and ethical properties that elicit a similar line of questioning on the part of the reader.

The second chapter focuses on the *giallo* detective's connection to Italy's vibrant regional and local identities and specific settings and places, especially those normally associated with social margins. The complexity of Italian identities calls out for special attention to setting in Italian literature, but especially in the *giallo*, where a pivotal crime or violent event attached to a specific place creates an exceptionally strong sense of place and setting. Certain settings are even embodied in an individual character or become so intensely described as to become like a character themselves, drawing even more attention to problematic social paradigms. By reading the particulars of the place and setting in the *giallo*, as viewed and understood through the detective character's experiences, the reader can find clues to how to read the narratives themselves and interpret the social and ethical issues they raise.

Finally, the third chapter focuses on the use of humor to emphasize and explore troubling social and cultural issues in mainly two series of novels and their television adaptations. Detective characters are often conflicted and seemingly contradictory, which is unsurprising, given their frequent encounters with death, their impulse to preserve and restore justice and social order, and their culturally embedded mistrust of official institutions and narratives of justice. I refer frequently to a theory that explains humor as the conjunction of

11. Martha Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism," 358.

multiple conflicting frames of reference, in this case arising from the detective negotiating paradoxes created by conflicts between social and personal values and his own desires and ends. Television adaptations introduce additional elements or emphasize different aspects of the characters and narrative, further highlighting the multiple frames of reference that create both conflict and humor. When the adaptation and the humor are coherent and successful, these detective characters embody the challenging complexity of human relationships and society as well as the humorous framing of these concerns.

Chapter 1

Giallo Detectives:

Rule-Breakers and Social Healers

Introduction

This chapter explores the detective character in his roles as rule-breaker and rule-enforcer, social critic and mender in his relationships to institutions of law and order. When is the detective in a position to transgress rules, laws, and protocol and overlook others' transgressions? When does he instead rigorously follow and uphold the rule of law? The reader is led to approve of those transgressions that serve moral justice or a sense of greater social

good, a more abstract form of justice. Both of these contradictory actions are equally important for understanding the *giallo*'s and the detective's roles in upholding justice and order, on levels both social and personal. These are the moments in which the *giallo* becomes its most powerful at engaging in critique and forming the reader's capacity for self-reflection and judicious critique as well.

The *giallo*'s function as social critique stems from the social and political function of literary imagination as theorized by Martha Nussbaum in her works on politics and literature, especially *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, as well as narrative's ability to oscillate seamlessly between particulars and universals. I will use Fabrizia Abbate's definition of Nussbaumian literary imagination: "[la] capacità di figurarsi e di comprendere emotivamente la complessità umana, i bisogni e i desideri degli individui e le circostanze materiali in cui essi agiscono, in qualsiasi parte del globo terrestre" ["[the] capacity to picture and to understand emotively the human complexity, the needs and desires of individuals and the material circumstances in which they operate, in whatever part of the globe.]"¹ Abbate also examines the happy meeting of particulars and universals in the social meaning conveyed through narrative, especially fiction, as a property of literature in general: "l'oscillazione tra il concreto e il generale, tra contesto e universalità, come dire che la concretezza dell'immaginazione narrativa non è un limite, un recinto angusto, ma piuttosto la sua potenzialità di dire di più a tutti, perché quei contesti ci appartengono così come condividiamo la medesima umanità" ["the oscillation between the concrete and the general, between context and universality, that is to say that the

concreteness of the literary imagination is not a limit, a narrow confine, but rather its potentiality to say more to everyone, because those contexts belong to us all, since we share the same humanity.”² All fiction, for Nussbaum and Abbate, has the potential to function as social critique and medicine; since “Literature focuses on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves...literary works typically invite their readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences...they convey that there are links of possibility, at least on a very general level, between the characters and the reader.”³ The *giallo* is especially poised to highlight these potential links and fill these roles as criticism and medicine because of the emphasis that *giallo* authors since the 1990s have placed on the most pressing contemporary social and political ills, and because of the detective character’s particular attitudes towards institutions of law and order, protocol, conventions, and justice in the absolute. Nicoletta di Ciolla takes a similar view, but focuses primarily on the cognitive functions of the *giallo* and *noir* narrative: “The noir narrates so that we can remember, and it narrates so that we may take heed and action, turning cognition into an act of resistance against oblivion and rebellion against injustice.”⁴ Given that the detective is traditionally the central character of the *giallo*, it is primarily the detective’s perspective on human complexity that the reader is invited to imagine, and his understanding of both the concrete, material evidence and

1. Fabrizia Abbate, *L’occhio della compassione*, 22.

2. Fabrizia Abbate, *L’occhio della compassione*, 23.

3. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 5.

4. Nicoletta di Ciolla, *Uncertain Justice*, 11.

the emotional, psychological motivations and contexts of the case that the reader inevitably encounters.

An obvious but nevertheless essential question to ask will be, which rules, conventions, and institutions does the *giallo* challenge, and does that list include narrative structure and reading themselves? A brief overview of the history of the genre and official attitudes toward and limitations on the production and distribution of detective novels will show that the *giallo* has long had a reputation for challenging the political status quo. This is the case even though many predecessors from English and French literature follow a more or less straightforward crime-investigation-solution model that reassuringly upholds both the rational, investigative process and the legal process: “Fascist fear of the genre...further indicates its intellectual potential to subvert dominant structures of power: *gialli* might teach citizens to challenge the status quo.”⁵ But how strong is that intellectual potential? Does it go so far as to undermine the narrative as a governing structure and reading as a system of investigation itself? What reading and investigation clearly have in common are the exercise of reason and the interpretation of narrative(s), but does the *giallo*’s very subversiveness offer a challenge to the conventions of narrative structure or to the power of reading as a mode of intellectual inquiry? The efficacy of that subversive teaching seems highly questionable. It would seem, in fact, that the opposite is true, that the power of reading is unthreatened by the *giallo*’s tendency to challenge the social status quo, and that, in fact, the style has a considerable capacity (and perhaps a responsibility?) to “express[...] faith in the power of clear speech, of language, of storytelling, and of individual

testimony,”⁶ as Past claims is the case in Carofiglio’s novels, and is applicable to varying degrees to other authors.

The Italian legal system offers a particularly fruitful arena for the *giallo* and its detectives to challenge and test the limits of the power of language, storytelling, and individual testimony. It is also an excellent test case for Nussbaum’s theory that literature, especially fiction, increases the competence of citizens because it “promuove l’attitudine al ragionamento critico su di sé e sul mondo e, insieme sviluppa l’immaginazione mediante le storie e personaggi” [“promotes an attitude of critical reasoning toward the self and the world, and at the same time develops the imagination through stories and characters.”]⁷ The Italian legal system is based on the rule of the letter of the law (its text), not on a combination of written law and precedent; there is no Italian equivalent to the Anglo-American tradition of Common Law. It claims a tradition rooted in Roman civil law, specifically the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* issued by Emperor Justinian, later revived and reinterpreted at the University of Bologna in the twelfth century.⁸ Distilled to its most basic elements, the main difference between a civil law system and a common law system (such as the Anglo-American tradition) is that civil law practitioners were formed in universities and occupied with the interpretation of written legal codes, while common law lawyers were shaped in the courtroom itself and in the active practice of law.⁹ Admittedly, this

5. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 6.

6. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 110.

7. Fabrizia Abbate, *L’Occhio della compassione*, 67.

8. For a succinct yet informative summary of the history of the origins of Italian law explained for Anglo-American readers, see Thomas Glyn Watkin, *The Italian Legal Tradition*, 1-26.

9. Thomas Glyn Watkin, *The Italian Legal Tradition*, 36.

description is an oversimplification, but it does provide a picture that goes a long way toward describing the differences in emphasis, culture, and courtroom practice in the respective systems. The Italian civil system thus would naturally privilege the language of the law over legal precedent; what, then, is the relationship between the power of legal language and the power of individual clear speech, narrative, and testimony and to what extent can the latter challenge and upset the former? To what extent can the detective's interpretation and retelling of the facts of the case, and by extension the *giallo's* overarching concern with narratives of justice and injustice, challenge and upheave the systems and institutions of law and order that he (it) operates within by forming readers more capable of literary imagination, of compassion, of emotional intelligence, of picturing others complexly?

On the practical level, the Italian courtroom displays this emphasis on legal language and narrative by being inquisitorial in culture and procedure, in contrast to the adversarial style of the Anglo-American courtrooms. The Italian court is primarily interested in discovering the true facts of the case, much more so than in weighing the relative merits of the two sides of an argument between defendant and prosecutor. Legal reforms enacted in 1989 sought to transform the traditional inquisitorial Italian courtroom, in the interests of rendering the time-consuming system more efficient and decreasing the potential for abuses of various kinds, by adopting some Anglo-Saxon practices, such as allowing the defense to call witnesses and to cross-examine witnesses called by the prosecution. The Italian system today is a hybrid of the two styles, though with greater emphasis on its traditional inquisitorial culture and Roman civil law origins, rather than a 50/50 balance between two vastly different traditions.

This hybridization means slightly different things for the detective character and for the reader. For the fictional detectives (the vast majority of whom are part of the legal system in some capacity, from the police station to the courtroom itself), while they labor to uphold the law and expose the truth of the case, often reveal tension between the letter of the written law (or procedure) and their individual sense of abstract justice, morality, or *legge in assoluto* [absolute or universal law]. In the cases of Guido Guerrieri in the novels by Carofiglio, especially, this tension is palpable as the lawyer-detective struggles with the nepotism, laziness, and corruption surrounding him in the law courts and threatening to prevent him from finding true facts and justice for his clients. These tensions contribute powerfully to the narrative's ability to create readers who employ critical reasoning informed by compassion and empathy and to develop an ethics that is "disposta a perdere rigidità e a guadagnare in duttilità, nel senso di saper mediare tra le regole e i principi da una parte e le urgenze dei casi complessi dall'altra; ...un'etica che eviti di stabilire doveri inflessibili senza valutarne le conseguenze, perché altrimenti finirebbe con l'essere una guida cieca per le azioni che ricadono inevitabilmente nel mondo, laddove ciò che conta di più sono proprio le conseguenze degli atti compiuti" ["disposed to trade rigidity for plasticity, in the sense of knowing how to mediate between rules and principles on one side and the exigencies of complex cases on the other. An ethics that avoids establishing inflexible obligations without evaluating their consequences, for otherwise it would end up being a blind guide for actions that inevitably backfire upon the world, where what matters most is actually the consequences of actions taken."¹⁰ The contrast

10. Fabrizia Abbate, *L'Occhio della compassione*, 82-3.

between rigid and more ductile ethics and between official and individual definitions of justice is extremely pronounced in the Carofiglio novels, but it is found in the other *gialli* as well, to varying degrees.

I do not search, necessarily, for a singular answer to whether or how the detective reinforces or challenges rules or the legal system's status quo. Rather, I respond to and expand upon interpretations such as Past's and attempt to deal with the *giallo*'s contradictory tendency to be cautiously hopeful about the potential for just, positive outcomes present in the official workings of the organs of law and order while at the same time exposing their propensity for violence, misinterpretation, corruption, and deception. I also examine how the *giallo* employs Nussbaumian narrative tools to form an ethical, compassionate, and emotionally intelligent readership. Perhaps it is no accident that so many *gialli* are set in Sicilia and Napoli, the historical centers of mafia activity, the tangible and ever-present reminder of the failure of the official system to integrate Sciascia's "legge in assoluto," absolute or universal justice, and "legge ufficiale," official law, places where an ethical, compassionate public and legal system are most needed.

Risks to the creation of the authentic, socially conscious and compassionately just reader still exist in the *giallo*; no literary work is so perfect as to live up to Nussbaum's ideal in all respects at all times. One problem inherent in the traditional "crimine-indagine-punizione" ["crime-investigation-punishment"] formula is that the narrative tends to barely disguise a

persecutorial logic,¹¹ at odds with the natural function of literary imagination in promoting compassion and empathy for the other. As will become apparent, the *gialli* of Camilleri, de Giovanni, and Carofiglio handily avoid this potential pitfall, sometimes by following in the footsteps of Sciascia, in whose *gialli* the end of the investigation never arrives, much less the punishment phase. Giuliana Pieri characterizes the lack of a solution as a very recent postmodern feature, and although I see it as having roots in earlier works like *Il giorno della civetta*, I do agree that it has the function of highlighting the social ills of contemporary Italian culture.¹² The most unique technique for avoiding the trap of persecutorial logic is employed by De Giovanni, whose protagonist Ricciardi is characterized by a preternatural capacity for empathy, and whose setting of the city of Napoli functions as a character in its own right with emotions of its own and its own capacity for compassion of a sort. Commissario Ricciardi presents another potential problem with looking to the *giallo* and other narratives for increasing empathy in the public sphere; the detective's capacity for empathy is sometimes so strong as to become debilitating, impeding at times his ability to form 'normal' relationships with his fellow police officers and denizens of Napoli, possibly hinting at a latent danger in Nussbaum's theory of literary imagination if the empathy and compassion it engenders are allowed to run unchecked by the counterbalancing effects of logic and reason.

11. Giuliana Pieri, discussing the criticism of Northrop Frye in Giuliana Pieri, "Letteratura gialla e noir degli anni Novanta e impegno" in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, Eds. Florian Mussnug and Pierpaolo Antonello, 300-301.

12. Giuliana Pieri, "Letteratura gialla e noir degli anni Novanta e impegno" in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, Eds. Florian Mussnug and Pierpaolo Antonello, 301.

I. The *Giallo* and the Law: Tense Relations from the Beginning

Since the birth of the *giallo* with the inception of Mondadori's series *I libri gialli* in 1931, it has been an intersectional genre incorporating elements normally perceived to "belong" to other genres, such as the "happy ending" of the *rosa*, as well as borrowing elements from other national traditions, especially the French and Anglo-American. All these disparate elements come together to form an early tendency toward political and social critique that belies the *giallo*'s undeserved reputation as inconsequential, escapist, pseudo-literature. In fact, the genre is skeptical of official narratives of justice and the idealistically orderly society from the start. The Italian genre tends more toward the psychological approach rather than the positivism of Sherlock Holmes, which means that the *giallo* quite deliberately and systematically presents an alternative way to read and interpret one's surroundings and events, and if Nussbaum is right, it may prove effective in forming readers with a more empathetic and just view of social issues.

The first *giallista* to exhibit and express a "consapevolezza della possibilità di un giallo italiano,"¹³ that is, an awareness of the possibility of and plan for developing the genre as a socially-driven and distinctively Italian literary enterprise rather than producing "libri di consumo" ["books for consumption"], was Augusto de Angelis, whose first novel *Il banchiere assassinato* was published in 1935. His writings in a variety of genres, wide-ranging readings in classical and modern literature, his familiarity with French and English precedents, including Edgar Allen Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) and the other foreign origins of the

detective story, made him ideally positioned for just such a project. De Angelis' most famous and successful detective character is Carlo de Vincenzi, a figure located more or less in the Maigret camp rather than that of Holmes: the former being characterized as highly cultured and focused primarily on understanding human interactions and motivations, rather than a positivistic approach focusing on scientifically or mathematically provable facts, in order to solve the case. The points at which De Angelis diverges from foreign models are also where he sets the mold for the future of the Italian *giallo*: first, he stresses that the *giallista* (especially the writer of *polizieschi* or police procedurals) must strive for knowledge of "tutta la psicologia" ["all of psychology"],¹⁴ and not just criminal psychology (such an emphasis on psychology will continue to characterize many an Italian *giallo*). More importantly for the argument of this chapter is De Angelis' conception of the *giallo* as an organic, artistic expression of modern life: "il poliziesco veniva considerato in queste [sue] pagine come genere e tipologia di scrittura caratteristico di una civiltà di violenze e di paure quotidiane. Dove, quindi, scrivere romanzi polizieschi era come 'far versi' in modo consono ai tempi" ["the police procedural came to be considered in these [its] pages as a genre and typology of writing characteristic of a civilization of violence and everyday fears. Where, then, to write police procedural novels was like 'making verses' in a way befitting for the times."]¹⁵ As such an artistic reflection of the modern Italian world, De Angelis' idea of the *giallo* places on its author the *impegno* or the undertaking of civic responsibility that was the duty of the civic poets of the past: to be true to the depiction of real

13. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 23.

14. From an interview in "La Lettura," (March 1960).

social and civil problems of the age, as well as to the artistic project of writing stories, the verses of the twentieth century, which in themselves promote a more equitable, compassionate, and just society.

It is no coincidence that the most active period in De Angelis' *giallista* career (1935-1944) occurs within the years of the Fascist period in Italy (1922-1945) when his *gialli* depict everyday violence and fear, and the uncertain power of institutions to preserve order and justice. His novels are exemplary of the tendency toward social critique that so unnerved the Ministero della Cultura Popolare of the Fascist regime. The Minculpop's first effort to limit crime fiction's tendency to run counter to fascist values and priorities was to put telling restrictions on the genre's powers of critique:

con l'avvicinarsi dell'entrata in guerra dell'Italia i freni della propaganda in orbace si strinsero ancora di più. Se qualcuno voleva scrivere un giallo doveva ricordare che: 1) l'assassino non doveva essere a nessun costo italiano, bensì straniero; 2) il protagonista italiano non aveva il diritto di suicidarsi; 3) l'assassino non poteva sfuggire in nessun modo alla giustizia.¹⁶

[“with the approach of Italy's entry into war the brakes of blackshirt propaganda pressed even harder. If someone wanted to write a *giallo* they had to remember that: 1) the killer could not at any cost be Italian, but rather a foreigner; 2) the Italian protagonist had no right to commit suicide; 3) the killer could not in any way escape justice.”]

These restrictions were clearly an attempt to limit any suggestion that Italian national character or Italian culture might have a tendency toward lawlessness or crime, or that official justice were anything less than swift and effective. Crime and depravity, even suicide, were something

15. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 25.

16. Marco Tropea, Ed. preface to the reprint of Giorgio Scerbanenco, *Sei giorni di preavviso*, 1977.

belonging to foreign, especially Anglo-American, culture.¹⁷ The Minculpop's efforts to restrict and limit the *giallo's* ability to challenge such ideas culminated with the 1943 order to remove from circulation "tutti i romanzi gialli in qualunque tempo stampati e ovunque esistenti in vendita" ["all *gialli* novels whenever printed and wherever they are available for sale."]¹⁸

However, the reality of writing and publishing *gialli* in Italy at this time was more complicated than this. Not every *giallo* fell entirely victim to the ban: "Si erano tuttavia pubblicati, va ricordato, anche gialli di intonazione nazista, fascista, e antisemita" ["Nevertheless, there were also published, it must be remembered, *gialli* with Nazi, fascist and anti-Semitic intonation."]¹⁹ As Pezzotti notes,

Certainly many Italian writers found it hard to write convincing detective stories set in Italy and opted for a foreign setting also in order to avoid censorship. Indeed Fascist control over a popular genre contrasted with a widespread prejudice (still present even today) that crime fiction was just escapist reading and supported the thesis that the genre was and still may be, in fact, a means of social and political criticism.²⁰

At the far end of the spectrum, some crime fiction was used explicitly as Fascist propaganda,²¹ going even so far as to see that the "eroe del poliziesco nazi-fascista, diviene un autorizzato strumento repressivo dello Stato" ["hero of the Nazi-fascist police procedural became an

17. Marco Sangiorgi notes the response of Enrico Piceni, the Anglo-French head of Mondadori at this time, to the representations of suicide in novels by Georges Simenon and Agatha Christie, that they were impossible to publish because the suicides could not be edited out, and that the policy against depiction of suicide affected the translation and publication of foreign non-generic literature as well ("Il fascismo e il giallo italiano" in *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, Ravenna: Longo, 2004, 119.

18. cit. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 34.

19. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 34.

20. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 17.

authorized, repressive instrument of the State.”]²² Many writers, though, were able to assert some intellectual freedom and subtly criticize the regime through their stories and avoid the empty praise of the regime; notable among these was Varaldo and his overt portrayal of the police as inefficient and ineffective in administering justice in *Il Sette Bello* and other novels. As the *giallo* directly addresses the flaws in the institutions meant to preserve order and justice through its depictions of violence and the shaky possibility of attaining absolute justice, the novel’s power to influence the reader away from restrictive notions of justice and law threatens the Fascist state, so that the danger the *giallo* represents is literally deadly for de Angelis, who was imprisoned for his anti-Fascist views and later died as the result of an attack by a Fascist activist.

After the end of the Second World War and the ban on the *giallo* was no longer in effect, it took some time for the genre to regain lost ground and assert itself as a “*far versi*” in the way De Angelis envisioned. This is no doubt due in part to the dubious and difficult success that genre literature has had in Italy in general,²³ but surely the Fascist restrictions and ban on the *giallo* had a great deal to do with its limited early success and the long delay before the *giallo* truly rooted itself in Italian literary culture. Foreign works dominated the market once again for several decades, but certain Italian works deserve highlighting for their literary value as well as their perpetuation of the kind of civic purpose conceived by De Angelis. Of the *giallisti* with the

21. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 18.

22. Marco Sangiorgi, “Il fascismo e il giallo italiano,” in *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, Ravenna: Longo, 2004, 119.

longest enduring reputations and readership spanning the decades, many display precisely the social consciousness and literary well-roundedness that De Angelis proposed and cultivated, as well as a deliberate and mindful engagement with social and civil issues and corruption in contemporary Italian society. I will note only two of the most notable here: Giorgio Scerbanenco (1911-1969), for example, was “capace di coniugare generi e linguaggi diversificati, comprendendo, oltre ai romanzi rosa, spionisti e gialli, anche prove ormai dimenticate o poco note di fantascienza.... In Scerbanenco vi è l’anticipazione... di una sensibilità, di un gusto, di una attenzione all’evoluzione della letteratura sia di consumo che di massa, che oggi potrebbe forse trovare migliore e più ampia udienza” [“capable of combining diverse genres and languages, including, beyond romance novels, spy novels, *gialli*, and even attempts at science fiction that are by now forgotten or little known... In Scerbanenco there is the anticipation... of a sensibility, an enthusiasm, an attention to the evolution of literature, whether consumer literature or mass literature, that today could perhaps find a better and wider audience.”]²⁴

In order to tackle the difficult and almost taboo subject of the Mafia in an environment in which it was much safer to deny its existence, Leonardo Sciascia (1921-1989) chose the *giallo* to engage with the subject: “Ironically, ...while his novels are among the finest examples of political commitment in the history of crime fiction, as a theorist for the genre Sciascia refused

23. Marco Sangiorgi, “Il fascismo e il giallo italiano,” in *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, Ravenna: Longo, 2004, 123-4.

24. Marco Sangiorgi, “Il fascismo e il giallo italiano,” in *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, Ravenna: Longo, 2004, 125-6.

to credit crime fiction with any literary or political value.”²⁵ His *Il giorno della civetta* is especially notable for the apparent impossibility of relying on official narrative for the truth: “Whatever the consequences, for Sciascia’s sleuth it is vital not to accept the official version of the truth. His detectives’ efforts stress the importance of continuously searching and questioning.”²⁶ This unending and ultimately unfinished quest for the truth independent from and sometimes in rejection of the official narrative (in a period when widespread corruption in the police and judicial system would certainly justify a pessimistic view of Italian official justice) eventually “leads [Sciascia] to despair at the incompatibility of reason and power”²⁷ in contrast to what Past identified in Carofiglio (whose works first appear just barely over a decade after the publication of Sciascia’s final works) in the quote already cited above: “Although the Guerrieri novels fret about the inevitability of violence in the law, their style expresses faith in the power of clear speech, of language, of storytelling, and of individual testimony.”²⁸ While Sciascia may be affected by the idea of the *giallo* and other genre literature as primarily a diversion and a formulaic exercise, this attitude is belied in his own works and in others’ descriptions of them and other *gialli*, and what emerges instead is a far more complex understanding of the genre as much more than an entertaining story.²⁹

Carlo Lucarelli had this to say while discussing his historical *polizieschi*, but it applies to the *giallo* as a whole as well as the *noir*:

25. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 34.

26. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 92.

27. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 110.

28. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 110.

è sempre e comunque una 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 è una verità che non funziona, che non è la verità giusta, ma cerca le pieghe oscure, la metà oscura delle cose.... Qualunque cosa, diventa sempre e comunque una operazione di denuncia e di critica e quindi da quel punto di vista lì una operazione sociale.³⁰

[it is always and nevertheless an operation of critique; the police procedural in any case works at looking at that which is the situation that does not work; the noir novel, above all, works at seeking that truth that is a truth that does not work, that is not the correct truth; looks for the dark folds, the dark half of things.... Anything becomes, always and nevertheless, an operation of condemnation and critique and therefore from that point of view it is a social operation.]

Conspicuously absent from Italian *giallo* authors' discussion of their own works or of the genre in general are descriptions of the *giallo* as primarily or merely a game or puzzle, or anything resembling the English sub-genre of the "cozy mystery." "Operazione sociale" and "operazione di critica" seem to be far more accurate and comprehensive descriptions of the work of the *giallo*; for it does "work," both in the sense of laboring toward a purpose and in the sense of functioning effectively within its context. From the overview I have undertaken here of the early years of the genre in Italy, one can see that a large part of the *giallo*'s emphasis on social meaning and critique originated in the genre's late emergence in contrast to the French and English traditions, which happened to take place under the controlling eye of Fascism, developing in reaction to the restrictions of the regime.

29. Sciascia receives additional attention in section III of this chapter.

30. Carlo Lucarelli, "Il giallo storico ambientato durante il fascismo," in *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*, Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò, Ravenna: Longo, 2004, 158.

II. Critique and Empathy: Two *Giallo* Representations of Fascism and the Fascist Period

Given the *giallo*'s late and rocky beginnings in Italy and the troubled relationship it endured with the Fascist state, examining representations of Fascism in the *giallo* will offer further insight into the anti-institutional tendencies of the genre and how it functions to shape a compassionate and ethical reader. This "operazione di critica" will compare works of two authors, one who writes during the Fascist period (Augusto De Angelis) and one more contemporary author, who sets his historical novels in Fascist-era Naples (Maurizio De Giovanni). While the focus of this project is mostly on more contemporary authors, it will be helpful to include De Angelis as well, as an author who not only depicts Fascism and Fascist characters, but also had to write from within the Fascist state despite his fierce criticisms of the regime. De Giovanni's historical novels set during the same period offer a striking contrast not only in style but also in the freedom with which it is possible to critique (and appreciate) the past with the distance of several decades. At the same time, his protagonist, Commissario Ricciardi, exposes one danger of the power of Nussbaum's narrative imagination: the perils of developing too great a capacity for the first-order emotion of empathy and of identifying too strongly with the other (in Ricciardi's case, with the victims of violence).

The value of looking to a literary text and its grappling with empathy is that the experience can be transformed into a model for social relations in general, but especially in the *giallo*, for relations involving legal and juridical figures. Gaakeer formulates this transformation as follows:

The experience of viewing the world of the text and its inhabitants empathetically can be transformed into a norm for judging human relations in general, or, as Nussbaum puts it, for 'our social existence and the totality of our connections'. Thus, reading literature can make us aware of the complexity of the human condition and can help promote an empathic ability, i.e., '...to imagine the concrete ways in which people different from oneself grapple with disadvantage...'”³¹

On the surface, De Giovanni's detective Ricciardi seems to be anything but an ideal lens through which to focus a critique of the system he inhabits or the regime he lives under, much less a model for ethical, empathetically informed human connections. He is described as melancholic, antisocial, obsessive, haunted both literally and figuratively by paranormal images of violent death.³² The author gives him relatively little dialog, considering that he is the titular character and the protagonist. Instead, the reader is provided with Ricciardi's interior monologue, gestures, and movements in great detail. Related to his general melancholy and antisocial tendencies, another primary trait of the detective is insubordination, which appears to come from stubbornness and exasperation at having his investigations interfered with, from irritation at the loss of control when his superiors intervene, from the time wasted on the nonsensical demands of bureaucracy and political maneuvering, rather than from any social or

31. Jeanne Gaakeer, "Practical Wisdom and Judicial Practice: Who's in Narrative Control?", 5.

32. That is, Ricciardi has the strange paranormal ability to see and hear psychic echoes of the last moments of those who have died violently, by crime or misadventure, seeing their last movements and hearing their final thoughts. He calls this ability "Il Fatto." Ricciardi is thus haunted in a real sense; he has no choice but to be exposed to these phantasms, but neither can he really interact with them, since his visions of the dead in their last moments are static, unchanging, endlessly repeating the last few seconds of existence like a recording on a loop. Since Ricciardi is a passive observer, not a traditional medium who speaks to or is spoken through by spirits, and the ghosts he sees are never self-aware, this paranormal dimension to the novels falls short of being so surreal as to fall under a broad definition of magical realism.

political ideology. As Ricciardi labors to recreate the true narrative of the case before him in such a way that accounts for “Il Fatto” (the psychic echoes of violent death that he is subjected to), the interjection of the bureaucratic, official narrative of institutional justice is thrown into high relief as a narrative of restrictive, mechanical adherence to rules, or one that serves the interests of the regime and the legal system instead of serving ethical or absolute justice through awareness of the human condition.

In other words, Ricciardi at first seems too disconnected from his fellow living human beings to provide a thorough critique of the society they inhabit together or to model and serve the Nussbaumian functions of the narrative imagination. It is difficult to think of this character as binding us readers to his experiences because it is hard to “take pleasure in his company,” unlike the characters in the novel Nussbaum proposes as a model, *Hard Times*.³³ Ricciardi is given very little dialog; what little appears on the page is usually held with his partner Maione, his superior, his friend the coroner, or his nanny/housekeeper. Interviews with witnesses and suspects also appear, but they are succinct and brief. He is so far from being a social animal that the parish priest calls him the “ghost” of the local church (with unconscious irony—if he only knew that his “ghost” sees real ghosts).³⁴ His colleagues superstitiously marginalize him within his own police station. If the *giallo* is to take advantage of Nussbaum’s narrative imagination, to pull the readers into identifying with and *compatire* or sympathizing with the other, represented

33. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 35.

34. “Ecco di nuovo il fantasma della chiesa di San Ferdinando: quello che arriva senza rumore e poi scompare per mesi” [“Here’s the ghost of the Church of San Ferdinando again: the one who

by the detective protagonist, in order to inform their sense of justice with compassion, then Ricciardi seems at first glance so marginal and misanthropic as to compromise this crucial social and ethical function of the narrative.³⁵

In another interaction with the parish priest in the same novel, *Il posto di ognuno*, one also finds a moment in which Ricciardi reveals certain vital parts of his ethics and worldview, especially traditional values that would easily harmonize with Fascist ideals, at least on the surface. His version of these ideals, unlike the Party's rigid, rule-based ethics, is precisely the kind of ductile ethics that Nussbaum envisions for the society informed by the narrative

arrives without a sound and then disappears for months." Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 269.

35. Richard Rorty challenges Nussbaum's idea that the ethical function of narrative is to enhance moral philosophy by adding truths that the poet can argue better than philosophy can. He claims that a while a novel is "good at showing us what it is like to notice things about other people - their needs, their fears, their self-descriptions, their descriptions of other people - which we are usually too egotistic to take account of", that does not mean that it is "helpful to describe this noticing sort of intelligence as part of the process of discovering the good life for human beings." (Richard Rorty, "Redemption from Egotism: James and Proust as Spiritual Exercises," 399).

But Nussbaum's figure of the poetic judge does more than notice; noticing and collecting knowledge is barely the beginning of the practice of developing and forming the narrative imagination. Nor does she guarantee the success of every exercise in narrative imagination and compassionate judgment. She also does not ascribe moral value to artistic or literary works. She is concerned with reading and viewing art as an ethical and moral activity: "One can think of works of art which can be contemplated reasonably well without asking any urgent questions about how one should live. Abstract formalist paintings are sometimes of this character, and some intricate but non-programmatic works of music (though by no means all). But it seems highly unlikely that a responsive reading of any complex literary work is utterly detached from concerns about time and death, about pain and the transcendence [sic] of pain, and so on—all the material of the "how one should live" question as I have conceived it. Thus, even with regard to works I don't talk about at all—poetic dramas, lyric poems, novels by novelists very different from Dickens and James—the aesthetic-detachment thesis is implausible if we use

imagination. In reference to a promise made to the priest, Ricciardi says “un impegno è un impegno” [“a promise is a promise”], an expression of the importance of duty commonly found in Fascist rhetoric;³⁶ we also learn that the detective is “molto mattiniero, questa è una buona virtù” [“very much an early riser, such a good virtue”];³⁷ that he sees his role in front of the body of a victim as similar to the role of the priest in confession, “un lavoro di pulizia, si deve prendere sulle spalle il peso degli altri e portarlo via... Solo che lui non poteva pulire proprio niente” [“a work of cleansing; one has to take the weight of others onto one’s shoulders and carry it away... Except that he could not really cleanse anything.”]³⁸ A respect for order and honor, healthy living habits, and a good Catholic loathing of sin; these are all qualities that on the surface ought to draw Ricciardi close to the rhetoric of Fascism and its ideals for Italian society, if not to party politics, but this is anything but the case.³⁹ Ricciardi is more disillusioned with and uninterested in politics than nearly everything else; he will not even rail against the regime with his friend Dottor Modo. He stalwartly stands apart from any party, creed, or group that will hinder him from clarifying what is murky in his cases and arriving at the complete truth, which is frequently very different from the dogmatic facts that are written in official

“ethical” and “moral” in the broad sense that I have consistently and explicitly given it” (Martha Nussbaum, “Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism”, 358).

36. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 148.

37. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 148.

38. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 149.

39. Perhaps this speaks to the reason why De Giovanni’s novels are set in the Fascist era: Fascist rhetorical about the tranquil Italian state, the ideal family and the idea society were threatened in their time by the *giallo*’s potential for critique, and the novels make clear that the party rhetoric cannot account for crime, much less the personal, very human causes behind crime and violence.

reports. In this way, the character is not only a central figure of the narrative and a focus of the reader's empathy and compassion, but he also models the emotionally intelligent, empathetic, and ethical citizen.

Ricciardi's paranormal ability (affliction) to see ghosts in the form of psychic echoes of the dead adds further dimensions to the relationship between the detective and the historical and cultural setting of the novel, and thus the novels' social critique and ability to develop the reader's second order empathy. First, Ricciardi's unique ability to see the dead and witness their last thoughts, words, and gestures gives voice to the victims in a way that is not normally possible, simply by ensuring that there is at least one person who can hear them, bearing witness to their suffering and death after the fact. The victims' personal narrative becomes part of Ricciardi's narrative reconstruction of their deaths, and part of the novel's wider narrative of personal vs. institutional justice. At the same time that Ricciardi's paranormal affliction is probably partly responsible for the difficulty he has in connecting with living people, "Il Fatto" also prevents his social detachment from becoming total misanthropic isolation and gives him a unique and empathetic connection to the victims of crime and misadventure. Through the detective character, the reader experiences an empathetic connection to the suffering of others in an even more intimate, immediate way than already allowed by the narrative structure and conventions of the novel and short story. Ricciardi displays a uniquely intimate familiarity with violence and death even beyond that of most other fictional detectives, plus his connection to and communications with the dead, who are the most marginalized and excluded members of the community, makes it all the more poignant and authoritative when the Commissario's

words and actions criticize the ability of the legal system he inhabits to mete out true justice. The performativity of Ricciardi and “Il Fatto” is inextricably tied to his identity as a police detective, appealing to empathy as a judicial response to violence and death, considering our total social existence and connections in his role as the enforcer of law and investigator.

At the same time, it would be disingenuous not to consider the personal, emotional, psychological toll that “Il Fatto” takes on the character Ricciardi. As Nussbaum and other law and literature theorists have pointed out, at the other end of the spectrum from a justice that considers only the rule of law and never the societal and communicative functions of law, there is the risk of a justice that relies on the law of man, on subjectivity, compromising the letter of the law. De Giovanni’s detective character reveals another aspect of the difficulties of balancing law’s abstractions with its ethical and communicative functions: the intensity of his experiencing others’ narratives puts him in constant danger of allowing his empathy, a second-order emotion that entails being able to make decisions in the light of others’ first-order emotions, to become a first-order emotion of his own. Ricciardi has no control over when he will be afflicted with “Il Fatto”; his intense experience of and reaction to these phantasms reveal that his social detachment and melancholy are created in response to being afflicted with too much compassion and empathy rather than too little. When we cultivate the ability to imagine one thing as another and assess the ethical implications thereof, there is danger in allowing others’ emotions and experiences to *become* our own. In this way the Ricciardi novels simultaneously dare to challenge a notion of justice devoid of empathy and to challenge the universality of the narrative imagination that makes that upheaval possible.

For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus primarily on two of the novels. First is *Il posto di ognuno*, because while it is not the first nor the last time Ricciardi's priorities and methods of narrating the crimes he investigates come into conflict with the priorities and narratives of the police administration, it is the first time he loses his temper at this disconnect and must face the concrete, personal dangers of threatening the official narrative, being for the first time in direct contact with members of the Fascist party. Reductive, abstract official narratives like that of the Party, which asserted the absolute tranquility and perfection of the Italian state and society, cannot account for the very human causes of violence and criminality, and thus are threatened by narratives like Ricciardi's, which take no such tranquility for granted, but rather are concerned with the experiences and contexts of individuals and their communities. Sergia Adamo writes of the rewriting of the past in Manzoni and literature in general: "riscrivere per fare parlare il passato nel presente attraverso le sue voci, [...] dare voce al Dimenticato e alla sua domanda di giustizia" ["rewriting in order make the past speak in the present with the voices of the present, giving voice to the Forgotten and its demand for justice."]⁴⁰ The Fascist era is decidedly one that continues to call out for rewriting in its demand for justice in the Ricciardi novels, precisely because the Fascist official narrative accounted for so little of the realities of crime and violence in the lives of its citizens. The title of the novel also speaks to the controlling and restrictive nature of the Fascist regime at the time and how it tended to exacerbate crime and disorder by ignoring certain problems of class and other social

40. Sergia Adamo, "La giustizia del dimenticato: sulla linea giudiziaria nella letteratura italiana del Novecento," in *Postmodern Impegno: Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*,

constructs in favor of maintaining the status quo: *Il posto di ognuno*, “The place of each person,” referring to an Italian saying similar to one also found in English, “knowing one’s place.” The second novel I will focus on is *Il giorno dei morti* because it is set during the days surrounding an official visit to Napoli by Mussolini (based on real events that occurred in 1931). Much of the plot revolves around how that visit upsets the normal running of the police station and reveals certain aspects of Fascist attitudes toward the possibility and nature of crime and violence in Italy, especially the attitudes of certain Fascist officials and loyalists toward the relationship between crime and power.

Most of the time, the counterpoint to Ricciardi’s emotionally charged, empathetic justice comes in the form of abstracted, nepotistic, institutional justice embodied by vicequestore Garzo, Ricciardi’s superior. The *vicequestore* [deputy chief of police] is anything but a detective; he has no experience of that “kernel of irritation”⁴¹ that drives Ricciardi to seek out truth and resolution through investigation: “aveva sempre provato disgusto per la mentalità criminale, e trovava orribile doversi sporcare le mani con i delinquenti” [“he had always had a disgust for the criminal mentality, and found it horrible to have to soil his hands with delinquents.”]⁴² Rather, he is primarily concerned with appearances, “*fare la bella figura*” [“making a good impression”], and with not going against the will of the aristocratic elite of Napoli and orders from above. In *Il giorno dei morti*, the police force of Napoli receives orders from the Fascist Party to make sure the city is “cleaned up” of crime in anticipation of a visit from Mussolini and

Ed. Florian Mussgnug and Pierpaolo Antonello, 2009, 262.

41. Robert Rushing, *Resisting Arrest*, 35.

his entourage, which results not in a reduction of criminal acts but only in a temporary cessation of investigations, prosecutions and charges, effectively giving the city's criminals a free pass. Garzo repeats this order to his inferiors, an order that reflects his attitude toward crime and appearances perfectly, and Ricciardi's reaction is like a breath of fresh, indignant air in the face of such an absurd policy: "Ma come si fa a essere così stupidi? Viene Mussolini, e allora? A parte il fatto che di qui nemmeno passerà, ma poi che cosa cambia? Non si muore lo stesso, non succedono comunque le stesse cose terribili, in mezzo alle strade?" ["But how can they be so stupid? So Mussolini is coming, so what? Apart from the fact that he won't even pass by here, then what changes? Don't people die just the same, don't the same terrible things happen anyway, in the middle of the street?"] His partner brigadiere Maione tries to calm him, and offers a resigned observation about the state of things in Napoli and the rest of the country: "È proprio questo il punto, commissa': no, non succedono. Nel senso che quel cretino di Garzo va dicendo che in città tutto deve andare bene, che non ci devono essere disordini o delitti: che questa è la città fascista, dove regnano la pace e tranquillità per i cittadini" ["That's precisely the point, Inspecta', no, they don't happen. In the sense that that cretin Garzo goes around saying that in the city everything must go well, that there must be no disorder or crimes: that this is the Fascist city, where peace and tranquility reign for the citizens."]⁴³ The Fascist city is where peace and tranquility reign, no matter what. The official narrative is inflexible and predetermined: there is no crime, Italy is at peace with itself, and the citizenry is better off than they ever have

42. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 20.

43. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 35.

been; the narrative has been so cleaned up that the human element is completely absent, and there is no place for empathy or ethics.

As a policeman, Garzo is inept, but as an administrator he is formidable, until he pushes Ricciardi too far. He attempts to persuade Ricciardi at least once in every novel to tread softly and make his narrative conform to policy, so as not to upset some vague powers that be or some powerful person (more often than not with ties to the Party) who could make life difficult for the whole department, but especially for Garzo himself. The detective finally loses his temper after Garzo tries to warn him off an investigation into the son of a duke in the case of the duchess' murder, for the sake of preserving the family's privileged status and reputation:

Vi ripeto quello che vi ho già detto, giacché a quanto pare non avete capito: siete libero di affidare questa maledetta indagine a chi volete. Ma se l'indagine è mia, allora non mettete il vostro naso nelle mie cose. Se non troveremo il colpevole, farete quello che vi sembrerà opportuno. Ma nel frattempo, non sindacate nessuna mia decisione. Nessuna.⁴⁴

[I will repeat to you what I have already said, since it seems that you haven't understood: you are free to entrust this cursed investigation to whomever you want. But if the investigation is mine, then don't stick your nose in my business. If we don't find the guilty party, do what you think is appropriate. But in the meantime, don't judge any of my decisions. Not one.]

Garzo may be completely unsuited for investigation, but he is much better at social manipulation, hence successful in his career. He finds Ricciardi unsettling (even without knowledge of Ricciardi's paranormal experiences) because he does not operate in the same system of palm greasing and subtle manipulation, is able to inhabit the mind of the criminal and imagine other possible narratives besides the official one, and his asocial, almost hermetic

habits make him uncontrollable. In the end, the fact that Ricciardi privileges an empathetic reading of the case and society over a politically acceptable one means that he solves seemingly unsolvable cases and that he is beyond the influence of Garzo's usual manipulation and intimidation tactics, so Garzo is eventually forced to allow him his autonomy.⁴⁵ When Garzo expresses relief that a powerful local family turns out not to have been involved in murder, re-stabilizing the social status quo, Ricciardi reacts with vitriolic scorn: "Sono lieto che vi faccia piacere, dottore, che una donna sia morta e che un'altra... verrà rinchiusa in un manicomio criminale. Sono lieto che sia un sollievo per voi, che due famiglie siano rovinate per sempre.... E mi dispiace informarvi che non siamo stati noi a inventare questa soluzione. Ma solo il demone di una passione corrotta e disperata" ["I'm happy that it pleases you, sir, that a woman is dead and that another... will be imprisoned in a criminal asylum. I'm happy that it is a relief to you, that two families are ruined forever.... And I'm sorry to inform you that we were not the ones to invent this solution. Instead, it was only the demon of a corrupt and desperate passion."]⁴⁶ The problem is not that Garzo is pleased that Ricciardi and Maione caught the murderer, but that he is relieved that the murderer is the *right one*, someone whose criminality conforms to the Fascist narrative for society, and not the *wrong one*, an aristocrat and a supporter of the regime whose crime would have suggested that the Fascist version is flawed. For Ricciardi and the reader, on the other hand, the solution of the case is nevertheless a tragedy, because the lives of others have still been shattered and broken.

44. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 128.

45. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 20-21.

In the person of Garzo, the Fascist institutions of law and order reveal one of their greatest flaws: when the highest priority is preserving the *appearance* of order and peace, true justice and social betterment are important only if and when they serve that cause, and the only truth worth knowing is the facts recorded in official reports. Ricciardi offers an alternative that depends on personal responsibility to the truth, not just facts, and to justice beyond that which is defined by a distant, official, impersonal entity. The closed circle of bureaucracy founded on blind servitude to the rule of appearances turns out to be vulnerable to an agent like Ricciardi who refuses to inhabit the system and manipulates it to serve his own conscience and rules of personal justice. When Garzo insists on strict interpretation of the facts in a coroner's report, Ricciardi immediately casts doubt on the truth of the coroner's narrative: "siamo la polizia, e ci basiamo sui fatti! E i fatti sono tutti scritti qui: morte accidentale, dovuta all'ingestione di esche avvelenate per piccoli animali... Semplice veleno per topi! E voi venite qui ... per inventarmi indagini che non ci sono?" ... "Io non mi invento proprio niente, dottore. Penso solo che quando la causa di un evento non è chiara sia necessario appurarla, tutto qua." ["we are the police, and we base things on facts! And the facts are all written here: accidental death, due to the ingestion of poisoned bait for small animals ... Simple rat poison! And you come here ... to invent investigations where there are none?" ... "I'm not inventing anything, sir. I just think that when the cause of an event isn't clear it is necessary to ascertain the cause, that's all."]⁴⁷ Dwelling outside the system insofar as he refuses to take its values and methods for granted, Ricciardi

46. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 274.

47. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 81.

offers a solution to bureaucratic obstructions to justice that seems simple: if something is unclear, make it clear. Simple, but monumentally difficult. To do this, he will return to the scene of the poisoning victim's death to experience his final moments with "Il Fatto", imagining the experience and social realities of the boy's life in order to formulate a more "fair" narrative of his death, supplanting the inadequate, sterile coroner's version.

While Garzo poses little real threat to Ricciardi and represents more than anything the vulnerabilities of the police force of the Fascist state, the dangers of living under the regime start to ooze through the cracks of Ricciardi's life and work to become immediate and personal with the risks run by his friend Dr. Modo, bringing upon himself and Ricciardi the vague menacing warnings of the secret police. In their exchanges, we can see that not only does Nussbaum's narrative imagination and empathy encourage an equitable democracy, but it is really only possible to be fully realized in a system that is at least somewhat democratic. Modo and Ricciardi get along so well in the first place in large part because of their shared dissatisfaction with the status quo and pity for the people whom the regime fails because they do not fit into the official narrative of peace and order, but the difference is in how they deal with the agony of empathy:

Non erano certo affini: lui estroverso e sopra le righe, quello silenzioso e poco incline alla risata; ma gli era vicino più di ogni altro. Forse perché erano due solitari; forse perché osservavano il proprio tempo nella stessa maniera, con disincanto e malinconia; forse perché condividevano la stessa pena per quella città brulicante e quel popolo disperato. Con differenti scelti di lotta, però: il dottore con l'esplicita dissidenza, il commissario con l'azione silenziosa.⁴⁸

48. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 37.

[“They were certainly not alike: he was extroverted and over the top, the other one silent and little inclined to laugh; but they were closer to each other than anyone else. Maybe because they were two solitary types; maybe they spent their time in the same way, with disillusionment and melancholy; maybe because they shared the same agony for that crawling city and that desperate people. With different choices in regards to the struggle, though: the doctor with explicit dissent, the inspector with silent action.”]

Modo is far more vocal in his critique than Ricciardi, as well as highly incautious. Ricciardi warns him against his Fascism “fixation”:

“Pietà, Bruno. Ti prego, non stamattina, con la politica. ...ce l’ho più di te con l’apparato e la burocrazia; ma credo che tu, con questa fissazione di Mussolini e dei fascisti, prima o poi ti metterai nei guai seri.”⁴⁹

[“Have pity, Bruno. I beg you, not this morning, with the politics. ...I’ve had it more than you have with the apparatus and the bureaucracy; but I think that you, with this fixation on Mussolini and the Fascists, sooner or later you’ll get yourself in serious trouble.”]

Maione’s joking response hits a little too close to home:

“Tiene ragione il commissario, dotto’. Io comunque devo fare il dovere mio di spia, e tra cinque minuti vado e vi denuncio, così vi mandano al confino in un posto caldo e asciutto e vi faccio pure una cortesia.”⁵⁰

“The inspector is right, Doc. Anyway I have to do my duty as a spy and in five minutes I’ll go and denounce you, that way they’ll send you to the border in a hot, dry place and they’ll be doing you a favor.”

He teases Modo that he must “do his duty as a spy” and denounce him, but while it is clear that Maione only means to use humor to warn Modo and has no intention of denouncing him, it is also clear that the threat of secret spies is real, that uttering a narrative that directly violates the

49. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 15.

official one leads to the state enacting violence on its unruly citizen. As melancholy as Ricciardi is, and as inescapable as “Il Fatto” has become in his life, he models a more effective way of subverting the fascist narrative from the inside than Modo’s direct approach.

Not even the author can be absolutely sure of protecting Modo or himself from the attentions of spies and Fascist loyalists. At the end of most of the Ricciardi novels, the author interviews a character as if for a journalism piece, in a metaleptic,⁵¹ trans-temporal encounter. In his interview with Modo, they visit a brothel in 1930s Napoli, where Modo rants about the responsibility to speak up against the regime’s thirst for power and utter disregard of the poor and the victims of crime, and for a tense moment it seems his speech might put them in danger: “Ha parlato a bassa voce, ma due uomini si sono subito voltati a guardarci. Un soldato, in attesa col berretto in mano, ha abbassato gli occhi fingendo di non aver sentito” [“He spoke in a low voice, but two men immediately turned to look at them. One soldier, waiting with his cap in his hand, lowered his eyes, pretending not to have heard.”⁵² Nothing results from the rant, perhaps because his complaints, however critical, are made in a setting that is not quite public; perhaps because they are overheard by a regular soldier and not by a member of the *Camicia Nera*

50. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 15. Maione is referring to the practice of exiling political prisoners and detaining them in places like Lampedusa, an Italian island off the coast of North Africa.

51. By metaleptic, I mean the narratological term referring to the transgression of the borders of the narrated world, a contamination of the narrating and the narrated. The phenomenon is centuries old, but only recently named and studied. For a more detailed working definition, see: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/metalepsis-revised-version-uploaded-12-may-2014>

52. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 307.

militia.⁵³ Whatever the reason, Modo's risky outspokenness is overlooked, and the author quickly changes the subject. In fact, Modo does avoid getting shipped away to the "hot, dry" place in the novels, but it is more the result of luck than circumspection. The threat remains constant, with the implication that as necessary as it is to challenge the official narrative, it remains highly dangerous within an undemocratic system.

Other narratives that run counter to the one preferred by institutional justice originate with other minor characters, but the tellers incur less risk than Modo because they avoid his explicit dissent and semi-public criticism of the regime and its institutions. The transgender prostitute Babinella lives and thrives on the margins of the city and society of Napoli; her role in each investigation is to supply Maione and Ricciardi with gossip surrounding the persons of interest as well as the underground version of the events surrounding the crime. She provides another alternative to the official narrative, a perspective on the reality of the poor, the victims, and other outsiders like herself who exist outside of or on the margins of legality and socially accepted behavior. Her version of events and her access to illicit information is so essential and so different from the accounts the investigation encounters from respectable people that Maione marvels at how she always knows beforehand when he is coming to see her and how much the detectives rely on her to tell them what "everyone else" knows but no one will speak openly about: "Io mi chiedo come si può fare un lavoro come il mio se poi stai di mezzo a un mercato.

53. The danger for Modo is real; it was common practice to send outspoken political dissidents into exile in backwater towns in Southern Italy. One famous case was Carlo Levi's exile to rural Lucania, in what is now Basilicata, as recounted in his memoir of that period, *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, 1945.

...Nel quartiere pare che nessuno sa niente, come al solito, e invece sanno tutto" ["I wonder how anyone could do a job like mine if you're in the middle of a marketplace... In the quarter it seems like no one knows anything, as usual, whereas everyone knows."]⁵⁴ Her narrative from the socio-economic margins, in contrast to Ricciardi's self-imposed and paranormal marginality, rounds out the empathetic possibilities for the reader.

Another minor character who is fully aware of the dissonance between the official, public version of the state of crime and violence in Napoli and Italy and the reality experienced by the citizenry is the journalist, Capece. His reflection on the effects Fascism has had on the press, on journalism as a profession and as his personal calling, expresses sorrow, regret, and helplessness in the face of an insidious and systematic suppression of even everyday truths.⁵⁵ Even the mere suggestion that all is not tranquil and just and prosperous under the Fascist

54. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 67.

55. "Il giornalista portava avanti la sua indagine e gli era concesso parlarne, qualche volta collaboravamo con voi [la polizia]. Poi è stato deciso che il mondo era pulito, che non c'erano più delitti. È stato deciso a tavolino, ignorando completamente la realtà. Arrivò una circolare telegrafica.... Mi ricordo le parole esatte: con particolare riferimento alle notizie di suicidi, tragedie passionali, violenza eccetera, che possano esercitare una pericolosa suggestione sugli spiriti deboli o indeboliti.... Tutto quello che ci succede attorno, quello che voi vedete dalla mattina alla sera, per i giornali non doveva più esistere.... questo non è più il mio mestiere. Ma non so fare altro, e allora ho continuato, senza voglia."

["The journalist moved forward with his investigation and he was allowed to talk about it, sometimes we would collaborate with you [the police]. Then it was decided that the world was clean, that there were no more crimes. It was decided at some table, completely ignoring reality. A telegraph circular arrived... I remember the exact words: with particular reference to the news of suicides, passionate tragedies, violence, et cetera, that can exercise dangerous suggestions on weak or weakened spirits.... Everything that happens around us, that you [the police] see from morning to evening, for the newspapers it must no longer exist... this is no longer my vocation. But I don't know how to do any other, and so I have continued, without wanting to."]

regime must be suppressed, so that journalism is no longer an authentic endeavor responsible to the public and operating on standards of integrity; Capece finds himself doing a job he no longer even recognizes, writing what is in effect propaganda for Mussolini's vision of Italy, decided in advance around conference tables.

As mentioned above, the most insidious and threatening official presence in the Ricciardi novels is neither Garzo nor the questore, nor the vague threat of spying neighbors and passersby who denounce dissenters, but the members of the so-called *Camicia Nera*, the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, a paramilitary organization turned volunteer militia with semi-official status who swore allegiance directly to Mussolini and whose methods became harsher and more violent with time. Ricciardi's critique of the blackshirts' operating outside the boundaries of the law and regular protocol, addressed to the Fascist Party functionary Pivani, is pointed, unequivocal, and extremely dangerous, given the political climate: "Non sono dei ragazzacci: sono dei criminali. E hanno del sangue sulle mani. Non conta quello che è successo a me, ieri sera, ma quello che stanno facendo, ogni giorno con più protervia. E questa protervia gliela date voi e quelli come voi. Siete almeno complici, e lo sapete. Se non mandanti" ["They're not bad boys: they're criminals. And they have blood on their hands. What happened to me yesterday evening doesn't count, but rather what they are doing every day with more and more arrogance. This arrogance is granted to them by you and people like you. You are at least complicit, and you know it, if not accessories."]⁵⁶ Fortunately for Ricciardi, Pivani retains some

Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 137.

56. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 224.

conscience and detachment from the actions of the Party: “Avete ragione...Dovete capire che pure un’idea alta e nobile come il fascismo può divenire, in mano a qualche idiota, un’arma per regolare vecchi conti personali. È già successo altrove, sta cominciando a succedere anche qui. Ma non è la nostra volontà, dovete credermi” [“You’re right... You have to understand that even a high and noble idea like fascism can become, in the hands of idiots, a weapon for settling old personal scores. It’s already happened elsewhere, and it’s starting to happen here, too. But it’s not what we want, you have to believe me.”]⁵⁷ With the appearance of the blackshirts, the novels expose more and more the dangers of the Fascist cult of personality surrounding Mussolini, the surveillance state, and the anonymity and unchecked autonomy of the secret police.

The most prominent of such anonymous figures goes by the assumed name Falco (whether first or surname is not specified); he is the personification of the regime’s use of power as repression and the hunting down of *possible* enemies of the State and Mussolini. His physical appearance is that of the by now familiar, stereotypical, anonymous Man in Black, with nondescript, monochrome clothing and the seeming ability to appear in rooms without actually entering them.⁵⁸ He conceives of his role as entirely different from that of the regular police force: “La polizia fa la polizia. Si occupa di affari ordinari, dell’evidenza: ladri, stupratori, assassini.... Noi ci occupiamo di cose diverse, sotterranee, nascoste.... Questi sono i nostri nemici, possibili terroristi, dissidenti. Gente pronta a levare la mano armata contro il governo,

57. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 224.

58. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 165.

contro il Duce" ["The police do policework. They're concerned with ordinary affairs, with evidence: thieves, rapists, killers... We're concerned with different things, underground, hidden things... These are our enemies: possible terrorists, dissidents. People who are ready to raise arms against the government, against the Duce."]⁵⁹ The police have the "easy" job concerning actual evidence, while Falco and his organization deal with the hidden, possible, unproven, and perceived threats; there is no mention of justice in his mission statement, only "sicurezza" ["security"], and when he mentions that sending an innocent man to prison would be in no one's interests, it sounds more like a threat than a reassurance.⁶⁰ He is the perfect antithesis to Ricciardi's search for justice and social meaning within a system that prefers a consistent narrative to a true one, an abstracted definition of justice rather than one that considers its ethical and communicative implications.

Paradoxically, Ricciardi the solitary figure, the marginalized detective superstitiously avoided by most of his colleagues, is more easily illustrated in contrast to these other characters from his world. He rarely talks about himself, and the occasional internal monologues the author offers us have mainly to do with what the detective sees in "Il Fatto," or with his self-torture and self-doubt regarding his relationship with his neighbor Enrica. It is in the author's metaleptic interview with Ricciardi at the end of the first novel, *Il senso del dolore*, that the protagonist speaks most at length, still reluctantly, about his home town in the mountains, his family, his faith, the causes of crime: "[la città] sembra allegra, rumorosa, disordinata, e in parte

59. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 113.

60. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 114.

lo è; ma sotto al superficie ribolle continuamente, i ricchi e i poveri, l'invidia, la gelosia, l'amore non corrisposto. Passioni che si infettano, che suppurano, che scoppiano e invadono le anime. Che portano al delitto" ["[The city] seems cheerful, noisy, disorderly, and in part it is, but underneath the surface boil constantly the rich and the poor, envy, jealousy, unrequited love. Passions that infect, that fester, that burst open and invade the soul. That lead to crime."]⁶¹ It appears that one reason the detective maintains a distance from the systems and institutions of law and order is that these impersonal entities are too far removed from the intimate, passionate, personal causes of crime... and the deaths that he experiences repeatedly throughout the city every day. Death is eventually inescapable for everyone, but because of *Il Fatto*, death and the dead demand Ricciardi's constant attention, leading to his inescapable drive to confront death in his work: "Si presentano dove meno te lo aspetti, con il loro carico di sofferenza, a ricordarti che sono là fuori, a ogni angolo. L'unico modo è di affrontarli, a viso aperto, per cercare di mettere le cose a posto. Per fare ordine, per contribuire a dare loro un po' di pace, nel posto dove sono andati. Ammesso e non concesso che siano andati da qualche parte, naturalmente" ["They show up where you least expect them, with their burden of suffering, to remind you that they're out there, on every corner. The only way is to face them, with eyes open, to try to put things in their place. To create some order, to help give them a little peace, in the place where they've gone. If it is the case that they've gone somewhere, naturally."]⁶² Nothing is more intimate and personal than death, but crime is personal, too, not

61. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 195.

62. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 197.

institutional, and so must be Ricciardi's method of detection; so must be the reader's method of reading the narrative.

As mentioned above, Augusto De Angelis was a prolific writer and critic of detective novels during the Fascist era until he was imprisoned in 1943 for antifascism and died a year later after being released, the result of being beaten by a "repubblicano" ["republican"] activist⁶³. His protagonist Carlo De Vincenzi is an early example of Italian detective fiction tending to avoid a positivist approach to crime solving in favor of less empirical methods, in this case one based on amateur psychological study and the detective's natural instinct. De Angelis' novels not only exposed unconscious prejudices in their readers but also made pointed allusions to other severe contradictions and failures in contemporary society and especially the Fascist regime (which "opposed the psychological study of the human mind" in general, not just in fiction) and the judiciary system.⁶⁴ Unsurprisingly for the novels having been written during the Fascist period, De Vincenzi's anti-fascism typically appears not as overt criticism (like Dr. Modo's rants), nor as philosophical reflections on the societal changes he observes (like Capece). Even Commissario Ricciardi exercises more free speech in his restrained comments about the regime and his personal outbursts toward his superiors. What the two detectives do have in common, instead, is their "silenzioso" ["silent"] anti-fascist activities from within the

63. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 24.

64. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 25.

system, which Pezzotti identifies as “anti-fascism by manipulation” and “anti-fascism by deceit.”⁶⁵

The greatest impediments to the work of both detectives, defined as the investigation of the truth of events surrounding the crime and the attempt to mend the dysfunction and breach in the fabric of society, are the police and judiciary’s skewed priorities, prioritizing the appearance of order and the attribution of blame on the right kind of criminal above all else.⁶⁶ De Vincenzi’s questore, for example, is a bully, always shouting, aggressive, and overbearing, always demanding results and the immediate return to the normalcy that should be present in a model Fascist city. He checks in with De Vincenzi:

“Tutto normale, dunque?”
“Apparentemente, certo.”
“Di quale apparenza parla?”
“Di quella che impone la società!”⁶⁷

[“Everything normal, then?”
“Apparently, sure.”
“What appearances are you talking about?”
“The ones imposed by society!”]

As Pezzotti notes,

De Vincenzi’s comment in this passage underlines the fact that the work of the detective is, in fact, similar to the work of a tailor who is only able to mend a tear or, rather, a breach of the rules imposed by society which are destined to be

65. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 35.

66. “De Angelis delivers a severe criticism of the Fascist judiciary which he accuses of being obtuse and more interested in finding a culprit at any cost than pursuing the truth.” Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 31.

67. Augusto de Angelis, *La Barchetta*, 396.

breached again and again. This unsettling ending is what one can imagine as the most anti-Fascist stance possible in crime fiction at the time.⁶⁸

Not only, though, is this passage exemplary of De Vincenzi's and De Angelis' critique of the discord between society's standards and the reality of the inevitability of crime, it is also typical of the *questore's* bullheaded refusal to even hear or understand De Vincenzi's critique. The detective's comment does not compute in the questore's understanding of his role in the justice system, to ensure at all costs that things are always returned to normal. The other members of the police force, especially the ones over whom De Vincenzi has some authority as Commissario and can send out on assignment to guard and follow suspects, show similar disregard for the investigation of the truth. Their literal interpretation of his orders and lack of initiative result in losing track of suspects and other setbacks:

"Insomma, lo avete perduto!"

"Che potevamo fare...? Lei ci aveva raccomandato di non farci vedere!"⁶⁹

["So, you've lost him!"

"What could we have done? You told us to not let ourselves be seen!"]

De Vincenzi is the one character who offers a moral center and a conscience, the lone figure who searches for truth and is in a position to mend society through manipulation and dissimulation within a corrupt system.

Martha Nussbaum writes of the literary imagination's power for societal healing, and Harold Bloom writes of reading as a healing pleasure, "It returns you to otherness, whether in

68. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 34.

69. Augusto de Angelis, *Il candeliere a sette fiamme*, 194.

yourself or in friends, or in those who may become friends.”⁷⁰ I maintain that the detective’s function is not only to solve crimes, but to be a model reader, developing an ethical stance that imagines and empathizes with the other. Like a good doctor or mender, the first task of the detective as social healer is to identify and diagnose a social ill or tear; sometimes this means identifying the cause of the breach in the false assumptions and prejudice based on unfounded negative stereotyping. De Angelis not only portrays Jewish characters in a positive light, such as Virginia Olcombi a.k.a May Bigland in *Il candeliere a sette fiamme* (1936), but also manipulates representations of anti-Semitism and other negative stereotypes to expose the absurdities of the Fascist regime’s stance on the issue. In the same novel, May Bigland and another character, John Vehrehan, are under suspicion from the beginning because of their foreign (non-Italian) appearances, language, and habits. Predictably, it is revealed that they are both foreign spies. So far, the narrative is in line with Fascist proscriptions against the portrayal of Italian criminals; even the victim in this novel is a foreign national, Osman Mascali. Then the investigation transforms a hotel room murder into an international spy story, and the moral concerns are suddenly much larger than the threat of foreign presence in Italy and the location of a secret formula: the newly opened Palestinian question is at the center of it all and De Vincenzi finds himself inevitably on his way to the Middle East. Perhaps it is not a surprise that De Vincenzi had to leave Italy in at least one of the novels in order to address certain questions of justice, if Haycraft and Pezzotti are correct, and “crime fiction can only exist in democracies because it

70. Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why*, 2000, 19.

depends on and promotes a concept of absolute justice."⁷¹ A concept of absolute, or even moral as opposed to legal, justice would demand a certain amount of freedom in order to be acted upon. Totalitarian regimes are naturally hostile to the independent pursuit of such ideals and concepts, so it is not surprising that De Angelis takes his protagonist outside the Fascist state in order to address and attempt to resolve the moral conflicts in the novel. The commissario is occasionally troubled by the thought that he is helping a probable murderer (May Bigland) leave the country and escape legal justice, but she and the other Jewish characters (all the while retaining the stereotypical physical features of the race that were prevalent at the time) unquestionably have the morally superior cause and he is compelled to assist them all the same. The reader identifies the Jewish characters with ease by their stereotypical characteristics, which pulls one into the story; then in a reversal of expectations, these characters whom the Fascist propaganda would have been inferior and in the wrong are shown to be sympathetic and even heroic. The reader cannot help but imagine their plight and empathize with their suffering.

The risk in this novel is for empathy to develop into descriptive romanticism, especially as the narrative abandons Italy for more exotic foreign locales. The lack of a neat, punitive solution, however, helps to mitigate the romanticism somewhat. The end of the novel leaves the rightness or wrongness of De Vincenzi's choice to help May Bigland and her cause ambiguous: May might or might not be the murderer of the man in the hotel at the beginning of the novel; she definitely betrayed her people's cause, but probably under duress; she keeps her promise to the detective to return the stolen formula to him in exchange for his help, which constitutes

71. cit. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 17.

another betrayal of her cause; he leaves her to the mercy of her own people who may or may not sentence her to death. De Vincenzi is still able to imagine a brighter future for Palestine and himself, however, and the novel ends with the melancholy and uncertain expression of hope, but hope nonetheless. The true task of the detective and reader is that of empathizing and identifying with the controversial other, to seriously consider the moral and ethical implications of their otherness, and move forward in the hope of a more humane justice than the narrow, legalistic one represented by the police agency the detective has left behind.

This model of the detective as a psychologically-oriented investigator, but most especially a figure of social critique and positive change, is essential to De Angelis' most significant contribution to the genre, his insistence on a recognizably Italian style of crime fiction, pursuing freedom of expression in defiance of and in both implicit and explicit contradiction to the strictures and ideologies handed down by the MinculPop.⁷² De Vincenzi's propensity for psychological and instinctive investigation resonates especially strongly in his spiritual heir, Commissario Ricciardi; for both, the real mystery is the human psyche, and it just so happens that the latter has visceral, realistic paranormal experiences of it. Both depart from investigations rooted in scientific, empirical evidence in favor of following that drive to understand the minds and hearts behind the crimes. Their melancholy and solitude, their ability to empathize even with criminals like May Bigland, to manipulate the system despite itself into

72. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 39: "defense of an Italian way of crime fiction, far from being an adherence to Fascist cultural autarky [...] a testimony of his lucid struggle against an oppressive regime that wanted to control every aspect of people's lives."

allowing them room to search for the truth, and their reluctant and hesitant optimism are all traits passed down from the one to the other. While reading their narratives, the reader takes on their views on justice and the risks of empathy and romanticism to balance out its ethical advantages.

III. Nussbaumian Poet-Detectives: Sciascia and Camilleri

The police detective remains more common in the *giallo* than the private detective, possibly because locating the detective within an institution of law places him in explicit relationship to the organs that ought to be serving justice, creating that essential tension between justice that is institutional and that which is absolute or personal. It also places the narrative of investigation, more often than not told from the detective's perspective, in direct contrast with the official narrative of events and vision of society. In this section, I will contrast two Sicilian authors' police detectives and their uneasy relationships with the institutions they are part of: Leonardo Sciascia's Captain Bellodi, and Andrea Camilleri's Commissario Montalbano. Sciascia is not alone among Italian *giallisti* for being known for rejecting the formulaic structure of the classic crime novel, ending his *gialli* without a neat, officially

generated solution, and Bellodi's ending is no exception.⁷³ Abbate identifies this tactic as one that fits in marvelously well with a Nussbaumian understanding of the literary imagination: "l'operazione sciasciana di ricostruzione di motivazioni, comportamenti, idee di un uomo di cui gli atti ufficiali non rendono la complessità e che lasciano avvolto nel mistero" ["the Sciascian operation of reconstructing a man's motivations, behaviors, ideas, of which official proceedings do not render the complexity but rather leave it wrapped in mystery."]⁷⁴ Montalbano, a sort of literary heir to Bellodi, expends just as much effort into the same operation of human reconstruction, even if the endings of his cases for the most part leave fewer loose ends than Bellodi's.

Leonardo Sciascia's reluctance to call himself a *giallista* was really part of a broader resistance to labels of all sorts; neither did he wish to be called a Gramscian, nor an

73. "In Leonardo Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta* and *A ciascuno il suo* (1966) the criminal events, that in both cases occur near the incipit and that are soon overshadowed by other issues, are just the trigger that sets off the real concern: the examination of the Mafia-ridden Sicilian society and its parallel and only partly submerged reality, ruled by an omnipresent criminal organization which operates with – and thanks to – the complicity and the imprimatur of the institutions...Its ability to engage with serious social issues without resorting to the formulaic structure of the classic crime novel...renders the Italian giallo an effective, if hybrid, category of narrative fiction, capable for foregrounding themes and issues that are in tune with readers' own, becoming a prime site for the articulation of concerns about society and denouncing the irregularities and contradictions of the 'sistema Italiana'. And if these irregularities and contradictions are not resolved or explained by or through literature, and retain a high level of inexplicability even after they have been represented in fictional terms, still their coming to the fore makes a difference: it turns the 'obscurity of the unspoken' into the 'obscurity of the voiced', as Sciascia said in an interview, and, producing a raised level of public awareness, it constitutes the first step towards change."

Nicoletta di Ciolla, *Uncertain Justice*, 6-7.

The Sciascia interview she refers to is transcribed in Sciascia and Padovani, *La Sicilia come metafora*, 1989, p. 87.

“intellettuale organico” [“organic intellectual.”]⁷⁵ As Pezzotti points out, the “unrelenting ‘moral rebellion’ in his works” beyond political or ideological labels “brings him closer to the classic crime fiction which he accused of being escapist and mere passive reading.”⁷⁶ His works include thoughtful and revealing discourses on the Mafia, yet he cringed at *Il giorno della civetta* being called a Mafia story. The protagonist is a police detective, Captain Bellodi from Parma, but Sciascia would not want his story called a *poliziesco*. And yet, the Mafia and the police are at the center of the ethical and political questions of the novel, not just at the center of the investigation and the enigma surrounding the murderer of a Sicilian contractor, Colasberna.

In Sciascia’s Sicily, there are different kinds of policemen; some pursue justice and policework as a vocation and some have no clue what the social role of a policeman really is. The system is riddled with corruption of various kinds and degrees, a problem that Nussbaum does not directly address in her theoretical work. According to one elderly *sbirro* instructing a younger one in *Il giorno della civetta*, there are those who are born to it like a vocation, and those who are not:

Non metterti in testa che gli sbirri siano tutti stupidi: ce ne sono che, ad uno come te, possono togliere le scarpe dai piedi; e tu cammini scalzo senza accorgertene.... ci si nasce. Ed uno non si fa sbirro perché ad un certo punto ha bisogno di buscare qualcosa, o perché legge un bando d’arruolamento: se fa sbirro perché sbirro era nato. Dico per quelli che sono sbirri sul serio: ce n’è poveretti, che sono paste d’angelo; e quelli non li chiamo sbirri.⁷⁷

74. Sergia Adamo, *La giustizia del dimenticato*, 273.

75. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 76.

76. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Novels*, 76.

77. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 51-2.

[Don't get it into your head that all cops are stupid: there are some who could steal the shoes off the feet of someone like you; and you'd walk around barefoot without even noticing.... He's born to it. And he doesn't become a cop because at a certain point he needs to search for something, or because he reads a recruitment poster: he becomes a cop because he was born a cop. I'm talking about the ones who are serious cops: there are some, poor things, who are saints,⁷⁸ and I don't call them cops.]

The older policeman rambles and soon loses the thread of his lecture, but the point that comes across is that some policemen understand their job to be something more than just a job; it is essential to themselves and to society, in response to some itch not to "search for something" but to... solve something, change something, or fill some void. Unfortunately for Bellodi and the victims of the Mafia, these true policemen are hard to find, and virtually none of the locals recognize that Bellodi is one of them, much less trust and confide in him, especially due to his distracting Northern accent and unfamiliarity with the island.

Interspersed throughout the novel are different characters' perspectives on law and the application of institutional justice. Again the problem of widespread corruption impedes the narrative of justice being taken seriously by many. Most perspectives on law in the novel are reflections of the jaded view that things always remain the same, inequality is part of the society in which people find themselves, and the written narrative of law is no less subject to human greed and manipulation than anything else: "Che la legge fosse immutabilmente scritta ed

78. The original phrase "pasta d'angelo" literally means "angel's dough," as in formed by the angels, and indicates a person who is good, but perhaps too good in certain circumstances. It can be condescending, but not quite a direct insult, not as negative as "goody two-shoes." A more common related expression is "lui è di buona pasta," "he's made of good dough," "he's a good sort." The translation given is "saints," not in the way we would call an especially honest

uguale per tutti, il *confidente* non aveva mai creduto, né poteva: tra i ricchi e i poveri, tra i sapienti e gli ignoranti, c'erano gli uomini della legge; e potevano, questi uomini, allungare da una parte sola il braccio dell'arbitrio, l'altra parte dovevano proteggere e difendere" ["That the law is immutably written and the same for all, the *informer* had never believed, nor could he: between the rich and the poor, between the knowledgeable and the ignorant, there were the men of law, and these men could extend the arm of liberty in only one direction, while in the other direction they had to protect and defend."]⁷⁹ The wording of this perspective on the nature of law by Parrinieddu the informant is especially telling, given the context of the Italian legal tradition being rooted not in precedent and "common law" as in the Anglo-American tradition, but in Roman civil law; the tradition adheres strictly to the word of the law as it is written and codified. The law *ought* to be precisely what Parrinieddu says it is not: immutably written and equal for all. It *ought* to provide a consistent narrative that is much closer to fulfilling the concept of absolute justice than it is. Instead, the men with the "longest reach"—namely, the Mafia, but also the officials who facilitate its influence—are able to exercise their will with one hand and protect and defend themselves under the law with the other. Nussbaum's judicious spectator must face more problems than usual, in the work of rewriting a consistent, reasonable, and empathetic narrative of events, and in the work of disseminating that narrative through the proper channels in the police and legal system, not to mention the rest of society.

or generous person a "saint" in English, but as an indulgent, pitying reference to their ineffective innocence and naïveté.

In stark contrast to Parrinieddu's pessimistic and fatalistic outlook on law and justice, Bellodi is an example of Sciascia's detective as the "representative[...] not of the 'legge ufficiale,' but rather the 'legge in assoluto.'"⁸⁰ His faith in the law and its ability to ensure freedom and liberty is at first unquestioned and unshakable: "con la fede di un uomo che ha partecipato a una rivoluzione e dalla rivoluzione ha visto sorgere la legge: e questa legge che assicurava libertà e giustizia, le legge della Repubblica, serviva e faceva rispettare. E se ancora portava la divisa, ...era perché il mestiere di servire la legge della Repubblica, e di farla rispettare, diventava ogni giorno più difficile" ["with the faith of a man who has participated in a revolution, and from that revolution has seen the law rise up: and this law that assured liberty and justice, the law of the Republic, he served it and saw that it was respected. And if he still wore the uniform, ...it was because the calling to serve the law of the Republic, and to see that it was respected, was becoming more difficult every day."]⁸¹ This idealism is part of his character as the Northern outsider in Sicily. To the locals his optimism simply does not correspond to their experience of life, and he himself eventually adopts a dystopian view of human existence and society that is shared by Sciascia himself. In such a deeply corrupt social context, the personally felt "esigenza di giustizia" ["need for justice"] Sergio Adamo mentions has difficulty even gestating, at least in connection with legality and conformity with the law, despite recurring experiences of injustice, because alternative narratives to the ones manipulated by the

79. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 30.

80. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 72.

81. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 31.

Mafia are so extremely scarce.⁸² By extension, the possibility of Nussbaum's judicious spectator emerging in such a context is also extremely difficult.

Not only is Bellodi's idealism seen as naive and unrealistic by the locals, he himself is seen as interfering, paranoid, delusional, and obstructive to the peaceful running of the police and society, and finally, motivated by anti-Southern prejudices:

Questo qui, caro amico, è uno che vede mafia da ogni parte: uno di quei settentrionali con la testa piena di pregiudizi, che appena scendono dalla nave-traghetto cominciano a veder mafia dovunque... E se lui dice che Colasberna è stato ammazzato dalla mafia, stiamo freschi... Io non so se voi avete letto quello che ha dichiarato a un giornalista.... Ha detto cose da far rizzare i capelli: che la mafia esiste, che è una potente organizzazione, che controlla tutto...⁸³

[This here, my dear friend, is a man who sees mafia on every side: one of those northerners with their heads full of prejudices, who as soon as they get off the ferry start seeing mafia everywhere... And if he says that Colasberna was killed by the mafia, let's not kid ourselves... I don't know if you've read what he told that journalist... He said things that would make your hair curl: that the mafia exists, that it's a powerful organization, that it controls everything...]

This observation is made by the *questore*, who is fully committed to maintaining the status quo, controlling the social narrative that appears in the press, and denying the existence of the Mafia that ensures these motivations stay constant and strong. Both Bellodi and Sciascia engage in dangerous and controversial social critique: exposing widespread and systematic corruption and mafia control over all aspects of civil society, while it was still a taboo subject and officially denied in most quarters at the time of publication. In *Il giorno della civetta* especially, but in Sciascia's other novels as well, the official narrative is unreliable not because of incompetence or

82. Sergia Adamo, *La giustizia del dimenticato*, 262.

83. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 34-5.

the obfuscations and inefficiencies of overgrown bureaucracy, but because of society's corruption on every level, from the eye witnesses who never step forward to the deliberate efforts on the part of political and legal officials to protect the Mafia and its members.

It is no surprise that Bellodi is accused of regional prejudice, however unfairly, and that this obstructs his attempts to be the poet-detective (counterpart to Nussbaum's and Walt Whitman's poet-judge). Nussbaum looks at prejudice and its tendency to mangle justice in Richard Wright's *Native Son* and E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. She says of racial hatred, which is not too far removed from regional hatred and prejudice at various times between North and South Italy, "[it] is a stain and an infection that prevents the individualized, and at the same time the common, view of the humanity of others. (These two perceptions are connected because seeing others as similarly and fully human entails seeing them as individuals with their own stories to tell.)"⁸⁴ The *questore's* accusation of Bellodi's prejudice is in itself a defensive expression of prejudice, from the South towards the North. Bellodi, as he tries to conduct his investigation with the neutrality that Nussbaum differentiates from un-empathetic detachment, is himself the object of the *questore's* failure to make the same effort. The stigma of prejudice - whether based on race, regional identity, gender, or sexuality - deforms not only the human community, but also the political and social institutions that serve it.

Over the course of the investigation, Bellodi is finally able to penetrate the traditional Sicilian culture of silence and find an eye witness to the murder, but his eyewitness is also murdered. His frustration turns into anger:

Da questo stato d'animo sorse, improvvisa, la collera. Il capitano sentì l'angustia in cui la legge lo costringeva a muoversi; come i suoi sottoufficiali vagheggiò un eccezionale potere, una eccezionale libertà di azione: e sempre questo vagheggiamento aveva condannato nei suoi marescialli. Una eccezionale sospensione delle garanzie costituzionali, in Sicilia e per qualche mese: e il male sarebbe stato estirpato per sempre. Ma gli vennero alla memoria le repressioni di Mori, il fascismo: e ritrovò la misura delle proprie idee, dei propri sentimenti. Ma durava la collera, la sua collera di uomo del nord che investiva la Sicilia intera....⁸⁵

[From this state of mind surges up fury, all of a sudden. The captain felt the angst in which the law constrained him to move; like his officers he longed for an extraordinary power, an extraordinary freedom of action, and he had always condemned this very longing in his officers. An exceptional suspension of constitutional guarantees, in Sicily and for a few months: and the evil would have been exterminated forever. But then occurred to him the memories of the repressions of Mori, of fascism, and he recovered the measure of his own ideas, his own feelings. But the fury persisted, the fury of a man of the North who was besieging all of Sicily....]

Here the captain's anger is turned in part on the corrupt society, but also on himself and his impossible situation. He wishes briefly for the kind of unchecked power to punish, sequester, and demolish the unjust and corrupt institutions and networks that make up the Mafia state-within-the-state, but then remembers how Fascism exercised precisely that kind of power and how it inevitably became a force of cruelty and terror. Bellodi then goes on to recall the inefficacy of previous trials of mafia dons and their associates in the ranks of elected officials and functionaries, and bemoans the Sicilian's ignorance of just how many liberties they are missing out on for the sake of the one "sola libertà" ["lone freedom"] the autonomy that permits the existence of the mafia, which among other things is also "una associazione di segreto mutuo

84. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 96.

85. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 60.

soccorso” [“an association of secret mutual support.”]⁸⁶ Finding true, absolute justice is impossible when society itself is corrupt and disallows alternative narratives. With a pessimism that will not last forever, he speculates that this might be a kind of justice, too.⁸⁷ This tension between knowing that the law is just and the awareness of its weakness in the face of corruption and abuse never leaves Bellodi, and he continues to attempt to find that place where he can serve the law without also weakening it by abusing his role within it, to navigate the difference between “senso di giustizia” [“sense of justice”] and “amministrazione di giustizia” [“administration of justice.”] What is most lacking from the “association of secret mutual support” is Nussbaum’s concept of rational emotions; without the appropriate emotions having their place in the “association’s” and therefore the law’s narrative, the law is deprived of information needed to make reasonable decisions and judgments, and a sense of human value is also lacking.⁸⁸

Bellodi returns to Parma after giving his deposition without having satisfied the detective’s itch to uncover the truth and reconcile all the facts of the homicides, and so “aveva presente e viva, peso di morte e di ingiustizia, la Sicilia lontana” [“remembered well and clearly, with the weight of death and injustice, the faraway Sicily.”]⁸⁹ As he revisits familiar sites from his home town and runs into friends who ask him about the “incredibile Sicilia,” the surroundings become more and more surreal and fragmented, the title of a song here, the sound

86. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 67.

87. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 61.

88. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 67-69.

89. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 121.

of knives clinking there; incidental details continue to remind him of Sicily despite himself. The novel ends with Bellodi drunk and confused, “sapeva, lucidamente, di amare la Sicilia: e che ci sarebbe tornato. ‘Mi ci romperò la testa’ disse a voce alta” [“he knew, clear as crystal, that he loved Sicily: and that he would return there. ‘I’m going to break my head there,’ he said out loud.”]⁹⁰ The captain is a born detective if there ever was one; certainly the enchanting scenery and intriguing people of Sicily are part of its pull on him, but it is really the mystery yet unsolved and the truth undiscovered, and the absolute justice still unfulfilled that demand his return and his continued “searching and questioning.”⁹¹ For di Ciolla, *Il giorno della civetta* is “a novel in which the focus is not on the solution of the original crime, uncovered in the first few pages, but on the progressive uncovering of the political forces within society which nullify and dismantle the investigator’s careful reconstruction.”⁹² This is the real crux of the plot; the inevitable unraveling of the poet-detective’s narrative by corrupt forces, and Bellodi’s undying “kernel of irritation” continuing to push for further re-narrating. In this way, Sciascia carries over the Italian *giallo* tradition of avoiding the neat, formulaic crime story plot into the age of the modern *giallo*.

There existed a strong relationship between Sciascia and Camilleri in life as well as on the page. The two authors knew each other fairly well, and Sciascia actively encouraged Camilleri to use the *giallo* as his literary form, saying, “la gabbia più vera per uno scrittore è il

90. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 121.

91. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 92.

romanzo giallo.”⁹³ This odd turn of phrase, “the truest cage for a writer is the giallo,” reflects Sciascia’s ambivalence toward the genre that he obviously excelled at yet disparaged; a reluctant admission of the *giallo*’s potential and an insistence on its limitations. Sciascia also disparaged Camilleri’s choice to make language a central feature of his novels, as Camilleri attests himself: “a lui desse fastidio, molto fastidio, il mio modo di scrivere. ‘Maria’ mi disse una volta mentre stava leggendo *Un filo di fumo* ‘ma quante parole siciliane ci mette, Camille!’ Molte cose mi dividevano da Leonardo Sciascia, fatta salva la stima e l’amicizia” [“My way of writing bothered him, bothered him a lot. ‘Maria,’ [innocuous expletive] he said to me once while he was reading *A Thread of Smoke*, ‘what a lot of Sicilian words you put in here, Camille!’ Many things divided me from Leonardo Sciascia, apart from esteem and friendship.”]⁹⁴ Camilleri has expressed his indebtedness to Sciascia in several places, as well as their close acquaintanceship and disagreements over the style and form of the *giallo*.⁹⁵

Elena Past and Barbara Pezzotti disagree on precisely this point of encounter between Sciascia and Camilleri. Past sees the “true aim” of the Montalbano novels to be “pleasure of reading,”⁹⁶ and despite her attention to detail in her analysis of the detective and his world, it is clear that she sees the novels as an exercise in entertainment, not so much in social critique or commentary, and that the critical attention devoted “to things other than [Montalbano’s] detective skills” reveals some kind of shortcoming in the novels, a failure to live up to Sciascia’s

92. Nicoletta di Ciolla, *Uncertain Justice*, 2.

93. Cit. Elvio Guagnini, *Dal giallo al noir e oltre: Declinazioni del poliziesco italiano*, 123.

94. Andrea Camilleri con Lorenzo Rosso, *Una Birra al Caffè Vigàta*, 57.

95. E.g. Andrea Camilleri and Lorenzo Rosso, *Una Birra al Caffè Vigàta*, 57.

example. Even if pleasure were the one “true aim” of the novels, Nussbaum would not dismiss pleasure’s potential so quickly; the pleasure of reading is crucial in the formation of an empathetic reader and the development of their sense of social justice by emotionally binding the reader to the characters, for the pleasure of their company, or the pleasure of the setting (or, in the Montalbano novels, the pleasure of gastronomy as well).⁹⁷ Pezzotti makes a more open-minded examination of the series that points out the flexibility of the imaginary setting where Past sees an unrealistic simulacrum compared to Sciascia’s Sicily; “It can instead be argued that Camilleri and Sciascia give different literary representations of Sicily, both of which—for being literary—do not correspond to the absolute truth.”⁹⁸ Pezzotti also makes more of an effort to identify the differences that forty years of history make in the setting and portrayal of Sicily in Montalbano’s world compared to Bellodi’s; it should come as no surprise that Sicily itself has changed in the time since Sciascia wrote his novel.⁹⁹

Other points of comparison that Pezzotti identifies include Camilleri’s de-romanticization of the mafia in comparison to Sciascia’s Don Mariano, who is untouchable: “It is a Sicily where the Mafia still exists and operates, but that can—sometimes—be defeated.”¹⁰⁰ I agree with Pezzotti that it is unrealistic to expect Camilleri’s Sicily to be the same as Sciascia’s, or to expect one author to express political commitment in the same way as another. I would also emphasize her argument that those “other things” Past sees as unrelated to Montalbano’s

96. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 105.

97. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 35.

98. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 139.

99. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 142.

detective skills are quite the reverse: humor, especially, can function as an extremely effective part of social critique because of its tendency to permit perception of multiple frames of reference at once,¹⁰¹ a function that is more possible now in the present political environment than in Sciascia's.¹⁰² While humor may be "light" or non-serious in contrast to the tragedies, corruption, and violence that drive the plot of the *giallo*, that indeed in some ways give it a foundation and reason to exist, it is important to recognize that the "lightness" of comedy stands out in high relief to tragedies and violence in all areas of art and culture, from the Commedia dell'arte tradition to modern stand-up comedy; "light" or non-serious discourse is not necessarily trivial. Humor distances itself from serious discourse and operates "outside the

100. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 142.

101. Koestler has led the field in sociological studies of humor; George E. C. Paton neatly summarizes the relevance of his theories for social critique by professional comedians, but it applies just as well to humor and comic characters in literature: "Koestler's 'bisociation' theory of humour, in stressing the way in which humorous stories...permit the perception of a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference, neatly points up the wider ranging possibilities for the professional comedian to expose and play on double-standard in official morality to legitimated moral codes and actual moral behaviour; and also the shifting borderline between the two as morality becomes more 'permissive' with social change." George E. C. Paton, "The Comedian as Portrayer of Social Morality" in Chris Powell & George E. C. Paton, Ed., *Humour in Society*, 207.

Montalbano's use of humor and sense of the comic also speaks to the resilience of his character and his methods for dealing with and taking control of difficult situations and problems:

"Humor use and appreciation can also reflect a given character's openness to change, his or her adaptive potential.... If humor allows us to stand back from our pain, rationality, seriousness and fear, then it should contribute to growth by allowing us to bend rather than break."

"...because the presentation of a particular image or idea as a fitting subject for humor is based on value judgments, the creation and use of humor is an exercise of power: a force in controlling our responses to unexpected and dangerous happening, a way of shaping the responses and attitudes of others and a tool in intergroup and intragroup dynamics." Paul Lewis, *Comic Effects: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Humor in Literature*, 21, 13.

102. Barbara Pezzotti, *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction*, 148.

assumptions and expectations of ordinary, serious discourse,"¹⁰³ This distance and difference from serious discourse has multiple effects: most importantly for the purposes of better understanding the role of humor in Montalbano's universe, humor (especially, I would argue, in the form of jokes and vignettes) demands the reader inhabit an interpretive state of mind and merge multiple frames of reference that are normally incongruous, but in the context of the joke or humorous episode, make some sense and somehow challenge the status quo. Mulkay has done considerable work showing how this crucial merging of frames of reference can challenge the status quo, debunk, ridicule, and criticize. Its precise actions are sometimes subtle and elusive, not always easy to identify in every case, which is not to say that they are any less effective and significant than less elusive serious discourse.

I will spend more time examining Camilleri's humor in a later chapter, but one striking example of Camilleri's subtle and nuanced use of humor is found in *La forma dell'acqua*, which I single out also because of the plethora of different kinds of rule-breaking and -circumnavigation contained in the one novel. Montalbano's ironic comments on society are never merely comic: "Mi pare bello che qualcuno, in questa nostra splendida provincia, si decida a morire di morte naturale, dando il buon esempio. Non trova? Altre due o tre morti come questa dell'ingegnere e ci rimettiamo in carreggiata col resto dell'Italia" ["It seems wonderful to me that someone in this splendid province of ours decides to die a natural death, giving a good example. Don't you find it so? Another two or three deaths like this one of the engineer and we'll put ourselves on

103. Michael Mulkay, *On Humour*, 19.

track with the rest of Italy.”]¹⁰⁴ This joke highlights Sicily’s reputation, perhaps partially deserved, as a lawless and violent place, despite the progress made since Sciascia’s time in prosecuting and limiting the reach of leaders of the mafia and the long overdue acknowledgment by authorities that the mafia is a real problem that can and must be addressed. The initial appearance of the victim in the novel as having suffered a natural death will remain true throughout the case, but nothing else surrounding the discovery of the body, its location and how it came there, will turn out to be as it seems, so even the suggestion of the victim’s “decision” to die naturally instead of at the hands of misadventure is overshadowed by the web of greed and malicious manipulation of evidence by the victim’s powerful family and enemies. Montalbano and the reader are required to become the judicious spectator, considering all possible worlds in which the victim dies in this way and the body is found in this particular location, to put themselves in the place of many different actors in the case, taking on their experiences and motivations, until the most comprehensive narrative is found. Literature and the detective, for their imaginative powers, are quite literally “the enemy of political economy”¹⁰⁵ in this novel, in which the political machinations of the victim’s family and political connects prevent the full, unabridged narrative from even making it into the public eye.

Montalbano is not the only character in Camilleri’s works, as Dorfles points out, to fit the description of “Funzionari di polizia simpatici, originali, lontani dallo schema del piedipiatti

104. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell’acqua*, 38.

105. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 1.

senza fantasia né personalità” [“Police functionaries, sympathetic, original, far away from the schema of the flatfoot without either imagination or personality.”]¹⁰⁶ Rather, he is the most well-recognized and beloved of many such characters. The *tenente generale* [lieutenant general] in Camilleri’s historical essay *La bolla di componenda* also stands out because his contribution to the investigation places himself in very real danger from the Mafia and the signatories of the *bolla* (“bull,” private contract or agreement) in the title, but is essential to “l’indagine che mette a nudo la dimensione della omertà, dei pregiudizi, delle superstizioni che ci sono intorno all’uso della Bolla” [“the investigation that he exposes the dimension of honor, of prejudices, of superstitions that are there surrounding the use of the Bull.”]¹⁰⁷ Camilleri is clearly dedicated to portraying “buoni poliziotti” [“good policemen”] and “persone perbene” [“decent people,”]¹⁰⁸ characters who privilege the pursuit of truth to the point of breaking the rules (exhibiting a sometimes extreme version of Nussbaum’s flexible law) if it means restoring order to society and dignity to victims of crime. Montalbano, the *tenente generale*, and other Camilleri characters all model the Nussbaumian poet-detective taken a step further, sharing that love of the elusive truth and the willingness to incur personal and professional risk in its service.

Montalbano takes the position of privileging truth over the rules so far that for him, rule-breaking becomes “una specie di vizio, di assuefazione alla quale non riesce a sfuggire” [“a

106. Piero Dorflès, “Montalbano e altri poliziotti anti-istituzionali,” in *Il Caso Camilleri: Letteratura e storia*, Ed. Antonino Buttitta, 54.

107. Piero Dorflès, “Montalbano e altri poliziotti anti-istituzionali,” in *Il Caso Camilleri: Letteratura e storia*, Ed. Antonino Buttitta, 55.

108. Piero Dorflès, “Montalbano e altri poliziotti anti-istituzionali,” in *Il Caso Camilleri: Letteratura e storia*, Ed. Antonino Buttitta, 60.

type of vice, an inurement to that from which he is unable to flee.”¹⁰⁹ Dorfles mentions his investigations into crimes outside his purview, or that have been assigned elsewhere, but these are not all; Montalbano even sometimes interferes in citizens’ lives in ways not directly related to the crime at hand, when he sees a social problem that needs mending, though he does not always succeed in finding the whole truth or providing a resolution. His empathy for others sometimes leads him to step outside protocol and interfere, for the sake of social healing. For Montalbano and for Nussbaum’s poet-judge, “neutrality does not require a lofty distance from the social realities of the cases before [them], indeed, [they are] enjoined to examine those realities searchingly, with imaginative concreteness and emotional responses that are prop to the judicious spectator — or to his surrogate, the novel-reader.”¹¹⁰ However, Nussbaum’s vision for the poetic judge and the empathetic reader allows for the possibility of neutral and compassionate judgment, rather than guaranteeing it. The results of Montalbano’s excursions outside protocol are mixed, especially when Montalbano allows his second-order emotion of empathy to become a first-order emotion, absorbing too much of the emotional experiences of others so that his neutrality as a policeman is endangered. In *La forma dell’acqua*, in what seems to be a tangent completely irrelevant to the case, Montalbano is sent to the home of a retired schoolteacher who has suddenly started shooting recklessly at a crowd outside his house; it turns out that he is upset at his wife’s supposed affair with a retired postman. Rather than arrest Contino the teacher, Montalbano listens to his lament over his wife’s unfaithfulness and his

109. Piero Dorfles, “Montalbano e altri poliziotti anti-istituzionali,” in *Il Caso Camilleri: Letteratura e storia*, Ed. Antonino Buttitta, 56.

request that Montalbano—in his capacity as police inspector—tell his wife to stop sleeping around, which is probably not meant entirely seriously, and ending with Contino offering him a coffee. Montalbano does not arrest Contino, but he does not entirely ignore his request, either; completely outside his responsibilities as a police detective, he approaches the postman instead of the wife, suggests the inadvisability of paying such attentions to Signora Contino that cause conflict between the couple, earning a perfectly justified rebuke, in his opinion: “Mi meraviglio di lei, che dovrebbe rappresentare la legge e invece mi viene a tenere questi discorsi!” [“I wonder at you, who ought to represent the law, and instead you come here to have these discussions!”]¹¹¹ But really, why should the law not be interested in these discussions, if Nussbaum is right and the literary judge is called to examine all social realities before her “searchingly, with imaginative concreteness”?¹¹² Because in this instance, the problem is that “though empathy with the actors will usually be one important part of the process of judicious spectatorship, ...the judicious spectator must go beyond empathy, assessing from her own spectatorial viewpoint the meaning of those sufferings and their implications for the lives involves... detached evaluation is at the heart of the activity of the literary imaginer as judicious spectator.”¹¹³ It not that the law should not be interested in the Contino family’s travails, but that Montalbano, the spectator, is allowing his emotional responses to the realities before him to become too personal, lacking “judicial neutrality.”

110. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 86.

111. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell’acqua*, 74.

112. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 86.

113. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 90.

In the end, unfortunately, Montalbano's interference was only temporarily successful in preventing violence in the Contino family. On the next page, the husband and wife have completed a murder-suicide pact, their final poses expressing resignation and acceptance of death, "qui, la morte, aveva trovato la sua dignità" ["here, death had found her dignity."]¹¹⁴ Montalbano expresses regret that he had not done more, gone further beyond his prescribed duties to inform the couple's friends and doctor. Perhaps their deaths could have been avoided and they could have found some other form of peace together. Meanwhile, it comes to light that during the chaos caused by the gunshots, some thieves took advantage of the distraction and turned over two neighboring apartments. This "case" takes up barely three pages and is completely disconnected from the main investigation of the body of the engineer who died of natural causes and was found in embarrassing circumstances. At first, it seems like merely a darkly comic aside, but certain aspects reveal that it also can be read in parallel to the larger case: the theme of individual perspective and the subjectivity of truth, the difficulty of reconciling multiple narratives, is apparent in Contino's conviction of his wife's guilt, symbolically represented in the viewing of the postman through facing windows that both partially obscure his figure and make it unmistakable to the suspicious husband. In both the large and small cases, Montalbano's official status as police inspector and face of the law both opens doors (literally and figuratively) and gives him access to information and witnesses, but also would impede him from pursuing his social commitment to its fullest extent — the institution he is a part of has too inflexible a concept of law and justice, privileging the letter of

114. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell'acqua*, 75.

the law over its social and communicative functions. Most of all, the deepest parallel between the large and small cases is Montalbano's "kernel of irritation,"¹¹⁵ the engagement of his irresistible drive to investigate not only the bare facts of the crime, but all the human motives and desires surrounding it, the desire to solve and resolve, the hope of enacting that resolution, and the unavoidable temporary nature of all social mending. In this way, the comical miniature case serves as a microcosmic view of Montalbano's larger investigation and personal moral and ethical struggles within his official role. I propose this "kernel of irritation" as fundamental to a Nussbaumian poet-detective, the counterpart to her poet-judge.

Inherent in that official role, both bolstered and limited by the law and police procedure, Montalbano faces one of the same challenges as his predecessor Bellodi: the unreliability of the official narrative and the mutability of truth and perspective. The title of the novel, *La forma dell'acqua*, speaks to precisely this problem. It originates in the story told by one character about a childhood revelation:

"Un giorno vidi che il mio amico aveva messo sull'orlo di un pozzo una ciotola, una tazza, una teiera, una scatola di latta quadrata, tutte colme d'acqua, e le osservava attentamente.

"'Che fai?' gli domandai. E lui, a sua volta, mi fece una domanda.

"'Qual è la forma dell'acqua?'

"'Ma l'acqua non ha forma!' dissi ridendo: 'Piglia la forma che le viene data.'"¹¹⁶

["One day I saw that my friend had placed on the edge of a well a bowl, a cup, a teapot, a box with square sides, all of them full of water, and was observing them attentively.

"'What are you doing?' I asked. And he asked me a question in turn,

"'What shape is water?'

115. Robert Rushing, *Resisting Arrest*, 35.

116. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell'acqua*, 110.

“‘But water has no shape! I said laughing, ‘It takes the shape it’s given.’”]

Like the water in the story, the truth takes the shape of its container, determined by whoever can control the narrative. Powerful “anonymous parties” interested in the murder victim’s contracts and political power sought to change the shape of the truth by altering and falsifying evidence, and it was the too-convenient “shape” of the case that first caught Montalbano’s attention subconsciously to something being amiss. He is eventually able to sort the true evidence from the false by venturing outside official investigation of the case that has been proclaimed closed, but it is still his responsibility to determine how to shape the narrative that will be handed over to official channels and the judicial branch. The idea that the falsified evidence may be misinterpreted and incriminate Ingrid, the innocent scapegoat implicated in the mafiosi’s alternate narrative, leads him to throw it in the sea.¹¹⁷ When he must decide what to do with real evidence that would prove how the body was moved from the place of death by a family member to hide one scandal with another, Montalbano throws that in the sea too, because even though it is “true,” it would unnecessarily cause suffering for the family. Illumination is overrated, it seems, suggested by another humorous childhood anecdote, this time Montalbano’s, in which a priest tells him, “La verità è luce” [“Truth is light,”] and he responds, “E allora viene a dire che se in una famiglia tutti dicono la verità, sparagnano sulla bolletta” [“And so that means that if in a family everyone tells the truth, they save on the electric bill.”]¹¹⁸ Montalbano decides that his godlike presumption of power over the narrative is

117. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell’acqua*, 143.

118. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell’acqua*, 145.

justified and right, primarily because the institutions that ought to be interested in inquiring into the facts of the case cannot be entirely trusted with them; just as Nussbaum warns that the law should not be understood in terms of natural science,¹¹⁹ neither should it be run on the model of a self-repairing machine.

IV. Avvocato Guido Guerrieri and the Judicial System: Tampering with Law and Language

Real-life anti-Mafia judge Gianrico Carofiglio has created a non-police detective protagonist in the attorney Guido Guerrieri, whose contribution to the genre includes an insightful comparison of the *impegno* of detective work with those of the attorney and the writer (especially the *giallista*). Nicoletta di Ciolla speculates that Carofiglio and other Italian legal professionals-turned-*giallisti*, “by bringing together the moral function of pointing to the truth – which is the prerogative of the fictional investigator – with the social function of rectifying a wrong – the prerogative of the upholders of the law – these writer[s] may have a fundamental role in shaping social consciences.”¹²⁰ An extremely important question, especially in light of Nussbaum’s theory of the connections between literature and law, is “whether they [*gialli* by legal professionals like Carofiglio] can potentially enhance the citizen’s perception of the

119. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 85.

120. Nicoletta di Ciolla, *Uncertain Justice*, 14.

principles of justice and of a fair civil society.”¹²¹ The novels follow Carofiglio’s investigations into intellectually challenging cases from the shocking and violent to the seemingly mundane: from child murder (*Testimone inconsapevole*, 2005) to wrongful arrest for drug trafficking (*Ragionevoli dubbi*, 2006). The thrill of the novels is never in salacious, detailed acts of violence, but rather in the extra-curricular and sometimes convoluted narrative paths on which the investigation takes Guerrieri, even though many of the pages of the novels are situated primarily within the confines of the courtroom. The attorney, in fact, often sees his investigations come to their inevitable end during examinations in the courtroom, that is, while he is in the process of reconstructing the narrative of the facts in front of the court.

This work of reconstruction takes place as the legal processes enter the narrative text in a more obvious way than in other *gialli* with other non-attorney detectives.¹²² Guerrieri’s reconstruction of the narrative frequently takes place in the courtroom, rather than in the outside “real” world, where most detectives encounter and reshape the narratives of crime and justice. As di Ciolla says, “through [Carofiglio’s] novels, the reader gets a privileged view inside

121. Nicoletta di Ciolla, *Uncertain Justice*, 14.

122. Quando il processo entra, con diverso spessore, nel testo letterario... si moltiplicano le versioni e le narrazioni di eventi di cui il lettore è già a conoscenza, spostando così l’interesse dalla trama (come accade comunemente nel romanzo poliziesco) sull’approfondimento del personaggio, delle motivazioni delle sue azioni, delle angolature e dei mezzi con cui ogni personaggio ricostruisce e racconta una stessa storia, già data e già nota.

[When the [legal] proceedings enter, with differing breadth, into the literary text...the versions and narrations of events the reader is already aware of are multiplied, thus moving the interest from the plot (as often happens in police procedural novels) to the detailed study of the character, of the motivations for his actions, of the points of view and the means by which each character reconstructs and retells the same story, which is already given and already known.]

the intricate workings of the Italian justice system, an authoritative take on the reality of legal procedures, a look at the machinations, collusions and connivances that power generates in our society. And their professional affiliations and competencies make their stories more credible, rendering the suspension of disbelief an unnecessary effort."¹²³ With the suspension of disbelief rendered unnecessary, Nussbaum's ideal narrative imagination seems a step closer than usual. Then, rather than a poetic judge, the primary legal figure theorized by Nussbaum, we have a poetic *avvocato*. Perhaps even more than the poetic judge, the poetic lawyer in the Guerrieri novels is tasked with reconstructing a comprehensive, truthful narrative from the multiplicity of material evidence, witness accounts, and testimonies, constantly evaluating the relationship between the facts that are internal and external to the courtroom, especially the human facts revealed through an empathetic narrative imagination. The multiplicity of narrations also problematizes the role of the omnipresent reader, the ideal juror tasked with judging the relationships between the text and that which lies outside it.¹²⁴

Guerrieri himself occasionally confides to a friend or the reader that if he had to choose another career, he would be a writer; a semi-autobiographical nod to the fact that Carofiglio himself, a magistrate in the court of Bari, had his debut in his second career as a crime novelist at forty-one, around Guerrieri's own age. In *Ragionevoli dubbi*, Guerrieri expresses a philosophy of language that speaks to both careers and their ability to enact change in society and the world: "La manomissione delle parole.... Noi facciamo a pezzi le parole (le manomettiamo, nel

Sergia Adamo, *La giustizia del dimenticato*, 264.

123. Nicoletta di Ciolla, "The Mythopoetic Function of the Noir," *Italica*. 86:4 (2009), 707.

sensu di alterarle, violarle) e poi le rimontiamo (le manomettiamo nel sensu di liberarle dai vincoli delle convenzioni verbali e dei non significati). Solo dopo la manomissione, possiamo usare le nostre parole per raccontare storie" ["The manumission of words.... We take words to pieces (we manumit them, in the sense of altering, violating them) and then we put them back together (we manumit them in the sense of liberating them from the bonds of verbal conventions and of not-meanings). Only after manumission can we use our words for telling stories."]¹²⁵ This power of language - and implicitly, the imagination - to "produce transformations" in the world they inhabit is one of the most powerful expressions of the potential and responsibility of literature, especially the *giallo*, wherein the investigator possesses

124. Sergia Adamo, "La giustizia del dimenticato," 264.

125. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 129. This reflection on the manipulation and power of language led Carofiglio to write a nonfiction book, *La manomissione delle parole* (2010), on the politics, rhetoric, ethics, and art of language and writing:

"Mi ha sempre affascinato l'idea che le parole...nascondano in sé un potere diverso e superiore rispetto a quello di comunicare, trasmettere messaggi, raccontare storie. L'idea, cioè, che abbiano il potere di produrre trasformazioni, che possano essere, letteralmente, lo strumento per cambiare il mondo. (Gianrico Carofiglio, *La manomissione delle parole*, 15.)

[It has always fascinated me, the idea that words... hide in themselves a different and superior power with respect to that of communicating, transmitting messages, telling stories. The idea, that is, that they have the power to produce transformations, that they can literally be the instrument for changing the world."]

"La ragione di questo libro...consiste nell'esigenza di trovare dei modi per dare senso alle parole; e, dunque, per cercare di dare senso alle cose, ai rapporti fra le persone, alla politica intesa come categoria nobile dell'agire collettivo" (Gianrico Carofiglio, *La manomissione delle parole*, 16).

[The reason for this book... consists in the exigency to find ways to give sense to words, and therefore, to try to give sense to things, to relationships between people, to politics understood as a noble category of collective action.]

the same power and *impegno* as an author who is called to *far versi*; most of all an investigator who is also an attorney, like Carofiglio's *Avvocato Guerrieri*. Nicoletta di Ciolla's conception of the function of a legal, fictional detective is very similar to Carofiglio's own: "Like literature, law is conceived and articulated through words which have a constructionist aim. Like literature, it obeys the rules of rhetoric and complies with aesthetic principles. Both literature and law produce worlds which either help us make more sense of the one we live in, or point to ones we couldn't envisage ourselves."¹²⁶ For both *giallista* and critic, the key poetic function of the *giallo* and the *noir* is the aesthetic and literary creation of possible worlds that feed the reader's literary imagination. Di Ciolla says that the writer is aware that these created worlds are "only hypotheses, arbitrary and provisional,"¹²⁷ but I would argue that in the possible worlds of detective Guerrieri, this proviso is not at all obvious. Carofiglio does not discuss the literary imagination in precisely Nussbaumian terms, but neither is his stance on the power of language difficult to reconcile with Nussbaum's concept of "poetic justice." For Nussbaum, too, politics and the public life are a collective action, which depends on influential agents being willing and capable to utilize language and narrative to give sense to things, to make reasoning and the imagination work together harmoniously: "The judicious spectator must go beyond empathy, assessing from her own spectatorial viewpoint the meaning of those sufferings and their implications for the lives involved."¹²⁸ Both writers would agree that the law is a

126. Nicoletta di Ciolla, "The Mythopoetic Function of the Noir," 710.

127. Nicoletta di Ciolla, "The Mythopoetic Function of the Noir," 710.

128. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 90.

humanistic as well as scientific field.¹²⁹ The primary difference is really one of emphasis: Carofiglio focuses on the medium (language) while Nussbaum on other human faculties (imagination, empathy, reasoning).

Beyond this power of language, the sum qualities of the ideal investigator (or lawyer), and possibilities for expressing them fully in the novels are complex and sometimes contradictory. Guerrieri gives clues, but his imperfect self-knowledge, pessimism, and self-deprecation make him an unreliable source at the best of times. *Ragionevoli dubbi* is the perfect novel to focus on for this question, with the above-mentioned statement of philosophy of language, but also because the investigation and the case involve no violent crime, meaning the focus of the investigation is instead on the manipulation and circumnavigation of the narratives embedded in law and procedure. What kind of investigation and investigator is this, so concerned with technical details that Carofiglio masterfully renders fascinating and suspenseful? Guerrieri tells his friend Tancredi, a police detective, “Odio gli sbirri che fanno speculazioni logiche” [“I hate cops who make logical speculations.”]¹³⁰ Both utilitarianism and exclusive dependence on intellect and reason, for Nussbaum, “deprive[s] us of information we need if we are to have a fully rational response to the suffering of others.”¹³¹ And indeed, in keeping with the invective against hyperlogical policemen and with general trends in Italian *gialli*, Guerrieri’s investigations do not follow a systematic, empirical approach to evidence; forensic evidence rarely plays a large part in any of Carofiglio’s novels, and not at all in this

129. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 86.

130. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 59.

one. But Guerrieri also disparages the intuitive detection that comes more naturally to him: “Lo so che l’intuizione e cose del genere sono perlopiù cazzate, ma io ci ho parlato e il modo in cui la racconta, la sua faccia, tutto...” [“I know that intuition and that kind of thing are mostly bullshit, but I’ve talked to him, and the way he tells the story, his face, everything...”]¹³² He relies heavily on his intuitive understanding of human behavior and motives, even facial expressions, and is sensitive to the tension between how he instinctively feels the law should function socially and communicatively and how it is conceived and operates academically and institutionally. He is also aware that his tendency to rely on intuition and human motivations can lead to prejudiced opinions (such as his gut reaction to the prospect of defending his one-time teenage bully) and is insufficient, even sometimes damaging to his professional demeanor, and constitutes an inappropriate risk to his client if left unchecked. At the same time, he has not quite assimilated the Nussbaumian stance repudiating “the idea that the law can or should be understood on the model of natural science,”¹³³ instead feeling guilty for taking the more empathetic, psychological view, not quite convinced of his own apparent opinion that the law should be a humanistic as well as scientific field.

In *Il paradosso del poliziotto*, a short dialogic story, Carofiglio offers a few more clues to the qualities of the ideal investigator, which correspond unsurprisingly to the qualities of a writer. In the story, the risk and eventuality of encountering violence performed by agents of law is succinctly and starkly portrayed by an aging police detective reflecting on his career.

131. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 66.

132. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 81.

Once again, Carofiglio underlines the key role of language and narrative in the activities of the investigator and, by extension, the legal system: “Il lavoro dell’investigatore ha molto a che fare con le storie” [“The job of the investigator has a lot to do with stories.”]¹³⁴ Far from the violent coercion the aged detective recalls from his early days on the force, the essential qualities of a detective are these: “spirito di osservazione, capacità di dubitare, senso d’umorismo” [“spirit of observation, capacity for doubt, sense of humor,”]¹³⁵ all of which speak to the detective’s moderate detachment and capacity for empathy, and resemble the recipe for an effective lawyer or writer, as well. The detective’s capacity for doubt, then, should be like Nussbaum’s ideal reader; not restrictive like Stanley Fish’s radical detachment and skepticism, but governed by the moral imagination and ethical reasoning.¹³⁶ A sense of humor, if it is to be an ethical one, is not truly possible without a narrative imagination that brings together multiple frames of reference and possible worlds. The unnamed inspector also outlines his ideal interrogation technique: “Richiede padronanza della tecnica e, insieme, consapevolezza del fatto che, spesso, i casi vengono risolti indipendentemente della tecnica. Richiede senso delle regole, etiche e giuridiche, e, nello stesso tempo, sospensione di ogni giudizio morale” [“It requires a mastery of technique, and at the same time, awareness of the fact that cases often get resolved independently of technique. It requires a sense of the rules, both ethical and juridical, and at the

133. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 85.

134. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Il paradosso del poliziotto*, 19.

135. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Il paradosso del poliziotto*, 25.

136. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 84-85.

same time, suspension of every moral judgment.”]¹³⁷ Again, the overlap between police detective, lawyer, and Nussbaumian poetic judge is striking: all need to be able to construct true narratives from third party testimony and material evidence. Knowledge of the technical, or technique, goes without saying; ethical and juridical rules as well; the “suspension of every moral judgment,” however, is the sticking point that Guerrieri would certainly agree with in principle, but as he points out several times in the novel, theory and practice are rarely the same. It aligns with what Nussbaum terms judicial neutrality, which entails first building as comprehensive an understanding as possible of the situation of the parties in the case, then not only preventing the emotions of the actors in the case to become one’s own, but also preventing oneself from being swayed by personal or political goals.¹³⁸

The challenge to Guerrieri’s suspension of moral judgment comes in the person and identity of his client Fabio Paolicelli whom Guerrieri remembers from their youth but Paolicelli apparently does not. The attorney initially mentally calls him by his childhood nickname, “Raybán,” and by an epithet that for Guerrieri sums up his entire character, or so he thinks at first: Raybán was a “picchiatore fascista” [“Fascist thug”], who had beaten the attorney when they were teenagers, and who was a member of a gang that had stabbed to death a young communist but was never prosecuted for the crime.¹³⁹ Guerrieri never inquires into the legal facts of the young communist’s murder case or whether he was ever investigated; he studiously and with difficulty sticks to his responsible decision neither to bring up their youthful

137. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Il paradosso del poliziotto*, 36.

138. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 90.

encounters nor make the effort to find out what really happened through his professional contacts, exactly the comprehensive narrative-building Nussbaum conceives as necessary for judicial neutrality.¹⁴⁰ The reason for his restraint is a consciousness of his own human weakness and desire to see his childhood bully punished (like a good reader he is self-reflective): “All’improvviso mi resi conto di quello che stava succedendo nella mia testa, e non mi piacque. Capii che volevo una confessione, da lui” [“All of a sudden I realized what was happening in my head, and I didn’t like it. I knew I wanted a confession from him.”]¹⁴¹ At other moments, he guiltily confesses to himself that he wishes Paolicelli were guilty for slightly different reasons: “Sarebbe stato tutto più facile” [“It all would have been easier.”]¹⁴² Not only would the court case have been easier if the drugs were Paolicelli’s after all, but Guerrieri might also have felt less guilty for sleeping with his client’s wife and coveting his family, and the mess he calls down on his own head by implicating Paolicelli’s previous attorney Macrì and his mafia connections in drug trafficking might also have been avoided.

Guerrieri’s job gives him “nausea...ansia...disgusto” [“nausea...anxiety...disgust”] at various times, always when his conscience is in conflict with the realities of his duties as a defense lawyer and the limitations of that position as well as the limited capacities for the judicial system to enact true justice and its propensities to instead act with violence toward

139. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 21.

140. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 90.

141. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 27.

142. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 69.

citizens.¹⁴³ These feelings of guilt and disgust are directed in part toward the failings of a flawed system and third party corrupt legal professionals, but Guerrieri himself is not immune from contaminating his professional ethics with his personal moral struggles and vice versa: “Mi chiedevo che cosa avrei detto se qualcuno mi avesse raccontato una storia come quella, e mi avesse chiesto un giudizio. Voglio dire: un giudizio su un avvocato che si fosse scopato la moglie di un suo cliente detenuto. Avrei detto che quell’avvocato era una merda umana” [“I wondered what I would have said if someone had told me a story like this, and asked me for a ruling. I mean, a ruling on a lawyer who had screwed the wife of his detainee client. I would have said that lawyer was a human turd.”]¹⁴⁴ If he were to judge himself from outside the situation, sleeping with his imprisoned client’s wife makes him “a human turd,” and while this is the most colorful self-criticism he gives, it is not the only example. He seems to have a difficult time expressing the same kind of empathy for his own ethical struggles that he experiences toward his clients.

Guerrieri is in the constant state of having to decide which is right, or better, or more human: to follow the rules of procedure and professional conduct, or his own conscience, informed by a sense of human value and empathy for others’ suffering. Paolicelli’s wife Natsu wants reassurance from him that her husband has been telling the truth: “Avrei dovuto risponderle... che non rientrava fra i miei compiti di avvocato scoprire se un cliente dice la verità. Ma c’erano altre cose che avevo fatto, e che non rientravano nei miei compiti di avvocato.

143. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 116.

144. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 155.

‘Ti ha detto la verità’” [“I should have told her... that it didn’t enter into my duties as a lawyer to discover whether a client of mine is telling the truth. But there were other things I’d already done that did not enter into my duties as a lawyer. ‘He told you the truth.’”]¹⁴⁵ Even this very human, compassionate choice to tell Natsu that her husband is the honest person she hoped he is, is a transgression of professional conduct. Guilt over having slept with her and committed an even worse transgression of professional ethics is part of the motivation and also part of his self-recrimination, as he finds it impossible to reconcile professional and personal morality and desires at this moment. This is what the judicious spectator looks like in real life - not a platonic ideal but a human being constantly struggling to maintain balance between first order emotions and ethical *impegno*.

Paolicelli’s former attorney, Corrado Macri, is the perfect nemesis to Guido Guerrieri; he represents the purposeful, malicious removal “Del conforto che prova chi, dopo mesi di prigionia e di pensieri orribili sul futuro, incontra qualcuno che è dalla sua parte e che può aiutarlo. La ragione stessa, fondamentale, dell’esistenza degli avvocati” [“of the comfort felt by someone who, after months of prison and horrible thoughts about the future, meets someone who is on his side and who can help him. The very reason, fundamentally, for the existence of lawyers.”]¹⁴⁶ (The purpose for having lawyers is not institutional, not procedural, but for the sake of compassion!) Rather than the support and comfort that is the whole reason for the existence of attorneys, which he should have been given by his defense lawyer, Paolicelli

145. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 267.

146. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 72.

received improbably terrible advice from Macrì to not respond to questioning and examination, even in court, which is a right afforded to the accused in this kind of abbreviated trial, on the shaky grounds that it would “aggravare la situazione” [“aggravate the situation,”]¹⁴⁷ whereas it was difficult to imagine any way the situation could be made worse. It comes out during Guerrieri’s investigation that the reason Macrì never asked for any payment while defending Paolicelli is that he is subsidized by his mafia connections to the point that he barely appears in court at all and his legal studio is nonexistent; he uses his position as defense lawyer to deliberately place Paolicelli in jail to keep any suspicion from ever falling on the real drug traffickers; he tampers with (manomette) the narrative and the court procedure to sabotage (manomettere) the truth and the life of an innocent citizen he should be defending. He even tries alternately to bribe and threaten both Paolicelli and Guerrieri.¹⁴⁸ So far from acting in the interests of his client and seeing that he receives a fair trial, not to mention failing to match even Guerrieri’s own problematic embodiment of professional responsibility, Macrì is the complete opposite, expresses no civil or moral *impegno* whatsoever; rather, he is the destroyer of the comfort, empathy, and support that the novel holds up as the qualities of the ideal attorney and that Nussbaum imagines in the ideal judicial spectator.

Other problematic judicial figures appear in this novel and others in the series: the immoral, jaded, corrupt, irresponsible, disillusioned. The one I would highlight in this novel is the oldest of the tribunal judges, Russo: “di regola cominciava a dormire qualche minuto dopo

147. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 29. For a brief explanation of abbreviated trials and plea-bargaining in the Italian system, see Thoma Glyn Watkin, *The Italian Legal System*, 141.

l'inizio dell'udienza e si svegliava al momento di andare via. Era piuttosto noto per questo e in una mia classifica della stima professionale per i giudici non si piazzava ai primi posti" ["as a rule he would start to sleep a few minutes after the start of the hearing and would wake up just in time to leave. He was known above all for this, and in my classification of professional esteem for judges, he was not in the first ranks."]¹⁴⁹ He has literally and figuratively fallen asleep on the job, no longer attending to the responsibilities of the court, nor the imperative to seek justice and order through his position of authority. As we will see below, Guerrieri's case somehow wakes him from his slumber because, it is implied, of the younger man's obsessive dedication to the *manomissione* of the true narrative from the achingly familiar facts of the case and his formidable insistence on the technical interpretation of procedure over the preservation of the culture of mutual protection among attorneys.

What Nussbaum does not really explore in *Poetic Justice*, since it is a theoretical work and largely imagines ideal or extreme cases and positions, are the ethical and professional problems that present themselves to a potential judicious spectator or poetic judge in a system that is historically plagued with corruption and iniquity, a system in which attorneys like Macrì are the norm, or at least perceived as such by many. Nicoletta di Ciolla speculates that if (it is a big IF) the imagined worlds of Carofiglio's *gialli* and others written by legal professions are incorporated into the real world, "the average Italian will cease to believe that the justice system

148. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 236-9.

149. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 185.

is irredeemably iniquitous.”¹⁵⁰ There is a lot of work still to be done, but Carofiglio’s fictional narrative goes a long way toward building di Ciolla’s idea of a myth of justice that has the potential to engender new forms of social justice in the real world. Even this tentative, qualified optimism is highly typical of the genre.

As mentioned above, Guerrieri’s investigation is structured by technicalities. He is dedicated to discovering a plausible alternative narrative that takes account of all the facts of the case, uncovering along the way more facts that are not necessarily explained by, and thereby throwing doubt on, the original prosecution’s narrative of the case.¹⁵¹ The attorney-investigator obsessively tracks down every possible piece of information that will hopefully allow the whole story to come to light, which is necessary given the incomplete recollections of the client and his wife. This obsessive behavior is part personality trait and part professional dedication (other obsessive traits include Guerrieri’s habit of using a punching bag in his entryway every evening to relieve tension in order to be able to sleep), but it goes beyond both into the realm of moral and ethical imperative. He is actually modeling the work of making logic and reason serve the purpose of supplying necessary information, doing ‘justice’ to the

150. Nicoletta di Ciolla, *The Mythopoeitic Function of the Noir*, 723.

151. The idea that the prosecution must prove the guilt of the accused “beyond a reasonable doubt,” expressed in those terms, is an Anglo-American one, with the system being based on a adversarial, not inquisitorial style of courtroom procedure. Italian law is rooted in the latter style, and although a similar concept has existed, it did not always function in the same way as in Anglo-American courts. Before 1989, it was possible to pronounce a verdict of “not proven,” which is basically the same as saying that the prosecution has not provided sufficient evidence to prove that the facts of the case support their narrative. The phrase “al di là di ogni ragionevole dubbio” [“beyond any reasonable doubt”] now appears in article 533 of the Codice

interested parties' emotions and granting them their cognitive content, in order for the judicial spectator to have a "fully rational response to the suffering of others."¹⁵² Guerrieri must have the definitive Italian attitude toward institutions of law and order: he must have faith in the unassailability of civil law and procedure by virtue of being a defense attorney, which only serves to make the distasteful parts of the job even more disillusioning. In fact, he mentions several times that he is tempted to quit altogether, only to also admit that he would never be able to resist the compulsion to keep going.

Guerrieri is regularly driven not only to obsessively research points of law and procedure, but also to blatantly overstep his professional duties in order to uncover the whole story: "Infatti non era il mio lavoro – essendo affare da poliziotto e non da avvocati, rintracciare le persone – e soprattutto non avevo idea di come fare" ["In fact, it was not my job – being the business of policemen and not lawyers, tracing people – and furthermore I had no idea how to go about it."]¹⁵³ He also persuades Tancredi to break rules that could genuinely get them both in professional trouble, such as giving him access to the police's official list of *alloggiamenti* that tells him the names of everyone who checked into hotels and other lodgings on a given date, access that is not reserved for the defense.¹⁵⁴

With his mixture of disillusionment in the reality of the judicial system's shortcomings and the faith in its potential to fulfill its purpose some of the time, Guerrieri's tactics in the

di Procedure Penale, following the judicial reforms of 1989 that attempted to incorporate certain aspects of the Anglo-American adversarial trial.

152. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 66.

153. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 76.

courtroom in the novel depend entirely on points of procedural order because that is all that he has, that and the power to reconstruct the narrative of events in front of the tribunal of appeals. First, he must get the court to allow him to bring material evidence from the hotel registry and the travel documents for his client's fellow ferry passengers, which is fairly straightforward, although it does involve obscuring the illicit methods he used to initially discover the relevant information with Tancredi's help. Then, he must call fellow defense attorney Macrì to testify. Contrary to appearances, although there is no illegality or illicit act in this strategy, this is the most controversial transgression in the novel, not when Tancredi or Guerrieri contravenes procedure and shares information in illicit ways; in other words, Guerrieri is not the more serious rulebreaker when he breaks the written rules. It is worse when he comports himself in a manner completely opposed to the *unwritten and unofficial rules* of collegial juridical culture and calls his fellow lawyer, Macrì, to testify on the behalf of his former and Guerrieri's present client. It is something that is simply *not done*.¹⁵⁵ While minor technical infractions occur under the table all the time, and everyone knows it even though no one discusses it openly, Guerrieri admits he has never even heard the suggestion of something like his plan to call Macrì to court ever happening before: "Normalmente chi viola queste regole, in un modo o nell'altro, la paga" ["Normally, whoever violates these rules pays for it, one way or another."]¹⁵⁶ His apprehension at attracting retribution for his actions is not only related to the dangers of impeding and exposing the mafia, but also with betraying this juridical culture.

154. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 115.

155. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 157.

The success of the case depends on the narrative uncovered in Guerrieri's investigations with the help of Tancredi and other professional contacts, but also on Guerrieri's mastery of the letter of the law and procedural rules in order to ensure that Macrì must testify. The tribunal judge eventually decides in his favor: "La norma mira a garantire ai *clienti* degli avvocati la massima libertà di confidare ogni cosa al proprio difensore senza timore che lo stesso possa in seguito esser obbligato a deporre sul contenuto di quelle conversazioni" ["The rule looks to guarantee the *clients* of lawyers the greatest freedom to confide everything to their own defense without fear that the latter can then be obliged to testify on the content of those conversations."]¹⁵⁷ The law does not afford lawyers the right to confidentiality; it is the client whom the law privileges, not counsel. After Macrì is thus obligated to answer questions regarding his relationship to the mafia and drug trafficking, to which he obviously gives false answers and perjures himself, Guerrieri is able to reconstruct the narrative of the frame job and even more scandalous misconduct by Macrì in his professional capacity as Paolicelli's defense lawyer in the original trial.

The prosecutor anticipates and challenges Guerrieri's statement with a long exposition, ending by saying, "Ciò che vi verrà proposto per richiedere l'assoluzione dell'imputato non è un dubbio ragionevole ma un dubbio, mi si passi l'espressione, fantastico. Cioè generato dalla fantasia e non dal rigoroso esercizio del metodo probatorio" ["That which will be proposed to you in order to ask for the absolution of the accused is not a reasonable doubt, but, if I can allow

156. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 189.

157. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 248.

myself the expression, a fantastical doubt. That is, it is generated by the imagination and not by the rigorous exercise of the probative method.”]¹⁵⁸ His argument is that Guerrieri’s inevitable alternate narrative is a work of the imagination, not of facts, and that it does not constitute reasonable doubt because it is pure speculation.

Guerrieri counters by appealing to a broader sense of truth and reasonable doubt beyond the legal definitions, although he appeals to those as well. The version in the novel is already several pages long, but Guerrieri reflects silently that he has talked for over an hour and needs to put an ending on his discourse; it is difficult to imagine what else remains unreported in the text. During his final remarks, Carofiglio’s philosophy of language and narrative appears again in more abbreviated and poetic form: “Noi, non solo nei processi, costruiamo storie per dare senso a fatti che in sé non ne hanno nessuno. Per cercare di mettere ordine nel caos. Le storie, a ben vedere, sono tutto quello che abbiamo” [“Not just in judicial processes, we construct stories in order to give sense to facts that in themselves have none. In order to try to create order in chaos. Stories, if you look closely, are everything that we have.”]¹⁵⁹ Indeed, all we have is the “story” of the closing speeches, not the texts of the speeches themselves; all we have is the story of Paolicelli’s misadventures, not an empirical truth. We have probable— not definitive—, cohesive, and believable doubts as to his guilt.

The elderly, somnolent judge mentioned above was amazingly awake and alert for the entire hour and more of Guerrieri’s closing remarks and the final decision to reverse the original

158. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 273.

159. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 284.

conviction. We are given a glimpse at what is perhaps the judge's long-lost enthusiasm for the power of language to transform and mend society and the acknowledgement of the younger man's dedication to the same: "Russo... Mi guardò e io lo guardai. Gli occhi erano vivi, e intensi. Aveva le spalle dritte e sembrava dieci anni più giovane, come non lo avevo mai visto. Fece un cenno col capo, appena percettibile" ["Russo... looked at me and I looked at him. His eyes were alive and intense. His shoulders were straight and he seemed ten years younger, like I had never seen him. He made a sign with his head, just barely perceptible."]¹⁶⁰ What lies behind the surface of the plot, I would argue, is that the sleepy judge represents a legal system that has been functioning somnolently and automatically on procedure and intellect alone, and as Nussbaum states, "Intellect without emotions is, we might say, value-blind: it lacks the sense of the meaning and worth of a person's death that the judgments internal to emotions would have supplied."¹⁶¹ Guerrieri's narrative appeals to both reason and emotion, it demands that the audience consider the facts with a sense of human value, precisely as Nussbaum's ideal narrative imagination ought to function. The judge is waking up, the *law* is waking up to the enjoinder "to examine [social] realities searchingly, with imaginative concreteness and the emotional responses that are proper to the judicious spectator."¹⁶² Once again, the detective's role in the novel is not just an object of the reader's imaginative empathy, but also a model reader and model 'judicious spectator' of human society, engaged in a dynamic process of narrating and re-narrating, envisaging new forms of social justice.

160. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ragionevoli dubbi*, 291.

161. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 68.

Avvocato Guerrieri is an ideal protagonist to express and explore the potential for language and the *giallo* to “tamper with” narrative, but also with to manumit society through critique and the proposal of plausible alternative narratives and realities. His moral and ethical struggles are believable and compelling, and his idealism, complemented by his disillusionment and melancholy, is only made more appealing by his own struggles to maintain it and live up to it. Most compelling of all is the *impegno* to tell stories and keep transforming and retelling them, to offer more material for the narrative imagination of his audience, both in the novel and beyond.

162. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 86.

V. Conclusion

The *gialli* explored in this chapter exemplify the tension between legality and morality through a particularly Italian lens, and they also make it clear that this tension has been integral to the genre from its beginnings. Far from being a mere cog in a system of problematic institutions, the Italian detective figure is also far from being a purely individualistic maverick character. It matters which rules he breaks, which institutions and organs of law and order he works to transform from within, which social and cultural attitudes he distances himself from. Most of all, it matters how he re-writes the narratives of events and testimonies encountered during the investigation, emphasizing the importance of the narrative imagination in the formation of an ethical sense of justice, in the individual and society. Through the detective character in particular, the *giallo* shows itself to be a powerful medium of social critique and growth, and personal reflection. The power of the *giallo* story may indeed be disruptive and subversive, but that is precisely why it is valuable and needed.

At times, the *giallo* directly challenges the effectiveness, fairness, and efficiency of the legal system at large, and specifically the courtroom and police bureaucracy. It challenges the official narratives specifically, interjecting alternatives that imagine the sufferings of individuals as morally and ethically relevant to the workings of a just society and the decisions of the judicial spectator. The detective is forced to choose between upholding the system that ought to provide justice and security to citizens but only succeeds partially, and his personal sense of morality that is precisely what makes that justice and security meaningful and worth protecting

in the first place, without allowing his investigation to be driven by personal opinion and political motives. He models the empathetic reader, who considers the emotions of the other as essential to making reasonable judgments, while struggling with the very human problem of not allowing others' emotions to become his own. Reading the *giallo* becomes a process of social inquiry and self-reflection for the reader, in which she is confronted with such subversive social critiques that nonetheless ultimately uphold the power of language, clear speech, testimony and narrative.

During its relatively brief but prolific lifetime, the *giallo* has expanded beyond the medium of the novel into film and television, as have many other literary genres. As the medium and language of the *giallo* shifts, so do its potential for and realms of critique and social disruption. In the final chapter, I will explore some of these shifts in television adaptations of some of the novels already discussed and others.

Chapter 2

Setting, Geography, Insiders, and Outsiders

Introduction

One source of useful insights into crime and suspense fiction and its construction can be found in the writings of crime writers themselves. Patricia Highsmith and P. D. James are two such crime writers who have published small volumes reflecting on their processes and experiences.¹ Patricia Highsmith identifies several challenges and important elements and decisions that go into writing suspense fiction; two that I would like to mention here are point

of view and atmosphere. Point of view is fairly straightforward concept; atmosphere is a rather more nebulous concept, as Highsmith herself admits, except that it involves all five senses (or sometimes six).² In detective fiction, as the name suggests, there is usually one singular point of view,³ typically belonging to the detective character or his assistant.⁴ This main character is the filter through which we experience the atmosphere; their eyes and other sense organs become the reader's, and the setting provides a great deal of the sensory input that contributes to the overall effect of atmosphere. Indeed, character and setting turn out to be so closely related that certain novels can make us "care" for a setting like we would a character,⁵ especially when a detective/protagonist like Montalbano is "unimaginable" apart from his setting.

Admitting that it is somewhat reductive to think of characters as having discreet components, it can still be useful. Along with physical traits, a background story, gender, family, friends, personality, motivations, appetites, and any other components one may choose to name, a character must also have his geographical identities, and the geographical setting in which we find him during the course of the story:

1. Patricia Highsmith, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*. P. D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*.

2. Patricia Highsmith, *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, 95.

3. Patricia Highsmith discusses the "snags" surrounding point of view in *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, 87-91. She is writing about suspense fiction, a larger category than detective fiction, and mentions the risk of monotony resulting from choosing a single point of view. This choice is still quite common in detective fiction, though the risk may still remain.

4. There are, of course, exceptions and variations, for example Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, in which the narrator and Poirot's helper is also the murderer, the last chapter serving as his confession and suicide note.

5. Patricia Highsmith also claims the necessity of making the reader care for, if not like, the hero: *Plotting and Writing Suspense Fiction*, 98.

Place, after all, is where the characters play out their tragicomedies, and it is only if the action is firmly rooted in a physical reality that we can enter fully into their world. ...the setting is where these people live, move, and have their being, and we need to breathe their air, see with their eyes, walk the paths they tread and inhabit the rooms the writer has furnished for them. So important is this identification that many novels are named for the place on which the action is centred: obvious examples are *Wuthering Heights*, *Mansfield Park*, *Howards End* and *Middlemarch*, where the setting exerts a unifying and dominant influence on both the characters and the plot.”⁶

Setting also helps the reader to understand the characters in greater detail and intimacy, “since people react to their environment and are influenced by it.”⁷ The setting of a murder can reveal a great deal about the victim’s interests and activities, of course, but can also sometimes offer insight into the detective’s character in the way that he reacts to the place and the objects within it.

Italian detective stories are not alone in establishing a strong setting and sense of place and time; a well-developed setting also lends credibility to the story, “which often deals with bizarre, dramatic, and horrific events which need to be rooted in a place so tangible that the reader can enter it as he might a familiar room.”⁸ In the *giallo*, violence is not unique to regions and spaces popularly considered to be uncivil, marginal, or somehow outside the law, but neither does that mean that violence is carried out in the same way in all places, or that the detective’s tools and methods of investigation will be the same in all locations and geographies.

6. P. D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 130-131.

7. P. D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 139.

8. P. D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 133.

After all, more than one *giallista* has described his setting of choice as having a soul,⁹ and if a town or city can have something resembling a soul or a personality, it follows that there will be a fruitful examination to be made relating the city to other characters, especially the central detective figure. Rather than examining how the *giallo* attempts to “make sense of the increasing illegibility of the postmodern metropolis”¹⁰ and other geographical units, this chapter examines how the setting of the *giallo* challenges and complicates the ever-changing relationship between the individual subject (especially the detective character) and his geographical, cultural and social milieu.¹¹

9. De Giovanni's character Ricciardi, for instance, frequently described Naples as having two souls; Lucarelli has been known to talk about Bologna in anthropomorphic terms as well (Tina Cosmai, “La metà oscura”, *Caffè Europa*, 160 (December 2001) <<http://www.caffeeuropa.it/attualitalia03/160noir-lucarelli.html>>).

10. Barbara Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*, 35.

11. Lucia Rinaldi has done some very important work in this direction, specifically with Lucarelli's Bologna. In her introduction, she summarizes general trends in Italian crime writers' dealing with regional, national, and local settings: “Within this context, setting has frequently become an important element in their narrative, as they have often chosen a specific regional context to analyse local socio-political tensions which, at one and the same time, epitomize contemporary Italy as a whole. For instance, crime writers such as Andrea Camilleri and Marcello Fois forcefully focus on the difficult modernization and ‘Italianization’ of Southern regions by examining, and sometimes criticizing, the obstinate parochialism of, respectively, Sicily and Sardinia. Conversely, others, such as Lucarelli or Massimo Carlotto, several of whose novels focus on the investigations of the ex-con detective L'Alligatore and are mainly set in the Veneto region, continue to set their stories within specific regional realities (Emilia- Romagna and the Veneto, respectively), but tend to present these settings as larger metropolitan spaces in which regional or local colour and flavour are lost, replaced by a more composite, globalized, urban culture. In any case, the fictional world of their crime stories reflects and reveals the crime writers' perception of changes in urban and sub-urban spaces and cultures, and aims to challenge the views on Italian society today.” (Rinaldi, “Bologna's Noir Identity,” *Italian Studies* 2009, 64:I, 121-122).

Such an examination of the detective story in relation to its setting becomes especially important and complex in the Italian context, which is not to say that this complexity is in any way undesirable. On the contrary, the general regional character of Italy, with an impressive multiplicity of regional and local identities, makes for an especially rich and varied array of settings for fiction in general. Italy preserves regional and local identities that are also particularly strong, not to mention regional stereotypes and clichés, which, as always, contain at least a grain of truth.

Italy's vibrant regional and local identities are especially important to understanding an Italian fictional character, and the complexity and multiplicity contained in the Italian nation will always call out for more nuanced readings of its literature with special attention to setting, but especially, I would argue, its *giallo* literature. Detective novels, being focused on a pivotal violent or criminal event and the scene where it has taken place, typically create an exceptionally strong, specific sense of place and of setting. This attention to setting, geography and topography contributes to another trend in the genre, that of drawing uncomfortable associations of supposedly civilized places with violence and destabilizing the center-periphery paradigms that link violence and crime with locations or positions that are marginal, illicit, or somehow outside the reaches of law and civilization. In fact, the *gialli* in this chapter use setting, topography and social margins to attempt to teach us readers how better to read both the text of the *giallo* and our surroundings. By focusing on the particularities of setting in these *gialli*, we can find clues as to how to read the works themselves and the larger social issues they raise.

I. The Soul of the Place and the Allure of the Detective Story

We can surmise that practically everyone who has read a Montalbano mystery or seen one of the television episodes will agree that they are extremely entertaining, that there is a great deal of pleasure in reading or watching them. What seems to be rather more elusive is why precisely we enjoy them so much. The intellectual puzzle that characterizes a Sherlock Holmes story is clearly not the essential kernel of the Montalbano series; nor are they “cozy” mysteries, despite being set in small villages like the English subgenre, for they leave the reader feeling anything but “cozy” and content as a result of the return to order and security that ought to occur when the criminal is caught. Camilleri’s Sicilian detective is socially minded and mindful, like Miss Marple and unlike Holmes, and finds answers primarily by interacting with people rather than puzzles, with suspects and witnesses, and through his familiarity with human nature and especially the Sicilian character. And yet, unlike in most of the cases of Miss Marple and other detectives in the Anglophone “cozy” tradition, and notwithstanding the “grudging optimism”¹² of Montalbano’s Sicily, he frequently finds imperfect solutions that fall short of reinforcing the sense that we live in a world where justice is always fair and well-ordered; we know that the ineffectual bureaucracy will never really change, and that unseen forces motivated by secret politics will continue to require the detective to come to an

12. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 89.

understanding with Mafia leaders, or to toss evidence into the ocean when his conscience demands it, since the system has no conscience of its own and might not work at all if it had.

With this unsettling awareness of unsolvable social problems and lingering sense of social unease at the end of every Montalbano novel, then, why are they still so enjoyable and apparently infinitely repeatable? The answer has to do more with the semi-imaginary Sicilian simulacrum and Camilleri's subtle handling of setting than with either the actual mystery plot or the novels' uncertain and hesitant optimism regarding social problems and the shortcomings of the justice system.¹³

In *La vampa d'agosto*, the plot of the murder and investigation hinges on the existence of an illegally constructed apartment buried in a layer of sandy soil, with the "legal" second story exposed above. The general practice in Sicily, according to the novel, is to build first (or at least build more than one's permit allows) and request amnesty later, because amnesty is less trouble and less costly than building permits. The German-born owner of the house was very particular about hiding the lower story because he was not aware of this practice, or as Montalbano puts it, "le nostre belle usanze" ["our beautiful customs."]¹⁴ The futility of Italian official systems, whether the police or the office granting building permits, is a recurring Italian theme that is

13. Rushing confirms that puzzle-solving and logic games do not provide the pleasure to be found in the novels: "Here, of course, is the secret to Camilleri's success: he has turned the Anglo-American emphasis on pure ratiocination and logic, a faith in reason that always seemed like a source of parody at best to the Italian mind, to an emphasis on social meaning. The cognitive pleasure produced by the unfolding of a Camilleri mystery is slight; what is significant is the reader's initiation into a series of social problems, ranging from the minor ...to the major." Robert Rushing, *Resisting Arrest*, 33-34.

14. Andrea Camilleri, *La vampa d'agosto*, 45.

hardly unique to the Montalbano series. The Mafia and the convoluted social and professional networks that result from Sicilians having to deal with them in their daily lives (as well as other more serious problems) is another recurring theme in the series, one that prompts Montalbano to quote Dante, but applying the Sicilian problem to the Italian national context: “Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello, / nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta, / non donna di provincie ma bordello!” [“Ah slave Italy, dwelling of grief, / ship without a pilot in a great storm, / no lady of the provinces but whorehouse!”]¹⁵ Enslavement to foreign and ecclesial powers remains although the faces have changes, and the “bordello” Dante spoke of, apparently incarnate now in these powers and in the Mafia, has only grown exponentially.

Montalbano, himself an avid reader of his own genre, relishes in particular the fierce social critique and anti-establishment tone of a particular unnamed Swedish series¹⁶ and pities those who pass over the *giallo* of whatever national literature, considering it to be only a “passatempo enigmistico” [“brain-teaser pastime”]. At the end of *La vampa d’agosto*, our last glimpse of Montalbano is of him weeping while swimming because he realizes that despite his years of experience, he and the system he is part of have just been used as pawns in another character’s revenge scheme; the rapist and murderer meets what is arguably a poetic if illegally exacted punishment, but neither the reader nor Montalbano can find closure or pleasure in the

15. Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, VI.76-78.

16. Andrea Camilleri, *La vampa d’agosto*, 117. He mentions a Swedish husband and wife writer team, most likely referring to Maj Slowall and Per Wahloo.

solution at the end of the novel as Montalbano's tears join the salt water of the sea: "natava e chiangiva." ["He swam and he wept."]¹⁷

The social problems of Montalbano's world are inextricable from the Sicilian setting, which does not perfectly correspond to the geography of the real-world Sicily and is peopled by characters who display exaggerated personalities, speech patterns, and motives. Nevertheless, as a representation of the "real" Sicily, the fictional setting of Vigàta allows Camilleri to throw more light than might be expected on a contradictory collection of social and political entities and problems:

The strong suit of the Commissario Montalbano mysteries, according to Rushing, is something other than the entertainment value of the individual cases confronted; rather, the panoramic geographical and social landscapes captivate the attention of the voracious audiences that rush to bookstores to purchase the Sicilian author's latest novel.

This focus on the social thus expands the small-town universe of Vigàta to encompass issues on a global scale, directing attention, at least at the level of plot, to a universal human condition (albeit in a Sicilian key).¹⁸

The extreme Sicilian-ness of the setting and characters (especially the more exaggerated minor characters) paradoxically drives home the connection between Vigàta's local, extremely particular issues and national, even global, issues, even though Montalbano's Sicily is arguably (impossibly) more real than the real Sicily. By exaggerating the characters and their problems just enough and with a certain ironic detachment, making them larger than life but still retaining consistency and continuity within the imagined setting, Camilleri emphasizes the common, familiar humanity of the characters and their problems.

17. Andrea Camilleri, *La vampa d'agosto*, 271.

One thing that remains true is that the Montalbano stories depend heavily on the lifelike coherence of their setting and faithful, yet somewhat magnified and mythical, portrayal of Sicily for the experienced pleasure in reading them:

Perché l'obiettivo ambizioso era di dare ai lettori la possibilità di rivivere in prima persona le storie, di scoprire passo dopo passo gli indizi, di arrivare assieme a Montalbano alla risoluzione del caso.... Quella onestà e quella coerenza letteraria di cui più volte Camilleri ha parlato a proposito della costruzione dei suoi 'gialli,' corrispondeva anche ad una coerenza spaziale, 'fisica,' se rapportata al borgo marinaro di Porto Empedocle.¹⁹

[The ambitious objective was to give readers the possibility of reliving the stories in first person, to discover the clues step by step, to arrive together with Montalbano at the resolution of the case... That honesty and that literary coherence of which Camilleri has spoken more than once regarding the construction of his 'gialli,' also corresponded to a spatial, 'physical,' coherence, compared to the maritime village of Porto Empedocle.]

The Vigàta of Camilleri's novels is both real and not-real, corresponding more or less to the environs of Porto Empedocle while under a different name and without the perfect coincidence of exact place names and relative positions; nevertheless, this does not stop fans of Montalbano from assigning locations in the novels to real places in Sicily as closely as they can, creating itineraries for the Montalbano-reading or -watching tourist (notably ignoring the least salubrious fictional locations, of course), aided by the creation of the two Montalbano TV series and their filming locations.²⁰ This deliberate combination of resemblance between the fictional

18. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 83-84.

19. Maurizio Clausi, *I luoghi di Montalbano: una guida*, 16.

20. See Maurizio Clausi, *I luoghi di Montalbano: una guida*; also websites dedicated to Montalbano tourism, for example <http://www.commissariomontalbano.org/>, <http://www.montalbanotour.com>, and trip packages on Viaggi Virgilio, http://viaggi.virgilio.it/reportage/europa/italia/sicilia_montalbano_VIgàta.html.

locations and real geographical ones and lack of precise correspondence between the two does bring to mind Camilleri's Sicilian predecessor and pioneer of the *giallo*, Sciascia, whose novel *Il giorno della Civetta*, *The Day of the Owl*, is set in an unnamed small town near Palermo, with the commonest Italian (not Sicilian) names for the streets (Cavour, Garibaldi), while the plot is inspired by a real-life crime that occurred in the town of Sciacca, around 97 km from Palermo.²¹ Sciascia's third detective novel, *Equal Danger* or *Il Contesto*, is set in an unnamed country that is both Italy and not Italy. In Sciascia's work, this choice of real-yet-unreal fictional locations seems to emphasize the universality of the concerns and anxieties of the novel, especially the fear of the power of law and its possible corruption. Similarly, just as the vigàtese dialect Camilleri invented for the novels is both faithful to Sicilian dialects in a broad sense and rendered comprehensible by its literariness and hybridization with standard Italian, so too the setting is both compelling due to the faithfulness to real Sicilian geography and regionality and rendered universally comprehensible and accessible by its fictionality.

It would be remiss in any examination of the character of Sicily in the Montalbano novels to omit the pervasive presence of Sicilian dishes enjoyed by the detective. They are not just an indulgence, not just a trick to engage more of the reader's senses; the importance of food in the novels is that it constitutes a strongly perceptible connection to the everyday, to life in the presence of constant death and violence. Cuisine is perhaps the second most unique and long-standing expression of regionality in Italy, after dialects. Food is also well established as an

21. Communist trade unionist Accursio Miraglia was murdered in Sciacca in January 1947.

emblem and vehicle in narrative fiction for anthropological, sociological, political, and cultural concerns, as well as being essential to the representation of reality;²² all this supports the intimate connection of food and cuisine to setting and characterization. The majority of dishes described in painfully exquisite detail in the novels are seasonal, local, and brilliantly simple, especially those prepared by Montalbano's housekeeper Adelina and his favorite restaurants, San Calogero and later Da Enzo. Reported in the novels are not only the dishes, but also the deliciously everyday conversations between Montalbano and whoever prepares his food for him, whether Adelina, a waiter, or a restaurateur. Another clue to just how important and serious food is comes with Montalbano's insistence on absolute concentration on the meal without interruption or distraction: the ideal mealtime is less social than it is nearly sacred in its dedication to the enjoyment of food, the opposite of trivialities.²³ A person whose stomach does not rumble at some of the loving descriptions of Montalbano's favorite meals deserves much pity. The specificity and profusion of detail in the descriptions of food cannot be accidental or inconsequential. I argue that while one might expect the specificity of the local cuisine to make it more foreign and less accessible to outside readers (even non-Sicilian Italian readers), it is

22. Gian Paolo Biasin, *I sapori della modernità*, 7.

Montalbano's rigorous insistence on no conversation while eating, especially no conversation about cases, also vaguely recalls some of the eleven requirements of the ideal Futurist meal from Marinetti's 1930 *Il manifesto della cucina futurista*, which altogether focuses on the eliminating distractions and maximizing the sensory experience of eating as well as the originality and nutritional value of the food. While the extreme recommendations in Marinetti's manifesto never took hold, the emphasis on the sensory, artistic, and nutritive value of food is never far beneath the surface in Italian food culture.

precisely this specificity and the attentive details that convey a genuine love for the cuisine, and by extension the local culture and inevitably immerse the reader ever deeper in Montalbano's Sicily and especially Vigàta, as well as in Montalbano's intimate personal connection to place as well as offering insight into his reaction to the presence of violence in these settings.

Montalbano's love of food is not just a quaint quirk of his personality or a device to attract and entertain gourmand readers; the descriptions are too attentive to detail in that they not only list all the ingredients of a certain dish, but also point out when the ingredients are only found in that place or in that season. Dan Saladino, writing for BBC Food, credits Camilleri and others for having paved the way for the recently increased presence of food and gourmand protagonists in the detective stories of several other languages, notably French and English.²⁴ He credits primarily the television adaptations, with the addition of the visual presence of the food on screen drawing the eye and making the mouth water, contributing to our overall pleasure in watching the episodes and the crimes being solved. Not that Montalbano is the first food-loving detective (his namesake, Spanish author Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, is the creator of another gourmand detective, Pepe Carvalho), but his deep, sincere joy and pleasure in front of a well prepared local dish, including the simplest of delicious fare, is impossible to miss or forget, and seems to be what marks him as something more than just another foodie detective. The overwhelming love of food, the authenticity and regional culinary pride and joy that come

23. For one example among many, see Montalbano's lunch conversation with Calogero in which they discuss the ideal meal for Montalbano's mood and his insistence that Augello be completely silent if he wants to join him: *Il ladro di merendine*, 32-33.

across in the narrative have inspired Montalbano food tourism, at least one food anthology, and even food-oriented fan fiction.²⁵ Saladino's article mentions the variety of Italian cuisine as he dwells primarily on how remarkably authentic and detailed the food descriptions are in Camilleri's work, but he does not look closer to note just how local and specific Montalbano's favorite meals are: spaghetti with squid ink and a myriad of other seafood dishes, fresh vegetable dishes made with local heirloom varieties not found elsewhere, to name just a couple; it would be impossible to list them all here.²⁶ The dishes are so locally specific, so carefully detailed, sometimes even with methods of preparation in addition to the minutest ingredients,

24. Dan Saladino, "Hungry Detectives: Why Crime Novelists Write About Food."

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/0/23666332>.

25. Much like the many books, tours, and online guides to Montalbano's locations in Sicily, there are also books, websites and Facebook pages dedicated to Montalbano food tourism and "Montalbano's recipes," the latter designation being somewhat ironic, in my opinion, since Montalbano himself does not actually cook. Reception of Montalbano's food is widespread and enthusiastic, not only in Italy. Chef Jacob Kenedy published Montalbano-inspired recipes: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/9c78994c-9440-11e3-a0e1-00144feab7de.html#axzz321Bzupcz>. Food writer Roberta Schira wrote a letter to Montalbano from his girlfriend Livia regarding his maddening obsession with food and her resolve to learn to make *arancini* for the blog Fine Dining Lovers: <http://www.finedininglovers.com/stories/salvo-montalbano-food/>. Finally, Stefania Campo has written an "investigation" into the food of Camilleri's world, more a food anthology than a cookbook: *Segreti della tavola di Montalbano*, Torino: Il Leone Verde, 2009.

26. In this way, the novels reflect a 180-degree turn from Artusi's 1891 cuisine manual, *La Scienza in cucina e l'Arte di mangiar bene*, which Biasin notes for its project of unification at the cost of sacrificing regional cuisine. Biasin also links a return to regional cooking with a "recupero dei relativi dialetti" ["recovery of the related dialects"] in works such as Ada Boni's *La cucina romana*, 1929. Post-unification literature reflects a similar tendency to return to the regional: "Non va neppure dimenticato che tutta la letteratura post-unitaria segue fondamentalmente il verismo e dunque il regionalismo, lasciando un'impronta durevole anche negli anni a venire... fino a oggi." ["It should not be forgotten, either, that all of post-unification literature fundamentally follows realism and therefore regionalism, leaving a lasting impression

they incite the question, why? Why include such an abundance of detail and why focus so closely on a local cuisine that to the vast majority of the audience is unfamiliar?

Food in Montalbano's world is essential to the novels' intense realism, but it also fills functions beyond offering vague "insight" into Sicilian eating habits and culture and creating a more intense portrait of the setting through the addition of the sense of taste. In an interview with BBC Radio 4, Camilleri emphasizes that his main character is not just an investigator, and definitely not a glutton. His love of food demonstrates this further, very human dimension to Montalbano: "I think it is a sort of unconscious revenge of vitality, an affirmation of being alive in the face of continuous death. Maybe eating, subconsciously, expresses the pleasure of feeling alive, a life force."²⁷ As human beings, our reactions to death and the rituals that we use to deal with it, from burial to grieving, form an important part of our cultures and identities. Montalbano's most elaborately described meals often follow soon after a direct encounter with death, such as immediately after seeing Lapecora's stabbed body and conducting the initial interviews.²⁸ Perhaps Montalbano's dedication to the table may also reflect a desire to possess and transform his world; "alla base della dialettica padrone-schiavo di Hegel, l'esplicita ingestione del cibo come impossessamento e trasformazione del mondo" ["on the basis of the master-slave dialectic of Hegel, the explicit ingestion of food as a taking possession of and

in the years to come as well... up to the present day."] (Gian Paolo Biasin, *I sapori della modernità*, 15)

27. Mark Lawson interviews Andrea Camilleri on Front Row on BBC Radio 4, "Andrea Camilleri reflects on the food-loving Sicilian detective Inspector Montalbano," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00zl705>, July 9 2012.

28. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 30-33.

transformation of the world.”]²⁹ In the face of death, violence, social disorder, and a justice system that is only capable of partially restoring that order, the essential, transformative and nutritive pleasures of eating are especially poignant.

Montalbano’s relationship to food may also serve a function very similar to the one P. D. James attributes to detectives’ domestic spaces: “They provide for us, the readers, reassuring safe houses of the mind from which we too can venture forth vicariously to encounter murder and danger before returning to domestic comfort and safety.”³⁰ Montalbano is not a particularly domestic character; he has no family, only a strained relationship with a long-distance girlfriend that eventually comes to an end. He does, however, have a housekeeper who keeps his home just-so and is the creator of many of the wonderfully local meals that the detective enjoys at home and that often provide him with a kind of succor. Her orderly presence and her meals, in addition to Montalbano’s ritual of swimming at the end of the day after a particularly disturbing case, make up the most constant everyday habits that are so important to him, creating his “safe house” and his affirmation of life in the face of constant death and violence. As such, the mouth-watering details of foods that can only be eaten in Sicily, sometimes only in this particular part of Sicily, are much more than an indulgence; they are a tangible connection to the living body, to the land and the sea, to Sicilian identity and traditions, to human life, and a life-affirming, creative, nourishing response to the reality of death and violence.

29. Gian Paolo Biasin, *I sapori della modernità*, 25.

30. P. D. James, *Talking About Detective Fiction*, 143.

While in the Montalbano novels regionality is primarily conveyed through a feast of the senses and through linguistic multiplicity, De Giovanni's novels featuring Commissario Ricciardi are distinct for their use of strong emotions, the paranormal, and a detailed topography of Naples to anthropomorphize and convey a sense of the character of the city. These prize-winning *gialli* set in 1930s Naples are especially pertinent to the question of how setting and topography and the "soul of the place" influence our understanding of the detective and the investigation for a few reasons, stemming from the unusual characterization of the setting in Fascist-era Naples.³¹ First, the frequency and attention to detail with which De Giovanni uses proper place names far exceeds what is typical for any novel, even the *giallo*, in which crime scenes and other specific places are crucial.³² It is almost always possible to map the movements of the detective and his *brigadiere* on an actual map of the real Naples; there are no fictional names of streets or neighborhoods, only names that may now be out of date. Second, Ricciardi himself conceives of the city of Naples as having a two-sided character, almost two distinct personalities, with a clear geographical dividing line:

Sapeva che avrebbe varcato, nel percorso da piazza Dante a piazza del Plebiscito, un invisibile confine tra due realtà distinte: a valle, la città ricca, dei nobili e dei borghesi, della cultura e del diritto. A monte, i quartieri popolari, al cui interno vigeva un altro sistema di leggi e norme, altrettanto o forse ancora più rigido. La città sazia e quella affamata, la città della festa e quella della disperazione.

31. A possible precedent and inspiration for this technique Giorgio Scerbanenco's crime novels set in Milan, which show a similar obsession with topographical details, in this case primarily for the purpose of embedding a commentary on uncontrolled urbanization and other changes occurring in Milan in the 1960s.

32. The function of proper place names in these detective novels will be discussed in more detail later. See section II.

Quante volte Ricciardi era stato testimone del contraddittorio tra le due facce della stessa medaglia.

Il confine: via Toledo. Palazzi antichi, muti sulla strada ma già rumorosi sul retro, le finestre spalancate sui vicoli, i primi canti delle massaie....³³

[He knew that he would have crossed, in the road from Piazza Dante to Piazza del Plebiscito, an invisible border between two distinct realities: in the valley, the rich city of the nobles and the bourgeois, of culture and entitlement. On the hill, the popular quarters, inside which was in force another system of laws and norms, just as, or perhaps even more, rigid than the former. The sated city and the hungry city, the city of feasts and the city of desperation. How many times had Ricciardi been witness to the contradiction between the two faces of the same coin.

The border: Via Toledo. Antique palaces, silent on the street side, but noisy behind, the windows thrown open on the alleys, the first morning songs of the housewives...]

On a map of Naples, even if one has never set foot in the city, the dividing line of Via Toledo is clear simply in the arrangement of streets on one side and the other. On the west, the streets are numerous, narrow, and cramped. On the east, they are broad, farther apart, and include larger piazzas. For Ricciardi, the dividing line is more than topographical; it marks two distinct personalities found in the same city.

Secondly, Ricciardi and his blue-collar *brigadiere* and confidant Maione represent two distinct social communities that roughly correspond to the two halves of Naples, while their positions as policemen also make them outsiders of those communities to some extent. Ricciardi himself ought to be well suited for taking the lead or working on his own in the upper ranks of society and business (even though, and perhaps partly because he very effectively disrupts these upper ranks), while his colleague Maione is much better at getting information out of the

33. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 12.

lower classes, who run pizzerias and live six people to a room. The two worlds seem to have differing moral codes, and, in some of the novels, when the two worlds collide is when violence breaks out.

With all these elements under consideration, what truly makes the setting of the Commissario Ricciardi novels unique is the fact that Ricciardi sees the landscape in a fundamentally different way than virtually everyone else, with an immediately recognizable and complex anthropomorphism of the city of Naples. Ricciardi imagines the city as having two very different souls, one entity at odds with itself; one half is prosperous and law-abiding, the other impoverished and subject to an unofficial, illegal, and some ways, stricter, order.³⁴ He sees phantasms of those who have died violently, not as ghosts who interact with the living in any way, but as psychic echoes repeating the last emotions and thoughts of the person at the moment of death. He reads their emotions as part of his landscape and feels the urgent need to map them, especially while investigating a crime:

Nella mente di Ricciardi si andava delineando una dinamica plausibile degli eventi... Lui lavorava così: creava uno schema, una geografia delle emozioni che incontrava...

...sentiva un unico impulso violento, non reiterato. Una solitaria ondata di odio fermo e limpido, con la distruzione che, ritirandosi, aveva lasciato sulla riva.³⁵

[In Ricciardi's mind, a plausible dynamics of the events was sketching itself out... This was how he worked: he would create a schema, a geography of the emotions that he encountered...

...he felt a single violent impulse, not to be repeated. A solitary wave of inflexible and limpid hate, with the destruction that, in pulling itself back, it had left behind on the shore.]

34. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 12.

35. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 124.

For Ricciardi, the city is peopled with both the living and the dead (visible essentially to him alone, although that exclusivity is called into question a few times in the series); it is as if he sees two populations at once, like overlapping, discordant images. A popular spot for lovers, it turns out, is also a popular spot for suicides, and Ricciardi sees and hears both at once, the suicides repeating their final thoughts of desperation next to lovers embracing.³⁶ Ricciardi sometimes plans his route around the police station and the city around these phantasms, avoiding ones that are too painful. Others become familiar and routine to the point that he murmurs their last words along with them as he walks by. At a murder scene, he insists on experiencing “il Fatto”³⁷ alone, immersing himself in the final emotions of the victim so he can fit them into the larger emotional map of the case and the city as a whole.

In this bifurcated image of the city, is Ricciardi merely imposing a self-portrait onto the landscape of Naples, coloring it with his aristocratic background and his occupation, his internal (paranormal) experiences and the ordinary narrative he tells to others? The physical and emotional topography of the city is highly shaped by Ricciardi’s consciousness as he moves from place to place; our view of the city is also a view of Ricciardi’s psyche with all its contradictions, melancholia, and sorrow. Both the detective and the city share a deep need to reintegrate their discordant parts in order to arrive at an identity that is both autonomous and a

36. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 90.

37. Ricciardi refers to his paranormal experience as “Il Fatto”, which can be translated as “the fact,” “circumstance,” or even “reality.” This mundane and deliberately non-specific name is Ricciardi’s resigned attempt to normalize the grotesque and horrible sights and last thoughts of the dead that he must endure every day.

well-integrated part of a larger whole (Ricciardi in society in general, Naples in the nation of Italy).

II. Setting, the Past, and Temporality in the Ricciardi Novels

As part of creating an exceptionally strong sense of place, the Italian *giallo* writer also often spends a certain amount of ink on developing a sense of a place's past. Setting encompasses more than geography; it also involves a sense of temporality. This is most apparent in historical detective novels, such as the Commissario Ricciardi series, but it is also true for many other detective novels with a contemporary setting. The identity and character of a place is inextricable from its history, whether the place in question is an entire city, a single building, or all of Montalbano's Sicily. This sense of a place's past sometimes involves a nostalgia for an inaccessible "better past in the city,"³⁸ but not always, even in historical detective novels. Rather, a sense of history and of temporality in the *giallo* more often serves to draw attention to the way in which the characters and the reader experience time or to challenge the aforementioned sense of nostalgia by complicating our perception of historical periods and settings.

The sense of history and the passage of time is built into the macrostructure of the Commissario Ricciardi novels in particular: the particular experience of temporality in the unique, unrepeatable setting of 1930s Naples. The first four novels are subtitled according to the seasons of the year and set in those seasons, and at or near the beginning of each novel is included a detailed and lyrical description of the weather and the city's reaction to it. The narrator, the protagonist Ricciardi, Maione, and other characters are all closely attuned to the changes in the seasons and to the changes they bring about in the behavior of Neapolitans. With the exception of *Vipera* and *L'omicidio Carosino*, according to an interview with *La Repubblica* in which De Giovanni discusses plans for future installments in the series, the novels that follow these first four, continue (or will continue) the pattern established with *Natale* and are (will be) set during other feast days: Easter, Madonna del Carmine, and San Gennaro, the last two being important Neapolitan patron saints in the liturgical calendar.³⁹

The experience of temporality in the Ricciardi novels is uniquely heightened by the existence of "il Fatto"; 1930s Naples is unique and unrepeatable on its own, but it is rendered even more so by the existence of the phantasms seen by Ricciardi. Not only do they form a sort of paranormal topography as mentioned previously, but since the phantasms experience time in a loop, forever repeating the last few moments of life for months until they eventually fade, they throw into higher relief the experience of the passage of time experienced by the living characters and by the reader. The seasonal changes in the weather become all the more

38. Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*, 14.

significant and precious when we see that the dead no longer experience them; time and the climate's affects on the living are at once quotidian and horrible or miraculous. As spring starts to warm the city, "i primi balconi si aprivano su piazza Carità cominciando ad animarla" ["the first balconies were opening up on Piazza Carità, beginning to enliven it."]⁴⁰ Starting with the choice of "animare" ["enliven"], and the lack of mention of any specific human subject being awakened or enlivened, emphasizes the anthropomorphic qualities of Ricciardi's Naples and the agency of the weather. By simulating personality and moods, the weather as part of the geographical setting of the city functions like a character through its influence on other human characters. De Giovanni's Naples seen through Ricciardi's eyes is then quintessentially Neapolitan; earthy, connected to nature through the influence of the weather; mindful of its past and traditions; and finally, both spiritual and superstitious, somehow without a crisis of conflict between the two.

A complete picture of the nature and function of the setting of Ricciardi's Naples still remains somewhat elusive; more than a mere geographical accident, but without a voice and not quite as immanent as human characters. One way to understand it better is to examine how recurring characters react to and are affected by the city and the weather, one of the expressions of its personality. Brigadiere Maione, a native Neapolitan whose sympathetic connection to the city includes a network of informants and sources that prove essential to every one of the investigations, is far from immune to these seasonal changes that the city and its inhabitants

39. <http://libero-lacittadisalerno.blogautore.repubblica.it/2013/09/05/maurizio-de-giovanni-luomo-che-sussurrava-ai-morti-intervista-allo-scrittore-napoletano/>

undergo. His moods often reflect the weather; perhaps sometimes vice versa: “Il caldo era già infernale, ed erano solo le otto. Maledizione anche all’estate. Il brigadiere era infuriato, e non avrebbe dovuto esserlo” [“The heat was already hellish, and it was only eight o’clock. Curses on the summer, too. The *brigadiere* was furious, and he should not have been.”]⁴¹ The angry, blistering summer sun echoes the angry, blistering, jealous thoughts of Maione, and while his wife prepares the best ragú in the city, “ecco! bestemmiare a mezza voce andando al lavoro di domenica per un motivo che non avrebbe confessato nemmeno sotto tortura: evitare il meraviglioso ragú di Lucia” [“here he was, cursing half under his breath while going to work on a Sunday for a motive that he would not have confessed even under torture: to avoid Lucia’s marvelous ragú.”]⁴² His jealousy over his wife and anger at the suggestion that she admires the fruit vendor drives him to embrace hunger, effectively starving himself and punishing himself by avoiding home and table. A similar burning jealousy seems to be the motive of the murder he and Ricciardi investigate during the novel and the jealous, betrayed wife (and attempted murderer) ends up in prison; however, the true murderer committed the crime out of fear of his children’s hunger. All this time the blistering heat has continued, and only at the moment when Ricciardi confronts the true murderer and tells him he will be spared because his children come before justice is the heat finally broken by a rainstorm.⁴³

40. Maurizio De Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 14.

41. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 12.

42. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 13.

43. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 311-312.

Neapolitans, Maione and the murderer especially, seem to live in a sympathetic relationship to the climate and weather; Ricciardi himself is less affected; he reflects somewhat less of the city's living moods, being not quite native and also somewhat removed because of his aristocratic background, and because he is constantly pulled between the city of the living and the city of phantasms. The Maione couple, the blue-collar family with less education than Ricciardi, living in the "lower" part of the city, seem more in tune with the weather, the passage of time, and the everyday soul of the city, than either Ricciardi or other more educated and socially elevated characters, suggesting that the "earthier" character of Maione is by default more in tune with nature and the elements. Rather than leaving his own connection to the city and its living and dead inhabitants to be eclipsed by Maione's sympathetic connection to the elements, Ricciardi is not entirely immune to the weather and passage of time, either; once the rain starts it seems to contribute to the banishing of Ricciardi's indecision and inaction in regards to Enrica, the girl he loves from afar, and he finally takes up a pen to write to her.⁴⁴ The weather of Naples has acted on him as an invisible fulcrum, inspiring Ricciardi to action when human interactions could not. The weather seems to have affected him in a narrower context, though no less an instinctual and subconscious one than in the case of Maione and Lucia.

In *La condanna del sangue*, set in the spring, the novel begins with a description of the last rain and wind of winter, promising clear, calm spring weather. For the fortuneteller victim and for Ricciardi and Maione personally, such peace at first seems out of their reach, and instead

44. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 311-312.

their personal lives are full of turmoil and upheaval. Maione's wife Lucia is struggling with seeing little of her husband while he works and the tension between them since the death of their son; she is faced with a choice between complacently staying in bed (a sort of living death in which she sees her children only "da dietro la parete di cristallo che si era costruita attorno negli anni, ma che non riusciva a toccare" ["from behind the crystal walls that she had built around herself over the years, but that she was unable to touch"]) and getting up, opening the window, and moving on with her life and her family's life:

E Lucia Maione decise che era viva. Si girò e tornò in casa, perché il sangue suo e il sangue del suo sangue scorrevano ancora.

Ed era stato un altro piccolo, ignoto miracolo della primavera del 1931.⁴⁵

[And Lucia Maione decided that she was alive. She turned and went back into the house, because her blood and the blood of her blood were coursing still.

And it was another small, unknown miracle of the spring of 1931.]

Lucia chooses springtime, life, and the resurgence of passion, blood and family ties. The everyday gesture of opening the window to the spring air sparks this crucial, if seemingly small, decision. For Maione, too, this particular spring is one of renewal of passion, love, and family. When looking at Filomena, for whom he has some nascent feelings of tenderness, he realizes "che amava Lucia, più di quando l'aveva vista alla fontana a sedici anni, mentre lavava un lenzuolo e cantava" ["that he loved Lucia, more than when he had seen her at the fountain at the age of sixteen, while she was washing a sheet and singing."]⁴⁶ On the following page,

45. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 242-243.

46. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 252.

“Aveva voglia di casa” [“He longed for home.”]⁴⁷ The narrator’s comment above about small, unknown miracles should not be taken as in any way condescending or belittling of the significance of Lucia’s choice to live. Throughout the novels, it is the small, unnoticed, yet unique and unrepeatable gestures and moments, taken for granted like the weather, that often make all the difference, in characters’ lives and in the cases that need solving. Ricciardi has already taught the reader the importance of noticing and cherishing the small words and gestures of the dead, endlessly, painfully repeated and yet invisible to practically everyone else.

In *La condanna del sangue* and elsewhere, the reader is asked to notice and cherish the small, vital moments belonging to the living and the dead, and Ricciardi’s Naples seems to be a city particularly well suited for throwing light on them. The sensory details in the narrator’s description of the city of Naples and its inhabitants are staggeringly intense at times, never allowing the reader to forget the effects of the time of year (atmospheric or otherwise), or to miss the multiple significances attached to the next change in the weather any more than they could possibly forget the city of Naples or the particular *borgo* where the story is currently unfolding.

On the first page of *Il giorno dei morti: L’autunno del Commissario Ricciardi*, we find the unceasing autumn rains with their detritus and the first promise of the gray, cold winter months to follow, a particularly poetic and melancholy description of a boy and dog huddled in the rain, both of them dead, which is only revealed at the bottom of the page five paragraphs later:

47. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 253.

Quando l'alba tirò fuori dalla notte e dalla pioggia i contorni delle cose, se qualcuno fosse passato avrebbe visto il cane e il bambino ai piedi dello scalone monumentale che portava a Capodimonte. Ma sarebbe stata necessaria grande attenzione: a stento si distinguevano, nella luce incerta del primo mattino. Se ne stavano là, fermi, indifferenti alle grosse gocce fredde che cadevano incessanti dal cielo...Le scale erano un torrente in piena che trasportava rami e foglie dal bosco della reggia.⁴⁸

[When the dawn drew out from the night and from the rain the shape of things, if someone were to pass by they would have seen the dog and the boy at the feet of the monumental steps that led to Capodimonte. But they would have needed to be paying close attention: it was with difficulty the figures could be distinguished, in the uncertain light of first morning. There they were, unmoving, indifferent to the cold drops that were falling incessantly from the sky... The steps were a full blown torrent that carried branches and leaves from the woods around the mansion.]

In *Il posto di ognuno*, set in the summer, we see Livia's experience of the city: "Ora aveva trovato sole e allegria.... Era una pazza, ridente città, e a lei piaceva" ["Now she had found sun and happiness... It was a crazy, laughing city, and she liked it."]⁴⁹ In the springtime novel, *La condanna del sangue*, Spring is personified as late, patient, capricious, and playful, and sometimes a dangerous troublemaker but also a bringer of hope:

La primavera arrivò a Napoli il 14 aprile 1931, poco dopo le due del mattino. Arrivò in ritardo e, come al solito, con un colpo di vento nuovo dal Sud, dopo un acquazzone...

Il suo arrivo passò sotto silenzio, mentre la città si prendeva quel paio d'ora di riposo tra la notte fonda e il primo mattino... Invase le strade e le piazze. E si fermò paziente fuori dalle porte e dalle finestre serrate, ad aspettare.⁵⁰

[Spring arrived in Napoli on April 14, 1931, shortly after two in the morning. It arrived late and, as usual, with a gust of new wind from the South, after a downpour...

48. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il giorno dei morti*, 3.

49. Maurizio de Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 61.

50. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 9.

Its arrival passed in silence, while the city was taking that couple of hours of rest between deep night and first morning... It invaded the streets and piazzas. And it stopped patiently outside the closed doors and windows, waiting.]

Era la primavera che ballava sulle punte: volteggiava leggera, giovane, gioiosa, ancora ignara di ciò che avrebbe portato, ma con una gran voglia di cominciare a mettere un po' di disordine tra le cose. Senza secondi fini, solo per mescolare le carte.

E il sangue della gente.⁵¹

[It was spring who was dancing on her toes: she was twirling lightly, young, joyful, as yet unknowing of that which she had brought, but with a great desire to start bringing a bit of disorder to things. Without secondary motives, just for the sake of mixing up the cards.

And the people's blood.]

La brezza rinforzata dall'odore del mare si divertiva a far volare cappelli e spezzare rami. Donne e uomini, che per mesi si erano incrociati senza scambiarsi uno sguardo, ora si osservavano con attenzione, inviandosi messaggi silenziosi nascosti dietro un sorriso.... L'aria era dolce, profumata e carica di promesse, tra le quali volteggiava la primavera invisibile. Il sole splendeva e, forse, non tutto era perduto.⁵²

[The breeze reinforced by the scent of the sea enjoyed itself by making hats fly and breaking branches. Women and men, who for months had been crossing paths for months without exchanging a single glance, now observed each other with attention, sending each other silent messages hidden behind a smile... The air was sweet, perfumed and loaded with promises, among which spun the invisible spring. The sun shone and, perhaps, not everything was lost.]

After brief glimpses of Ricciardi and his love interest Enrica, each in their own home, embarrassed, discouraged, and just beginning to find a bit of the understanding and courage they will eventually need to speak to each other, we read the hopeful last line of the novel: "In alto, in bilico sul tetto, la primavera volteggiò e rise" ["Up high, balancing on top of the roof, the

51. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 46.

52. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 137.

spring twirled and laughed.”]⁵³ All this intense attention to geographical and meteorological detail serves to intensify the sense of the passage of time and the urgency of the investigation, making the reader feel as if the investigation were almost timed to the changes in the weather, or vice versa. Nature inexorably moves forward and time seems to run out along with the administration’s patience with Ricciardi’s eccentric and irritating but effective methods, in stark contrast to the apparitions of the dead, who are suspended in a slower current of time, reliving the last few moments and emotions of their lives, sometimes for months.

Geography and history are inseparable as part of the temporality of the setting of the Ricciardi novels. The topographical and architectural holdovers from Naples’ past emphasize not only the political history of the city, but most importantly the Neapolitans’ tenacious local identity through the persistence of proper place names. Naples has retained its character, traditions, and geographical nomenclature through wars and regime changes, through the mutations of time:

Ricciardi pensò a quanto potesse cambiare, la città, col cambiare del tempo. Nel vento freddo e nella luce incerta, i vecchi palazzi brulicanti di vita diventavano grotte scure, e i cantieri delle nuove costruzioni sembravano monumenti alla solitudine e all’abbandono.⁵⁴

[Ricciardi thought about how much a city can change, with a change of the weather. In the cold wind and in the uncertain light, the old palaces crawling with life were becoming dark caves, and the new construction sites seemed to be monuments to solitude and abandonment.]

53. Maurizio de Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 283.

54. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 50.

The mutations in the urban landscape caused by the passage of time are one more way in which the novels play with the reader's experience of time, contrasting the slow decay and changes in the city with the briefer, quicker lives of the characters and the frozen phantasms beyond all changes. The final observation, that the new constructions seem to be monuments to solitude and abandonment, reflects Ricciardi's state of mind as much as the impersonality and oppressiveness of the contemporary architecture of the 1930s.

Even more than just the passage of time, the city breathes history. It wears it like clothing. Key locations in the novels include explicit references to Naples' history, from past periods of foreign rule to recent changes in political regimes and movements. The Quartieri Spagnoli is just one of the more obvious references to the former; there are also streets that retain their original name with the inhabitants, despite being officially changed decades ago:

Si chiamava via Roma, ormai da sessant'anni; ma per i napoletani era e sarebbe rimasta via Toledo, come quando era nata sotto gli spagnoli. E sarebbe rimasta il limite, il confine pulsante tra le due anime della città, alternativamente posseduta e invasa dall'una o dall'altra.⁵⁵

[It was called Via Roma, had been for sixty years now, but for the Neapolitans it was and would remain Via Toledo, just as when it was born under the Spaniards. And it would remain the dividing line, the pulsing border between the two souls of the city, each alternately possessed and invaded by the other.]

Both the old and new proper names denote the same stretch of pavement. Why, then, should it matter to the Neapolitans which name is used, if Via Roma=Via Toledo?⁵⁶ In other passages in

55. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 86. In fact, Via Roma has since had its name restored and now appears once more as Via Toledo on maps.

56. This problem recalls Frege's famous semantics puzzle:

the same novel and others in the series, the street is referred to simply as Via Toledo, taking the reader in as part of the Neapolitan community that knows the street under that name. Apart from a general human resistance to change, there are also issues of cultural attitudes and of semantics at play. It also upholds Kripke's theory that proper names are rigid designators, that is, that "a proper name...refers to, or designates, the same individual in every possible world in which that individual exists."⁵⁷ For Neapolitans, "Via Toledo" refers to the same topographical entity in all possible worlds, past, present, and fictional, including the ones in which the state has attempted to replace the name with another more Italian one. They have failed to accept the replacement name as a true proper name for the street, and so its status as a rigid designator is never fully established either.⁵⁸

"a=a

has a different cognitive content from:

a = b.

Thus, for example:

Mark Twain = Mark Twain

is trivial and a priori and contains no information, whereas:

Mark Twain = Samuel Clemens

is informative and a posteriori."

Cited in Stephen P. Schwartz' essay "Mill and Kripke on Proper Names and Natural Kind Terms," 2013, p. 928.

57. Stephen P. Schwartz, "Mill and Kripke on Proper Names and Natural Kind Terms," 2013, 931.

58. Proper place names have also featured prominently and provocatively in seminal works of Italian detective fiction. For example, *giallo* pioneer Carlo Emilio Gadda's detective novel bears the name of the street in the historical center of Rome in which the crime is committed: *Quer*

That proper names denote individuals is easily understood. On the other hand, philosophers do not as easily agree upon the nature of the connotations of proper names. In this case, the respective connotations of “Via Toledo” and “Via Roma” appear to have everything to do with Neapolitans’ preference for the former, since their denotations are clearly equivalent. I argue that the attachment to the historical name connotes Naples’ unique political history in contrast to the newly constructed national narrative, and preference for the original name indicates a typically Neapolitan stubborn resistance to Rome-centric nationalism and national identity in favor of localism and local identity.

In contrast to the pervasiveness of and attention to detail in proper place names in the Commissario Ricciardi novels, place names in Montalbano’s world must have a different function, since many of those that appear are fictional, in particular the town of Vigàta where the police station is located and which lends its name to Camilleri’s hybrid literary dialect, *vigatese*. The Montalbano novels, as is much more typical in fiction in general, mentions a few of the most important place names, street names, etc., but not in the same overwhelming detail as in the Ricciardi novels. Montalbano’s investigations and other travels are only vaguely mappable. Vigàta more or less corresponds to Porto Empedocle, and is certainly inspired by that town, Camilleri’s birthplace. In 2003, the town officially changed its name to Porto Empedocle Vigàta, the newspaper article in *La Repubblica* announcing the change also proclaiming, “Vigàta ha smesso da tempo di essere luogo della fantasia, per trasferirsi nelle

pasticciaccio brutto de Via Merulana. The title is also in Roman dialect, designating the locality of both the crime and the novel and giving the novel a particular local identity.

geografie dell'isola" ["Vigàta has ceased for some time to be a place of the imagination, and transferred itself into the geographies of the island."]⁵⁹ But Vigàta in the novels never lays claim to sharing connotations with Porto Empedocle in all possible worlds in the way that Ricciardi's Naples does; even if they now share a designation on maps, and even though the filmed locations in the television series can be found, identified, and mapped, Montalbano's investigations in the books cannot be so thoroughly or precisely mapped, and the geography and connotations of the places in Montalbano's Sicily never quite perfectly correspond to the Sicily that his readers can physically visit. Montalbano even makes a tongue-twister of a joke with the names Vigàta and Licata, a real town in Sicily about 48 km from Porto Empedocle:

Illustre signor questore, non essendo Vigàta Licata e nemmeno Licata Vigàta, c'è stato, è chiaro, un errore. Non ebbe risposta da parte mia l'ordine che lei mi diede, non certo per mia malafede, ma per rispetto della geografia.⁶⁰

[Illustrious Commissioner, Vigàta not being Licata, and neither Licata Vigàta, there was, it is clear, an error. You have not received a reply from me to the order you gave me, certainly not out of bad faith, but rather out of respect for geography.]

His tongue-in-cheek response to Licata's police station is taken badly by the commissioner there, who lacks any sense of humor or imagination, in Montalbano's opinion. Is it perhaps also a subtle reminder to the reader that Vigàta is first and foremost a fictional place, and that the novels set there are not, in fact, a tour guide? Fictional place names make it possible to set a story in a realistic, believable setting that skirts geographical accuracy when convenient or expedient without "disrespecting geography." That Ricciardi uses the opposite strategy,

59. April 28, 2003. <http://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/Vigàta/Vigàta/Vigàta.html>

creating fully mappable stories with accurate place names from the past, actually makes his fictional world the far more unusual of the two.

III. Regional Characteristics and Stereotypes, Personification of the Setting

The colorful, detailed, and nuanced settings of Camilleri's and De Giovanni's novels encourage a reading of the setting as functioning in a similar way to a character, through how it affects other characters in the novels or is reflected in them. When attempting to understand the character of the setting, it is particularly enlightening to examine what other characters say about it directly, about stereotypes and local character (e.g. "sicilianità"), and to look at personification of the setting, exaggeration of regional characteristics and stereotypes in human characters, all well-established features in more recent *gialli*.

In the Montalbano series, Sicily's famous gastronomy, gregariousness, and warmth set up in contrast to the corruption, problems of conflicting loyalties, etc. of an environment dominated by the mafia have been treated extensively elsewhere. The *giallo* is not alone in singling out the South and the figure of the *meridionale* as the subject of stereotyping, and in fact often seems to portray the South and Southernness from the prejudiced point of view of the Northerner. (By extension, the not-quite-caricatured portrayal of Sicily in the Montalbano

60. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 22.

novels could also be interpreted as a depiction of Italianness from the point of view of the foreigner.) Montalbano himself, while embodying many of these typically southern characteristics, is arguably a positive example of nearly all of them, and stands out as the most fully realized character in a sea of stereotypes; the reader cannot help but become invested in Montalbano and what happens to him on the job or off. The same cannot be said for the minor characters, even recurring characters such as Catarella, who are at best caricatures, albeit endearing and highly entertaining ones. One is left with the impression that Montalbano's Sicily is peopled in the most part by southerners whom the prejudiced Northern character Garrone from *La donna della domenica* would instantly recognize as such from the back, from their gait and other features.⁶¹ It turns out that the unpleasant Garrone is not always correct in his "ability," undermining the universality of stereotypes in the novel. Fruttero and Lucentini are not the first, and certainly not the last, to upset the reader's expectations in regards to regionality and stereotypes. Camilleri does invert expectations in regard to stereotypes of *meridionali* from time to time, but the novels just as often transform negative stereotypes into positive ones instead by making the stereotypical characters (such as Catarella) so likeable.

In contrast, De Giovanni's Commissario Ricciardi is one of the least personable detectives to spring to life from the end of a pen since Sherlock Holmes. His friend Modo offhandedly says to Ricciardi: "Lo sai, la gente ha paura dei tuoi silenzi, della tua determinazione. È come se tu ti volessi vendicare. Ma di che?" ["You know, people are afraid of

61. "Una sua abilità: sapeva riconoscere anche di schiena – anzi, sorrise sompiaciuto, soprattutto di schiena – la provenienza esatta delle meridionali. Fruttero and Lucentini, *La donna della*

your silences, of your determination. It's as if you wanted to avenge. But avenge what?"⁶² Ricciardi, true to form, declines to give a direct answer. His apparent attitude of determined vindication as described by Modo may read like a stereotypical Southern attitude, focused on vendetta and honor, but Modo also hits on the reason why this does not fit Ricciardi's character at all: "Ma di che?" ["But avenge what?"] Ricciardi's attunement to the supernatural is quintessentially Neapolitan, but he has no one to carry out a vendetta upon, except perhaps himself; he can hardly work revenge for his suffering and isolation on the poor echoes of the dead that surround him. His inability to talk about his troubles is very un-Neapolitan, to the point of alarming and unsettling Tata Rosa, Modo, and even strangers.

In the same Neapolitan setting, we find "Bambinella[,] Quello che sta sempre in mezzo, che sa i fatti di tutti" ["Bambinella[,] the one who is always in the middle of things, who knows everyone's business."]⁶³ Bambinella first appears near the end of *Il senso del dolore*, when Ricciardi sends Maione to ask her about the gossip in the lower quarters regarding the mysterious singer "o' Cantante" [called simply "The Singer" in dialect] Ricciardi believes is their main suspect. Bambinella is a transvestite, a fairly well-off and unusually well-educated prostitute, and a confidential informant before such titles were made official, to whom Maione turns for gossip and information that he cannot acquire on his own, frequently because the original source lies outside the usual circle of even blue-collar policemen and therefore distrustful of them. I argue that Bambinella personifies the city of Naples, in part because of her

domenica, 12.

62. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 124.

dual nature as a transvestite echoing the dual soul of the city described by Ricciardi, but primarily because she shows the most insight into the character and spirit of the city and its individual inhabitants, such that when Maione turns to her for help understanding the events and motives of a case, he is essentially turning to Naples herself for help. In Babinella's first encounter with Maione, we learn the location of her work and home on the borders and edges of the city: "una personalità complessa, quella di un ragazzo che aveva imparato ad accettare di essere diverso dagli altri, ma non per questo si era rassegnato a nascondersi. Anzi, si sentiva donna e da donna voleva pagarsi da vivere. Allo stesso modo in cui le donne povere e disperate spesso dovevano mantenersi...." ["a complex personality, that of a boy who had learned to accept that he was different from the others, but not for this reason had he resigned to hide himself. Rather, he felt he was a woman and she wanted to make her living as a woman. In the same way in which poor and desperate women often had to support themselves..."]⁶⁴ In the national context, Naples has long been disdained and treated with suspicion by other Italians. A "complex personality," "accepting that she is different from the others, but for all this not resigned to hide herself," even if it means selling herself to survive, are all descriptors that could easily be applied to the city as well as Babinella.

63. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 164.

64. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 64-65.

The author takes part in several metaleptic interviews with different major characters, one following each of the seasonal novels.⁶⁵ The interview with Babinella takes place in her house on the outskirts of the city after the end of the third novel, following similar interviews with Ricciardi and Maione in the two previous novels. In writing this encounter between himself and the character, the author allows Babinella to speak candidly about the other main characters and about herself in a way that would not be possible in Maione's company, which is the only way the reader has seen her in the novel. She starts out by talking about her living situation and lifestyle: "Questo è un porto di mare, gente che viene, che va; un sacco di... amici che mi vengono a trovare, chi porta una cosa, chi un'altra" ["This is a sea port, people come and go; lots of... friends who come see me, some bring one thing with them, some another."]⁶⁶ The narrated character quickly becomes herself the narrator of her own experience as she conflates her own situation with the character of Naples as a port city, perhaps referring to its status as an underprivileged *sister* of more affluent northern cities. As problematic as this view of Naples may be, Babinella is equally quick to point out more positive and negative characteristics, dwelling on the unique compassion and collaboration of Naples' poor:

Questa città, dotto', è un posto unico. Si deve andare avanti, si deve sopravvivere, e non si ha il tempo di fare certi pensieri. Per odiare ci vuole energia, e chi ce l'ha tutta questa forza?...proprio la fame rende tutti, come posso dire, un'unica famiglia...e la famiglia va avanti lo stesso, fino a quando poi non

65. I refer again to narrative metalepsis, rather than figural metalepsis, narrative metalepsis being the collapsing of boundaries between the world of the narrator and the world of the narrated.

66. De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 320.

c'è occasione di ricambiare....E davanti a tutti ci sta il mare; e sopra, il cielo che aspetta. E alla fine moriamo tutti quanti. E così è.⁶⁷

[This city, sir, is a unique place. One has to keep going forward, has to survive, and one has no time to think certain thoughts. In order to hate, it takes energy, and who has that kind of strength? ...really, hunger makes everyone, how can I say it, one single family...and family goes forward all the same, until the moment when there's the occasion to reciprocate.... And in front of everyone, there's the sea; and above, the sky that awaits. And in the end all of us die. That's the way it is.]

Hunger, survival rather than hatred, compassion, and common humanity are the defining characteristics of Neapolitans according to Bambinella. She also exhibits an uncommon courage in living out her true identity coupled with a philosophy that Pulcinella himself could hardly match:

In un primo momento mi vergognavo, mi nascondevo, poi ho deciso che com'ero ero, che la vita è una e che pure io ero una creatura di Dio e non uno scherzo della natura. Da quel momento sono stata felice, pure in mezzo a mille difficoltà.⁶⁸

[In the first moment I was ashamed, I would hide, then I decided that I was how I was, that we only have one life and that even I was a creature of God and not nature's practical joke. From that moment I have been happy, even in the midst of a thousand difficulties.]

Bambinella, tortured and yet confident and compassionate, personifies the city that Maione and Ricciardi serve and protect, that ultimately protects them in return, like Bambinella herself does with the information she passes on to Maione.

67. De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 321.

68. De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 323.

IV. Nationalism and Regionalism as Virtues and Values and as Sources of Unease

There have been several “regional” studies of the *giallo*, most notably by Luca Crovi and Massimo Carloni, emphasizing the synchrony between the personality of the detective or the particular nature of the crime and the locale of the setting.⁶⁹ This tendency to “match” the personality or methods of a detective to his geographical setting, or to speculate that a given detective could “only” operate in his particular city, is problematic to say the least, leading one to dwell uncritically on the comfortable harmony between character and regional setting and avoid directly confronting the many instances in which the *giallo* upends or challenges that harmony. The detective and other characters may frequently exhibit a strong resonance with their geographical surroundings, but they often challenge and disrupt the values and ideologies of localism,⁷⁰ regionalism, and nationalism as well, especially in connection to violence and criminality.⁷¹

69. E.g. Luca Crovi, “La Città del delitto” in *Tutti i colori del giallo*, 2002, and Massimo Carloni, *L'Italia in giallo: Geografia e storia del giallo italiano contemporaneo*, 1994. Both emphasize the “resonance” of certain detectives with their regional setting, for example: “il filosofo e poeta De Vincenzi poteva scegliere come luogo dei suoi studi sull’anima umana solo la fredda e nebbiosa Milano: il sor Ascanio Bonichi come il commissario Ciccio Ingravallo potevano spostarsi a loro agio (sonnecchiando a tratti) solo nella campagna e nella periferia romana.” [“the philosopher and poet De Vincenzi [detective protagonist of Augusto de Angelis’ novels] was only able to choose for his place where he studied the human soul the cold and foggy Milan: Ascanio Bonichi [protagonist of Alessandro Varaldo’s *gialli*] like Ciccio Ingravallo [police detective in Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*] could move at his ease (dozing off at times) only in the countryside and periphery of Rome.] (Crovi, 101).

70. For a definition of localism in Italy, I refer to Jaro Stacul’s study of local identity in *The Bounded Field*: “in Italy the term refers to the tendency to give one’s loyalty and allegiance to one’s locality rather than to the state” (Stacul, 2003, 1). Stacul himself also refers to Cento Bull’s

The issue of regional vs. national identity and nationalism is especially problematic in the Commissario Ricciardi series. Set in the Fascist era Naples of the 1930s, Ricciardi and other characters demonstrate widely varying interpretations and criticisms of nationalism, the Fascist Party, and contemporary administration. The strong sense of seasons and passage of time in Naples, the exceptional temporality of the novels and the accessing of all the senses, fully envelops the reader in the temporal and historical as well as geographical setting. If we are to look at the Ricciardi novels as revisiting the experience of Fascism, it is clear that the tone is anything but nostalgic for most aspects of life under that regime. There is a feeling of precariousness linked to the corruption and absolute ideology of the regime in the barely veiled comments made by some of the characters, such as Modo. In *Il posto di ognuno*, especially, there is a strong undercurrent of fear and justified paranoia, the officially denied secret police and their warnings to Ricciardi about Modo and the dangers of speaking unfavorably, not to mention overtly criticizing, the regime. The novels are also pervaded by still relevant questions about identity and political freedom emerging from time to time from the story's background, characterized by a sometimes vague but persistent sense of anxiety about speaking one's mind

chapter in *Italian Regionalism* (Ed. C. Levy, 1996). I would expand this definition to include not only political loyalty and allegiance but also adherence to local traditional values and customs. 71. Ellen Nerenberg, *Murder Made in Italy*, 14. "Significantly, the contemporary Italian *giallo*, or detective story, also challenges received wisdom of geography, particularly regionality. This genre portrays widespread delinquency, especially in Italy's central and northern regions. The reconfiguration of Italian contours of criminality that takes places in contemporary fiction corresponds, in many ways, to the sort of 'virtual' proximity to crime that increasingly rapid and widespread telecommunications is making possible."

in political matters. There are multiple indirect references to people who do or do not wear “black clothing,” i.e. support the Fascist party and policies, whether they agree with or understand the policies, platform, and trajectory of the party, or rather toe the line for the sake of the privileges and protection offered. The dangers of Fascism and the precarious state of civil liberties at the time are not the material of the main plot of the novels, but they certainly make themselves felt and prevent one from reading the stories as an indulgent escape into a “better past.”

In fact, Ricciardi never seems to be at home anywhere, in part because of his paranormal affliction, but also because he seems to have none of the loyalty to Naples or his ancestral home that could be called localism, nor regionalism, nor nationalism, substituting his own value system instead. The only place he seems to begin to be comfortable is in front of his window that overlooks Enrica’s kitchen (and even that comfort is threatened at various times); the only loyalties he actively expresses is one of a strained, habitual sort to his former nurse, Rosa, and a stronger, more personal loyalty to his friends and colleagues Maione and, to a lesser extent, Modo. All these connections are on the purely individual level and extremely rare for the detective. Ricciardi dismisses politics as having little or no bearing on his job or everyday life, calling the current government and its black-shirted supporters “buffoni innocui” in his metaleptic interview with the author, “Incontro con Ricciardi.”⁷² His superior in the police force, however, disagrees:

72. In Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 197.

“E in tempi come questi, in cui l’orgoglio nazionale è un valore assoluto... Pare che lo stesso Duce [...] ammirasse [Vezzi] e lo andasse ad ascoltare, quando cantava a Roma... Se dovessimo trovare il colpevole con la solita rapidità e con completezza, come sapete fare voi, insomma, questo mi... ci porterebbe direttamente all’attenzione delle massime cariche dello Stato, Ricciardi. Lo capite questo?”

“Capisco che c’è un morto, dottore. Un morto ammazzato; e un assassino che cammina libero per la città. Ci vorrà il tempo che ci vorrà, come sempre, faremo tutto quello che si deve fare, come sempre. Senza perdere tempo. Se non perdiamo tempo.”⁷³

[“And in times like these, in which national pride is an absolute value... It seems that the Duce himself [...] admires [Vezzi] and went to hear him, when he was singing in Rome... If we must find the guilty with the usual rapidity and with completeness, as you know how to do, so, this would bring me.. bring us directly to the attention of the highest offices of the State, Ricciardi. Do you understand?”

“I understand that there is a dead man, sir. A murdered man; and a killer who is walking free in the city. It will take the time it takes, as always, we will do everything that one must do, as always. Without wasting time. That is, if we don’t waste time.”]

Ricciardi seems to be in the right, in the end. His methods include ignoring politics on every level, not just national, and thus irritating important figures who then put pressure on his superiors to keep him in line, but they are eventually forced to let him continue being undiplomatic and unpolitical because he is the best detective in Naples. Other less indispensable characters like Modo may not be so lucky, but Ricciardi has the privilege of treating nationalism and regionalism as secondary to his duties as a police detective and the virtues he values as such: dedication, efficiency, and determination.

73. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 54. Note the use of the “voi” form of the second person singular formal pronoun. This usage was archaic and disappearing except in certain areas of Italy when Mussolini attempted to bring it back (the *voi fascista*) and supplant the “Lei” form, which he considered unmanly and foreign. That Ricciardi’s superior uses it here shows

Ricciardi's aging nurse, Rosa, is an example of someone whose life's sphere is so intimate and small that a concept as broad-based as nationalism does not occur to her: "Rosa Vaglio era nata assieme all'Italia ma non se n'era accorta, né allora né dopo: per lei la patria era sempre stata la Famiglia, di cui era custode forte e decisa" ["Rosa Vaglio had been born at the same time as Italy but did not realize it, neither then nor later: for her the fatherland had always been the Family, of whom she was the strong and decisive guardian."]⁷⁴ Rosa is able to live a valuable and virtuous life as she understands it, even if it is a highly circumscribed life, without nationalism or regionalism entering into her consideration as values to be sought after. All in all, nationalism in Ricciardi's Naples is of dubious value at best. Garzo and the thugs on the secret police force in *Il posto di ognuno* are among the characters who display the most nationalistic qualities are the least admirable.

Camilleri's novels with their contemporary setting address questions of Sicilian identity and regionalism by drawing attention to the changes on the island of the last few decades; the fracturing of the traditional family, the loosening of the traditional code of silence, the new, technologically savvy Mafia which is no longer an exclusively Sicilian problem, to name just a few. Elena Past views Montalbano's Vigàta as a simulacrum of Sicily, comparing it to Disneyland for its mythical, larger-than-life quality:

him to be a "good Fascist," even though Mussolini's official ban on "Lei" would come out a few years after the setting of the story. The "voi" form can still be heard in parts of Southern Italy.

74. De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 43.

After Sciascia, a successful detective in Sicilian literature must exist as part of a Sicilian theme park, a mythical island on which the ideals of Beccaria and the Enlightenment have been unproblematically brought to fruition.⁷⁵

I hesitate to take this last statement entirely seriously, not sure that Montalbano's Sicily is really so idealistic and blithely accepting of a "contradictory reality," or that the "true aim" of the novels is *only* "pleasure in reading."⁷⁶ And yet, this may be true on some level, that it is at least *one* of the true aims of the novels, if it is true that "Noi siciliani amiamo raccontare" ["We Sicilians love to tell stories."]⁷⁷ "Contradictory," "double," and similar words are often used by critics to describe Montalbano's Sicily, suggesting that attempts to pin down a definition of *sicilianità* in the novels is more difficult than expected, that the charm of the setting and its regionality only appears unproblematic.

For specifically representing Sicilian history, culture, and everyday life while, at the same time, recording transformations due to a network of mutual influences between Sicily and the mainland, Camilleri's Sicily, therefore, is a powerful image of the island as a site of 'double identity.'⁷⁸

While there may be some nostalgia expressed for the Sicily of the past, the Montalbano novels are more concerned with the new Sicily even while the old Sicily is ever-present, and neither one is depicted without serious flaws in every level of society and daily life, making the island's "double identity" not nearly so straightforward as Pezzotti implies. Montalbano himself

75. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 91.

76. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 105.

77. Antonio Calabrò, "L'identità siciliana e la lezione di Camilleri" cited in Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 105.

78. Barbara Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*, 137.

becomes more and more ambivalent about this “new Sicily” as the series progresses, further complicating the issue of what makes *sicilianità*.⁷⁹

V. Crime, Violence, and Center-Periphery Paradigms

It is clear that the tension between center and periphery has various functions within the *giallo* and its settings, not just on the level of the city or in terms of literal geography. By and large the contemporary *giallo* both exploits and challenges existing center-margin paradigms, just as it alternately celebrates and challenges the conventional characterization of regions and cities and nations. My intent is to parse out a more nuanced reading of these paradigms and received wisdom in relation to violent crime and the detective and other figures of authority.

The most pertinent example for our purposes of the *giallo* challenging the received wisdom of geography is the common association of crime with the urban periphery. In *Lupo Mannaro*, Lucarelli’s character Lanzaarini displays the “disbelief that an urban plague such as serial murder could spread to non-urban Italian locales links to the anxiety over the defamiliarization of Italian geography as experienced from within the national ranks. The contemporary Italian literary *giallo* generally worries the distinction between urban center and

79. One might speculate whether this increased ambivalence in the main character was a factor in the decision to produce the prequel television series, *Giovane Montalbano*, as a return to a

periphery.”⁸⁰ Falling into this trend, Commissario Montalbano is a detective who worries a lot of distinctions and a lot of people, often quite deliberately and nearly always very effectively. In *La forma dell’acqua*,⁸¹ the body of the victim is left in the *mánnara*, a place of ill repute outside the city, near an abandoned building, using the geography of the false crime scene to make the narrative of his death take one trajectory rather than another, and the detective has the task of choosing which narrative to believe and transmit. According to the vigàtese online dictionary, *mánnara* means “ricinto in cui si rinchiude un gregge” [“paddock in which one encloses a flock,”]⁸² making it an ironically pastoral word for a place that encloses prostitution and drugs, not a flock of sheep. The *mánnara* is chosen for the false crime scene precisely because it is the sort of place one would expect a violent, scandalous crime to take place, in order to obfuscate the true facts of the case that instead involve politics from the very center of the community, not the illicit margins. That Montalbano challenges the narrative suggested by the crime scene also challenges the notion that violent crime belongs to the marginal, the illicit, the place without legal or civic status, the place outside the order of civilization and law.

In *Le ali della sfinge*, a murdered Russian girl is disposed of in the city dump near a famous site full of trees and underbrush where prostitutes meet and bring their johns, in an obvious attempt to connect her death with that illegal activity instead of being the result of a nervous victim of housebreaking shooting an unarmed intruder. Zin’s (the victim’s)

slightly more nostalgic Sicily, and one a bit more palatable and comfortable for a TV audience.

80. Ellen Nerenberg, *Murder Made in Italy*, 55.

81. Andrea Camilleri, 1994.

82. http://www.Vigàta.org/dizionario/camilleri_linguaggio.html

foreignness, youth, attractiveness, and apparent training as a dancer would all support the assumption that she was a prostitute and that this work got her killed, as suggested by the disposal site. Montalbano, however, is never satisfied with the neat explanation that conveniently locates violent crime in the marginal, geographical location of unlawful activity outside the center of the city in what is essentially waste ground. His dissatisfaction with the easy answer is a clue to the reader on how to read the novel, and how to read a mystery in general; by worrying the conventions that we normally take for granted. He relentlessly tracks down explanations for every inconsistency and not only uncovers the murderer of Zin, but also the murderer of her boss, an important member of a “benevolent” society, in the process uncovering mafia connections within the superficially respectable charitable organization whose purpose is to help people like Zin, not facilitate them in crime.

Neapolitan Commissario Ricciardi, instead of butting heads with or overturning conventions, is more of a contemplative as he tries to make sense of the relationship between violence and geographical location, with mixed results:

Ricciardi ragionava su quanto fosse paradossale che i posti dove il Fatto gli riservava meno visioni fossero ospedali e cimiteri. Era logico, d'altronde: erano le passioni a generare le morti violente, non il dolore; e là abitava soprattutto il dolore...L'ospedale si vergognava della morte, e quindi la nascondeva. Rappresentava l'insuccesso, la sconfitta.⁸³

[Ricciardi reflected on how paradoxical it was that the places where the Fatto set aside for him the least number of visions were hospitals and cemeteries. On the other hand, it was logical: it was the passions, not suffering, that generated violent deaths; and in those places dwelled most of all suffering... The hospital

83. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 74.

was ashamed of death, and therefore would hide it. It represented failure, defeat.]

Apart from the relative lack of apparitions in hospitals and cemeteries, he does not find a geographical pattern to the occurrence of violent deaths (the only deaths that seem to produce phantasms). He correlates violent death instead with passions, common to all humanity, rather than to geographical paradigms.

Rita Wilson and Patrick Raynal have worked on another dimension of the crime novel's rapport with the social margins and the potential for meaningful encounters there, in particular in the *noir*:

...a medium that gives voice to the realities of marginalization: of those who are excluded and rejected by society, of those who either by choice or force of circumstance spend their lives keeping away from rules and institutions.⁸⁴

But giving voice to the marginalized is not exclusive to the *noir* subgenre; Bambinella in De Giovanni's novels is the marginal character par excellence, and furthermore "aveva l'abilità di trovarsi sempre in contatto con gli ambienti in cui maturavano i delitti," ["she had the ability to always find herself in contact with the settings in which crimes ripened,"]⁸⁵ making her useful to Maione, but usefulness does not explain the friendship and esteem that develops between them, and if Bambinella is marginalized, that fact does not prevent her from being worthy of esteem and a voice. Another character, Maddalena, echoes Bambinella's sentiments mentioned earlier regarding the tendency of poor Neapolitans to help each other:

84. Rita Wilson, "On the Margins" in Cicioni & Di Ciolla, *Differences, Deceits, and Desires*, 19. (Interview with Sabina Macchiavelli in "Etannantes voyageurs, IXe Festival International du livre, Saint Malo, 8-10 May 1998.)

“Ma qua, in questa città, senza offesa, commissa’, i malamente sono spesso meglio degli sbirri. La gente povera, che scappa, che ha fame, si aiuta: campiamo così, stretti uno vicino all’altro. Perché lo sappiamo, commissa’, che se non ci aiutiamo tra di noi non ci aiuta nessuno.”⁸⁶

[“But here, in this city, I don’t mean to offend, inspecta’, the wronguns are often better than the cops. The poor people, the ones who run away, who are hungry, help each other: we get by this way, packed in tight with each other. Because we know, inspecta’, that if we don’t help each other no one will help us.”]

Maddalena’s observation underscores the distinction between being poor and marginalized and being morally corrupt. Existing on the margins is conventionally seen as a sign of withdrawal from normal civic activity, whether by victim or aggressor, but characters like Babinella and Maddalena upend that notion, displaying a more strictly moral and ethical sense of social and civic duty than more centrally located characters. Border spaces like Babinella’s apartment can be places of encounter and communication across culture and class, of self-knowledge, rather than exclusion, isolation and estrangement.

The victim in *La condanna del sangue* is a *cartomante*, a definitive border character not only because of her marginal position in society but also in a temporal and spiritual sense, like the ultimate border characters, gypsies.⁸⁷ The geographical location in a poor neighborhood and the squalid architecture of the *cartomante*’s home, the setting of her death, are infused with hostility and distrust from the occupants, the physical surroundings so foul (stink of spoiled food, urine, filth, etc.) that they seem to be tangible signals that the corruption and greed of her life led to her death. And they did, but not in the expected, straightforward way. The motive behind her

85. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 65.

86. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 175.

death is both more complex and simpler; Attilio, her mentally challenged son, believes “io l’ho cacciata, alla strega, da dentro a mia madre. Le ho aperto a testa, per fare uscire il male” [“I chased her, the witch, out of my mother. I opened up her head, to make the evil come out.”]⁸⁸ The *strega* being the duplicitous face his mother wore, so to speak, when she put the potential social status of Emma’s unborn child above her own son, with whom she has failed to make something that will allow her to break into a higher social sphere. Attilio, who cannot truly comprehend either his mother’s anticipation of Emma’s child nor his own violent reaction, is another outsider par excellence, excluded from the most fundamental social unit, the family.

The worrying of literal and non-literal center-periphery borders is hardly unique to Camilleri’s and De Giovanni’s works; the tendency has a strong presence in others’ as well. Barbara Baraldi’s novels add yet another dimension to this issue, first being written by a female author (a much rarer thing in Italian detective stories than in many other world literatures), and second because of the focus on women’s experience of violence, crime, and investigation in particular. Gianrico Carofiglio’s novels about Avvocato Guerrieri are a prime laboratory for examining non-literal center-periphery paradigms, such as the outsider status of Thiam, an illegal immigrant, suspected kidnapper, and Guerrieri’s client. In *Testimone inconsapevole*,⁸⁹ Thiam is accused of murdering a child because of his marginal status as one of the *extracomunitari* and because of the dubious testimony of a racist barista. Guerrieri must

87. Rita Wilson, “On the Margins” in Cicioni & Di Ciolla, *Differences, Deceits, and Desires*, 20.

88. Maurizio De Giovanni, *La condanna del sangue*, 273.

deconstruct the false correlation of the immigrant outside with the geographical periphery and with violent crime. In *Ad occhi chiusi*,⁹⁰ Guerrieri travels back and forth from the city center and the law courts to his client's confidential and hidden home for battered women far outside the periphery of the city, a geographically tangible symbol of her extreme withdrawal from the "normal" activity of the city in order to escape her dangerously abusive ex-lover, a reversal in which the civilized place is the more dangerous.

VI. Detectives as Insiders and Outsiders

Italian detectives are not unique in inhabiting a metaphorical space both inside and outside their society, beginning with Sherlock Holmes, the eccentric, antisocial detective with encyclopedic knowledge of the geography of his city and a formidable network of informants from all social strata, and yet only one friend. Sciascia has created a memorable outsider detective in the Emilian Bellodi, whose concern about the Mafia and its pervasiveness at a time when many Italians were unwilling to believe that the Mafia even existed is considered by many of the locals to be typical Northern prejudice and ignorant, patronizing interference in the

89. Gianrico Carofiglio, 2002.

90. Gianrico Carofiglio, 2003.

lives and governance of his Southern cultural inferiors.⁹¹ Bellodi's status as outsider contributes to the difficulty he faces in breaking through this reluctance to acknowledge, discuss, or confront the Mafia problem, which must be done in order to solve the case and catch the guilty parties. In the end, he returns home to Parma unsuccessful, but determined to return to Sicily, a place he has come to love despite her deep flaws and all the misfortune her met with there, ending the novel with the phrase, "Mi ci romperò la testa" ["I'm going to break my head over this."]⁹² The novel ends, then, without a solution but still not without the suggestion of hope, embodied in the example of the outsider Bellodi, that Sicily (and Italy) will find the detachment, integrity and determination that are needed to acknowledge and confront the Mafia problem. An outsider's perspective and an insider's intimate knowledge seem to be what are most needed, if not yet trusted and accepted, in Sciascia's Sicily.

Maione and Ricciardi, as a detective team, need to be able to negotiate all levels and subtleties of the social construct of Naples, but they do not always succeed without help. When Bambinella, in many ways the ultimate outsider due to being transgender and pursuing an illicit profession, tells them just how far outside the everyday world of the city they are, it is definitely worth pondering:

"Brigadie', certe volte mi fate tenerezza. Vivete in una città come questa, fate il mestiere che fate e non sapete le cose che fanno tutti quanti. Perciò ci sto io, qua, che vi devo informare. Tra voi il vostro bel commissario muto che non ride mai, siete fuori dal mondo."⁹³

91. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 34.

92. Leonardo Sciascia, *Il giorno della civetta*, 129.

93. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il posto di ognuno*, 68.

[“Brigadier, sometimes you melt me. You live in a city like this one, you do the work you do, and you don’t know the things that everybody knows. And so here I am, and I have to tell you. Between you and your mute inspector who never laughs, you two are out of this world.”]

Laughter functions as a sign of social belonging, and its absence signals a lack of connection with others. Ricciardi makes few connections because of the oppressive affect that seeing *il Fatto* has on him, but even Maione needs help from Bambinella to discover facts that are common knowledge, if you move inside the right circles.

The Ricciardi novels create tension between social belonging and inclusion, proper social behavior and maneuvering, and effective policing and proper procedure. Ricciardi’s superior, Angelo Garzo believes (wrongly) that he possesses them all:

Pensava di possedere tutti i requisiti: bella presenza, ottime relazioni, una famiglia perfetta, dedizione al lavoro, iscrizione al partito e partecipazione a ogni iniziativa politica, attitudine a compiacere i superiori e polso fermo coi sottoposti. Si considerava dotato di capacità organizzative, era un presenzialista coscienzioso e costante, moderatamente mondano e, a proprio giudizio, simpatico a sufficienza. Ma in realtà si trattava di un inetto.⁹⁴

[He thought he possessed all the requirements: good presence, excellent connections, a perfect family, dedication to his work, membership in the party and participation in every political initiative, the attitude of appeasing his superiors and having a firm hand on his subordinates. He considered himself gifted in organizational abilities, he was a conscientious and constant participant, moderately wordly and, in his own opinion, sufficiently sympathetic. But in reality one was dealing with an inept.]

When Garzo tells Ricciardi he is too direct and should work with more diplomacy within the complicated social and bureaucratic system of diplomacy and favors, Ricciardi replies:

94. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 51.

“Liberissimo di conferire l’incarico ad altri, dottore. Io lavoro così. Secondo le procedure, mi sembra.”

“Ah, ma certamente! E io non mi sogno minimamente di assegnare ad altri l’incarico. Non c’è nessuno che potrebbe risolvere meglio questo caso. Per questo vi ho cercato così presto.”⁹⁵

[“You are free to assign the responsibility to others, sir. This is how I work. According to procedure, it seems to me.”

“Ah, but certainly! And I do not even dream about assigning the responsibility to others. There is no one who could solve this case better. For this reason I looked for you so soon.”]

In the end, the reader must side with Ricciardi, who places effective policing and professional integrity above social manipulation and belonging. When he refuses to participate in the system of favors that Garzo believes makes the city and the police force function, Garzo has no choice but to let him because Ricciardi does, in fact, produce the most consistent results in the department. Remaining aloof from colleagues and an outsider to the internal politics of the police force makes him a better detective, and a better citizen.

Montalbano, in contrast to the socially anxious Ricciardi, most of the time fits seamlessly into the world of Vigàta and surrounding towns, relishing the local scenery and especially the local gastronomy. However, it occasionally happens that the reader is reminded that Montalbano is not a native to the area, having been born instead in Catania, over one hundred kilometers away from the real-world location of the setting of the novels in Camilleri’s hometown, Porto Empedocle, in Agrigento. That Montalbano’s birthplace is *not* purely fictional could in itself be significant, lending the character more reality than the caricatures with whom

he works and comes into contact (Catarella, etc.). Montalbano's dialect is even slightly different from the local vigatese; in fact, Camilleri's use of language and dialect in the series is extraordinarily complex. Rather than a duality or hybridization of language and dialect, Montalbano's world operates on a continuum of multiple linguistic registers, with not just one *lingua* nor one *dialetto*:

Egli sa che una lingua e il suo mondo non si traducono interamente in un'altra e non sono interamente comprensibili dall'esterno. E dunque non ha altra strada che la traduzione, rispetto alla quale Camilleri opta per il metodo proposto da san Girolamo, che di fronte ad un *testo* da tradurre prima di tutto raccomandava di badare al senso e non alle parole.⁹⁶

[He knows that a language and its world cannot be translated entirely into another, and they are not entirely comprehensible from the outside. And therefore there is no way open to him other than translation, for which reason Camilleri opts for the method proposed by St. Jerome, who in front of a *text* to be translated, first of all recommended that one should see to the meaning and not to the words.]

Perché il commissario di origine catanese che lavora nell'agrigento parlava, nei primi romanzi del ciclo, un italiano un po' più disturbato dal siciliano di quanto non avvenga negli ultimi.⁹⁷

And so the inspector of Catanian origin who works in Agrigento speaks, in the first novels of the series, an Italian that is a little more disturbed by the Sicilian than occurs in the final novels.

This linguistic continuum from standard Italian to semi-educated Italian to *dialetto italianizzante* [Italianized dialect] to dialect proper, a continuum that in any case favors meaning over the

95. Maurizio De Giovanni, *Il senso del dolore*, 54.

96. Paolo Maninchedda, "La traduzione del mondo siciliano" in *Lingua, storia, gioco e moralità nel mondo di Andrea Camilleri*, Ed. Giuseppe Marci, 60.

words themselves is a major component in the intense, particular realism of the series, its specificity still not impeding the universal appeal of the characters and the setting. Camilleri's use of language and dialect also opens a window onto issues beyond the linguistic: ideological and anthropological concerns also come to the fore in Montalbano's and other characters' observations about and navigations within the linguistic continuum.⁹⁸

Italy's present and future linguistic reality, the survival of dialects, and the tenuous relationship between dialects and standard Italian—these are issues that continue to be debated and re-examined constantly today. It is not my intention to attempt to define Camilleri's position on political questions dealing with language and dialect. I am instead an outsider's experience) of them. Sicily is a region whose dialects enjoy a more vibrant and living existence than many others. Mutual intelligibility is sometimes a challenge, not only for characters in

97. Massimo Arcangeli, "Andrea Camilleri tra espressivismo giocoso e sicilianità straniata" in *Lingua, storia, gioco e moralità nel mondo di Andrea Camilleri*, Ed. Giuseppe Marci, 227. Footnote 107.

98. Paolo Maninchedda, "La traduzione del mondo siciliano" in *Lingua, storia, gioco e moralità nel mondo di Andrea Camilleri*, Ed. Giuseppe Marci, 59. "Vi sarebbero dunque autori nazionali che innestano colori, sapori, vitalità sul corpo antropologico esausto della tradizione letteraria italiana, e vi sarebbero autori dialettali che concepiscono il mondo e lo rappresentano attraverso l'universo simbolico e storico di un'altra lingua, diversa da quella italiana. Camilleri sta sul piano linguistico con i primi e sul piano ideologico e antropologico con i secondi, nel senso che la sua intenzione principale è proporre il caleidoscopio siculo come paradigma del tutto, degli aspetti essenziali, classici, ossia primitivi e durevoli, della persona, della società e del potere." ["There are therefore national authors who insert colors, flavors, vitality into the worn-out anthropological body of Italian literary tradition, and there are dialect authors who conceive of the world and represent it though the symbolic and historical universe of another language, different from the Italian. Camilleri stands on the linguistic plane with the former and on the ideological and anthropological plane with the latter, in the sense that his principal intention is to propose the Sicilian kaleidoscope as a paradigm of the whole, of the essential, classic, that is primitive and enduring aspects of the person, of society, and of power."]

Camilleri's novels but also for the reader. Montalbano's familiarity with the local dialect is more than adequate most of the time, but he still occasionally has to ask for clarification. In the familiar sardonic comic style of the series, Montalbano must ask a witness what she means by the local term *cuculùchira*:

"Nun lo sapi che è? Oh binidittu Diu! Tutti lu sannu che è! E io comu fazzu a spiegaricillo?"

"Ci provi."

"Allura... dicemu ca è granni squasi quantu 'na musca, vola di notti e fa luci."

Una lucciola!⁹⁹

The almost absurd, roundabout description of a common firefly seems to serve no other function than comic relief, but the discovery of the meaning of the term will turn out to be relevant to the case for the purpose of understanding the origins of a murdered girl and her friends. This lack of common local knowledge that "tutti lu sannu" ["everybody knows"] echoes a similar lack of awareness on the part of Commissario Santamaria in the novel set in Torino, *La donna della domenica*; the dialect phrase "La cativa lavandera a treuva mai la bon-a pèra" ["The bad laundress never finds the good rock"] seems to be nonsense at first, nothing more than an irrelevant, meaningless saying about washerwomen and pears. When the non-torinese detective finally has it translated for him, however, discovering that the dialect term *pèra* refers to rocks (in Italian, *pietre*) rather than pears (*pere*) and to a particular geographical

99. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 131. "You don't know what it is? Oh good God! Everyone knows what it is! How am I supposed to explain it?" "Try." "Okay... let's say it's about as big as a fly, it flies at night and gives off light." A firefly! (my translation)

location, it turns out to be the key to the entire case.¹⁰⁰ Both instances involve a detective at an initial disadvantage due to his lack of local knowledge and dialectal differences, but Montalbano's direct and immediate approach to filling in his gap of knowledge (asking immediately for clarification) shows he is at greater ease with his surroundings and seems a great deal more realistic and pragmatic than the approach of Santamaria; the Sicilian detective's reputation for bull-like impatience serves him well here as it often does. Nearer the beginning of the same novel, the infuriating but irresistible Catarella defends himself to Montalbano after getting yet another surname wrong, "Comu si chiama si chiama. Basta che vossia accapisce di chi parlo, dottori" [It's called how it's called. It's enough that you understand what I'm saying, sir.]"¹⁰¹ In the end, understandability does matter to Montalbano and to the reader. Linguistic and other disadvantages to being an outsider in Vigàta continue to need to be overcome expeditiously, even after the detective has been resident there for years, likewise many readers of Camilleri.

Given the potential disadvantages of the novels operating on this complex linguistic continuum where meaning is not always immediately accessible to the characters or the reader, what then are the advantages, and how do they compensate for the former? Firstly, this linguistic complexity is essential to the intense realism of setting and location in Montalbano's

100. Fruttero & Lucentini, *La donna della domenica*, 474: "Già, questi terroni non capivano niente. Sillabò al poliziotto il proverbio intero, glielo tradusse, gliene spiegò il senso." ["Right, these *terroni* (derogatory slang for a Southerner) don't understand anything. He recited the entire proverb to the policeman, he translated it for him, and he explained the meaning for him."]

101. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 13. "He's called how he's called. It's enough that you understand whom I'm talking about, sir." (my translation)

world, as well as characterization,¹⁰² but beyond the recreation of a certain place is also the creation of universalities within the particularities located there. The pervasiveness of dialect and its varied relationship to Italian, even in the narrator's voice, places the reader in contact with a particular cultural reality. Gian Luigi Beccaria describes the pleasure of experiencing Italy's linguistic multiplicity as similar to the pleasures of leisurely travel: "Il viaggio ci fa varcare dei confini, le vecchie barriere storiche ed etniche tornano a manifestarsi verbalmente" ["Travel makes us cross borders; the old historical and ethnic barriers come back to manifest themselves verbally."]¹⁰³ Both literal travel and the figurative travel of encountering a fiction world like Montalbano's "ci mette a diretto contatto con la non uniforme realtà linguistica italiana, con la quale più o meno il dialetto interferisce" ["puts us in direct contact with the non-uniform Italian linguistic reality, with which dialect interferes to a greater or lesser extent."]¹⁰⁴ The "voyage" of reading a Montalbano novel also carries the reader beyond borders, where one meets with verbal manifestations of ethnic and cultural barriers, with the implication that these barriers, too, can be confronted and surpassed.

The particularity of these linguistic and cultural barriers being confronted and overcome in the Montalbano novels, through the intense realism that they help to create, conversely also make the novels appeal universally, not only to other Italian readers who have varying degrees of unfamiliarity with the Sicilian setting, but also to non-italophone readers and viewers of the

102. Massimo Arcangeli, "Andrea Camilleri tra espressivismo giocoso e sicilianità straniata" in *Lingua, storia, gioco e moralità nel mondo di Andrea Camilleri*, Ed. Giuseppe Marci, 228.

103. Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Per difesa e per amore: La lingua italiana di oggi*, 213.

104. Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Per difesa e per amore: La lingua italiana di oggi*, 214.

television series. While the problem of intelligibility may at first create some feelings of estrangement from the characters and setting, it is important to recognize that the existence of dialects has not impeded but rather enriched the development of a shared Italian culture.¹⁰⁵ I argue that inherent in the reality of Italian dialects is the creation of intimacy and familiarity that carries over from the real world into the world of the novels and the reader's experience of them: "[I dialetti a]ssicurano al parlante un secondo livello, quello più liberalmente familiare e casalingo, spesso più intimo, talvolta il momento dell'affettività" ["[Dialects] ensure for the speaker a second level, that which is more freely familiar and domestic, often more intimate, sometimes the moment of emotionality."] ¹⁰⁶ Camilleri's multiple uses of dialect literally invite us into Montalbano's home of Vigàta, which is also a simulacrum of his own hometown, Porto Empedocle. They are an invitation to experience the humor, the folk wisdom, the daily lives and conflicts of the characters in their own familiar and intimate setting. Shared experiences and meaning despite superficial differences, confronting and surpassing barriers both tangible and intangible, these are the cautiously optimistic, universally appealing possibilities that the novels imply through their linguistic variation and specificity.

105. Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Per difesa e per amore: La lingua italiana di oggi*, 227: "Le barriere linguistiche, i dialetti diversi, non avevano mai impedito l'universalità di una cultura popolare. Diversi i dialetti, ma simili se non uguali i contenuti, la visione del mondo."

106. Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Per difesa e per amore: La lingua italiana di oggi*, 217.

VII. Conclusion

When a crime writer devotes special care to the representation of one or another aspect of the setting, it is always worthwhile to pay close attention. A highly developed setting and sense of place, as I have mentioned before, features frequently in detective novels in general, but can be especially illuminating in the Italian *giallo* because of the country's long history of regionalism and localism. More than just providing the novels with a sense of realism or contributing to the tone of the novel, the setting can also fulfill many other narrative and ontological functions. It functions as a major element in the construction of characters, especially the detective character, giving them richer, more complex identities. It connects the narrative and the characters to a real-world geographical and temporal context, or deliberately distances it from the same, in either case often challenging our received notions of geography and its relation to crime and violence. It can even reveal and challenge our reactions to the reality of violence and death.

Most importantly, perhaps, the setting grounds the action of the novel in *a* world – if not precisely corresponding to *the* real world – without which it is not possible for the reader to fully enter the story. The detective character, as the main source of point of view in the *giallo*, is often our best guide to the setting, in how he identifies with and reacts to his context and surroundings, however fallible he may turn out to be. This grounding of the *giallo* and the *giallo* characters in a realistic world is essential to one of the most vital functions of the Italian *giallo*, that is, to uncover, reveal, and critique the currents and underpinnings of corruption, violence,

and crime in Italian society. In a previous chapter, I further explore this function of the *giallo* as social and cultural uncovering and critique through an examination of how the genre and the detective character in particular identify with and react to figures or institutions of authority and organs of law and order.

Chapter 3

What's So Funny About the *Giallo*?

Humor and Social Conscience in Television Adaptations of the *Giallo*

*"Laughter helps things slide into the thinking."*¹

Introduction

The Italian television detective is quite often a contradictory character, whether adapted from literature or an original creation, a type of character the screen seems especially suited to.

One of the longest-running and most recognized examples of this breed of original TV detective is to be found in Ispettore Cattani, the protagonist of the perennial favorite *La Piovra*,² the first and most internationally successful Italian drama series in the modern style, referred to as an Italian “antidote”³ to imported American series like *Dallas*.⁴ Cattani is described by Milly Buonanno as having the following contradictory traits: he is “an unforgettable icon of the popular hero,” “a typical Italian character in his captivating mixture of honesty and unscrupulousness, exhilaration and despondency, in his vacillation between a desire for justice and a thirst for vengeance, in a deep anarchism betrayed by his impatience with the restraints of legal formalities.”⁵ The conflicted and conflicting nature of the TV detective is a large part of where the humor comes from in certain TV adaptations of the *giallo* that follow Cattani and *La Piovra*; the screen not only welcomes the conflicted detective but also makes for a felicitous translation of the multiple frames of reference involved in humor, even though Cattani’s character does not utilize humor a great deal. The first two television protagonists I examine in this chapter, Ispettore Coliandro and Commissario Montalbano, follow a similar paradoxical model to Cattani, but as I have mentioned before in the latter’s case, there is more to their characters than merely an engaging set of contradictions, and I would hesitate to use the word “vacillation” as Buonanno does to describe the play of conflicting impulses and ideologies that drive their actions on either the page or the screen. To “vacillate” hints at inconsistency or

1. Terry Pratchett, *I Shall Wear Midnight*, 2010.

2. *La Piovra*, Raiuno 1984-2000.

3. Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama & Beyond*, 51.

4. The television drama genre is called by the English word “fiction” in Italian.

fickleness, but these Italian detective characters, like so many others, exist in a perpetual state of negotiating multiple grave conflicts in the society around them, in the system they serve and participate in, and in their own sets of values and desires. Therefore, rather than being inconsistent, they embody the challenging complexity of human relationships and reasoning about social concerns, as well as the complexities of the successful humorous framing of these concerns.

The character Guido Guerrieri from Carofiglio's series, however, is a somewhat different case. This detective rarely makes one laugh at himself or others, and the character's use of irony and sardonic criticism is especially pointed and pessimistic, and occasionally driven by outrage. The short-lived television series⁶ based on these novels fails to successfully reproduce even so much ironic, dry humor as is found in the novels, and while it does convey the breadth and gravity of the social ills and institutional corruption Guerrieri faces in the novels, it also falls short of depicting the inner conflicts and paradoxical desires these problems bring out in the character in a compelling manner, meaning that the solution of the case is at once less problematic and less satisfying on screen. As a result, the humor is all but completely absent, and the screen Guerrieri is a very dull character, despite perfectly adequate acting on the part of Emilio Solfrizzi. It is easy to see why more episodes were never produced.

Today's Italian *fiction* (the borrowed term roughly correlates to the American term *TV drama*) television programs have their roots in the *sceneggiato*, a format that translates as

5. Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama & Beyond*, 45.

6. *L'Avvocato Guerrieri: Testimone inconsapevole* and *Ad occhi chiusi*, 2007-2008.

“scripted novel”; “It was... not thespian art but novels that turned out to be the main vehicle of widespread diffusion of humanistic and literary culture with respect to the Italian republic.”⁷

The *sceneggiato* was essentially a genre of literary adaptation, with various distinctive characteristics but always with the purpose of presenting an already published work in a new format to the wider public, the most popular television genre in Italy from the 1950s to the mid-1970s.⁸ Their source texts included popular fiction as well as classics, by Italian and international authors. When commercial networks began to take hold of the industry in the 1970s, television production changed to become more Americanized and to include more and more imported series, especially Anglophone, Japanese, and Latino programs.

Foreign crime and detective shows have been extremely popular in Italy, as have print mysteries, but the most popular in recent years have not been those that employ the humorous mode to the same extent as the *Coliandro* and *Montalbano* series, and other Italian *giallo* series have employed humor to only a very limited extent, if at all. On channel 38, GialloTV, Italian viewers can see British, American, and New Zealander detective dramas like *Brokenwood*, *Lie to Me*, *Missing Persons Unit*, *Law and Order*, and *Scott and Bailey*. With some few exceptions like *Brokenwood* (which features an exasperatingly eccentric detective and some kooky rural characters), the trend leans heavily toward more serious series that have very little room for the paradoxical or the seemingly absurd. The detective characters often have sobering emotional or psychological problems, addictions, broken relationships, or other serious flaws. Contrast these

7. Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama & Beyond*, 15.

8. Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama & Beyond*, 16.

to other more humorous Anglophone crime and detective shows that are far less known in Italy such as *iZombie* (possibly the most overtly paradoxical: a zombie medical examiner induces pseudo-psychic visions to help solve crimes), *Psych* (a con artist with an eidetic memory and juvenile sense of humor fools the police department into thinking he is psychic), *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (a parody of cop dramas and buddy-cop comedies), and *Dirk Gently* (a detective who refuses to look at small individual clues in favor of the “interconnectedness of all things”); in the first three, it is arguable that they are comedies that happen to also be crime shows, and *Dirk Gently* is nearly impossible to classify, just like the novels by Douglas Adams. I have yet to come across an Italian crime series quite like any of the above that frames the entire investigation narrative on a paradoxical premise or that privileges the telling of jokes at the same level or above coherent solutions to crimes. Apart from the three series that I examine in this chapter, *La Piovra* is a gritty, noir-adjacent series that makes very little use of humor. *Don Matteo* is similar to an English “cozy” mystery or G. K. Chesterton’s *Father Brown* stories, featuring a wise and charming Catholic priest who helps criminals own up to their sins and accept responsibility, relying a great deal on empathy, but humor is not central to Don Matteo’s technique. *Romanzo criminale* does feature a police detective, but Commissario Scialoja is hardly the central figure of either the novel by De Cataldo or the television miniseries; both follow the lives and desires of the Roman street gang to an equal or greater extent than the detective, lives that are too strained by pervasive violence to allow for much humor.

There are also national literary traditions with internationally successful detective novels that employ little to no humor at all: Henning Mankell’s *Wallander* series, or Steig Larsson’s

Millennium Trilogy starting with *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*. Notably, the foreign screen adaptations of each series feature considerably more use of humor than either the original novels or the native-language screen adaptations; this contrast is especially sharp when one compares the Swedish and British adaptations of *Wallander*. The English-language film and television adaptations of these examples have been extremely successful abroad, more so than the Swedish ones, but it would be problematic to assert that this is due to the employment of humor alone, or at all. One factor may be the readiness of international audiences to promote and consume English-language products over less familiar languages. Another question to ask is whether audiences may have different expectations for print and for screen media in regards to tone and the use of humor in detective stories, but this seems not to be the case as Mankell's and Larsson's novel series have also been extremely popular internationally without the insertion of new humorous modes into the translations. At the very least, this shows that humor is not strictly necessary for the detective story in general, but that when humor plays a crucial role in the original novel as it does in Carofiglio's work, to eliminate it from the screen adaptation poses significant problems for the novel's ability to engage in social issues and for its overall success.

Just as the successful paradoxical Italian detective characters Montalbano and Coliandro adapt extremely well from the page to the screen, in general, so too does the social and political humor translate well, and not by coincidence. The correlation between successful humor and the presence of internal conflict and paradox within a character will go a long way to explain the question, "where does the humor come from?" in these series. As many sociological scholars

of humor have argued to varying degrees, humor and comedy frequently rely on the juxtaposition of differing or even incongruous frames of reference or modes of interpretation.⁹ Pirandello, in his essay *L'umorismo* (1908), distinguishes between the *comico* and *umorismo* (which is slightly different from, but very close to the English term *humor*) by noting that the former is a mere *avvertimento del contrario* (noticing of a contrast or paradox) and the latter is a *sentimento del contrario* (awareness or understanding of the paradoxical).¹⁰ It is the humorous mode, for Pirandello, rather than the more superficial comic, that opens up to understanding of the other, to empathy, and to social critique. With this understanding of the humorous mode's potential, the detective character is an excellent vehicle for socially and politically conscious humor, with his multiple frames of reference already built in, so to speak. The conflicting interpretations involved in a joke or a humorous situation may be incongruous, but when conjoined they still make some kind of sense; they reveal an alternative hidden meaning. This makes humor naturally allusive, but not necessarily empty of serious content, nor any less capable of conveying serious meaning or engaging the literary imagination that is so important to Nussbaum's idea of poetic justice, as discussed in the first chapter. According to her model of the ideal world citizen, narrative imagination, "the ability to think what it might be like to be in

9. "Humour occurs when there is a sudden movement between, or unexpected combination of, distinct interpretative frames," a process termed 'bisociation' (Michael Mulkay, *On Humor*, 27). Or, to put it another way, humor is the mode of perceiving of a situation through two or more frames of reference that are consistent unto themselves but mutually incompatible. The term 'bisociation' was coined by Arthur Koestler (1964) and other humor analysts use variants of the same concept (e.g. Fry, 1963; Douglas, 1968; Suls, 1972; Paulos, 1980; Raskin, 1985).

10. Luigi Pirandello, *L'umorismo*, II.2.

the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story,"¹¹ is absolutely essential. I would argue that narrative imagination operates in harmony with a Pirandellian *sentimento del contrario* to reach that goal of understanding the other and engaging in meaningful social critique.

The humor found in Camilleri's and Lucarelli's detective stories and episodes occurs on all levels of the narrative. There are the humorous anecdotes, side-plots, and jokes told by the characters, especially detectives Coliandro and Montalbano themselves, which are obviously crucial for understanding how the social humor of the novels and the television series are related and build upon each other. But humor and comedy can also occur on the level of narration, in the textuality of the novel, the story, or the episode.¹² This is made especially clear in the case of the Guerrieri miniseries (*telefilm*); the irony and sardonic humor on the level of the narration in the novels is disappointingly absent on screen, even though the general plot and dialog are more or less faithful to the original text. The narration of television is analogous but not identical to textual narration; there are certain key differences all stemming from the

11. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 10-11.

12. There is not a critical consensus on whether television and film can be said to have a narrator, much less what such an entity would consist of, or to what extent it can be compared to the narrator or implied author in a printed work. I do not wish to replicate the debate here, so I will be taking the reasonable, middle-ground position that television does have a unique kind of narration, analogous but not identical to literary narration. Television narration operates on a different level than a mere voiceover or the "eye of the camera," though it may employ those and other techniques. I am not concerned here with the question of whether television has a narrator-agent with its own subjectivity. Subjectivity is not strictly necessary for the presence of humor in narrative; what is necessary is narration, an organizing agency or an authority that rationalizes the work's structure. For variations on the definition of 'narrator' as an agency that

obvious: one medium is exclusively verbal, the other is primarily visual with other components including the verbal. Most importantly for the purposes of examining the transformation of humor from print to screen, television narration shows different emphasis, specificity, and focus than the narration of a novel, which open up different possibilities for the interpretative frames that create humor. When the textual narration is successfully translated to the new medium, the humor and accompanying social critique is preserved.

I am primarily concerned with the relationships between the particular novels and television dramas in question and the function and ability of humor in both types of narrative to raise awareness and confront social and political inequalities, prejudices, and injustices. Simon Critchley summarizes the three most prevalent theories of humor in the Western world: the superiority theory dating back to Platonic and Aristotelian thought in which we laugh at the infirmities and shortcomings of others,¹³ the Freudian relief theory in which we laugh to release nervous energy, and the Bergsonian incongruity theory in which we laugh at the perception of the incongruous.¹⁴ Perhaps no one of these theories fully explains every reason why human beings have ever laughed, but some version of the latter goes the farthest toward explaining the crucial social functions of laughter and humor, the near impossibility of translating culturally-specific jokes, our ability to laugh at ourselves, and the extraordinary power of humor to

organizes the work, and an argument in favor of a non-human narrator-agent in screen media, see Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, Chapter 8, "The Cinematic Narrator."

13. Aristotle's theories on laughter, oddly enough, play an integral role in a historical *giallo* not included in this chapter: *Il nome della rosa* by Umberto Eco. A lost, potentially scandalous work of Aristotle on comedy (the fictional accompaniment to his works on tragedy in the *Poetics*) is the impetus for the murder plot and subsequent investigation.

challenge our frames of reference for the society and culture in which the humor is situated and out of which it is produced. As mentioned above, theories of humor based on incongruity, bisociation, or multiple interpretative frames, have been favored by sociological humor research, and are the ones I have found most useful for exploring the functions of humor in these detective shows and novels.

For Bergson, Crichtley, and others, humor is essentially human and necessarily social in nature. Bergson claims, "To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one."¹⁵ Crichtley adds, "in listening to a joke, I am presupposing a social world that is shared, the forms of which the practice of joke-telling is going to play with. Joking is a game that players only play successfully when they both understand and follow the rules."¹⁶ If we accept that humor is created by the bisociation of two or more frames of reference, or by the reversal of two or more concepts, which are normally incompatible, it is natural to conclude that these concepts and frames of reference must be shared by the joke-teller and the hearer in order for the joke to succeed. Ted Cohen adds that there exist "asymmetrical jokes" whose meaning can change (sometimes this means becoming more or less offensive) according to the identity of the teller and the hearer, especially if they do not share a common background and other conditions for the joke.¹⁷ Crichtley agrees with Helmut Plessner that laughter is a demonstration

14. Simon Crichtley, *On Humour*, 2-3.

15. Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, 65. Quoted in Simon Crichtley, *On Humour*, 4.

16. Simon Crichtley, *On Humour*, 4.

17. Ted Cohen, *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters*, 32-33.

of humanity's distance from the immediacy of animal life, since it requires a degree of reflection toward the self and one's experiences thus far unknown among animals.¹⁸ I would add that this self-reflection entails a reflective attitude toward the social and cultural context that makes the humor possible, meaning that humor naturally encourages social and cultural critique, sometimes in surreptitious ways.

Andrea Camilleri employs a multitude of types of humor in the Montalbano series of novels, most of which are consistently replicated and sometimes developed further in the screen series. The more closely the humor is tied to the imaginary local *vigatese* context, usually, the more successful the joke or comic scene, but humor specific to a Sicilian or Italian context is also widely abundant and successful in both versions of the series. The broad appeal of this very particular humor underscores Critchley's interpretation of the dilemma of the universal vs. the particular: "to say that humour is universal is, of course, to say almost nothing, or very little. All cultures laugh.... So what? ...Humour is local and a sense of humour is usually highly context-specific."¹⁹ As the humor in a Montalbano novel relates more closely to the specific experiences of the detective, the more the incongruities it references will be familiar to the larger Italian audience, since Italian culture itself is so tied to the local. There is not enough work done yet on European television and its use of humor to come to a consensus on whether this is unique to Italian culture and television, but I would hazard that it is at least a defining characteristic. The

18. Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, 28. Critchley is, however, skeptical of Plessner's certitude that animals are categorically incapable of reflection. For Plessner's use of humor in philosophical anthropology, see Helmut Plessner, *Mit anderen Augen. Aspekte einer philosophische Anthropologie* (Reclam, Stuttgart, 1982).

more the incongruities are visible in this way, the more potential they have to function as social reflection and critique, all the while accessing the pleasure the audience has in a good joke so as to avoid making this now serious discourse pleasant instead of onerous. Curiously, the specificity of the humor in the Montalbano series also manages to appeal to foreign audiences, for example in the United Kingdom, where the BBC picked up the television series. Foreign audiences might not 'get' all the incongruities in every joke, but they are apparently able to access enough of them for Montalbano to continue to be a beloved character outside the confines of Italy.

This is not to imply that humor *always* necessarily challenges existing structures or norms, however. It can and is frequently employed to do the reverse. Lucarelli's *Ispettore Coliandro* series not only presents the humor in certain contradictions, it also utilizes humor in contradictory ways, forming a much more problematic reflection on Bolognese and Italian culture and official institutions. First and foremost, the audience typically laughs *at* Coliandro far more often than *with* Coliandro, unlike the Montalbano series in which the title character invites us to laugh at local absurdities with him. Coliandro has a female co-protagonist in the text series, Nikita, but she is relegated to a sidekick role in the television series. Even in the books, though, his relationship with her is colored by the detective's ingrained chauvinism, although Nikita herself is an empowering female figure, and Coliandro's jokes about her to his colleagues are decidedly sexist. Coliandro himself is far from an instinctive, natural investigator, unlike Montalbano. He succeeds largely by coincidence and dumb luck, a

19. Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, 67.

bumbling *inetto* or a *schlemiel* (to borrow the Yiddish term) trying to be cool, working in a police system rife with inefficiency and corruption, occasionally stumbling on the solution to a scandalous case. These circumstances around Coliandro's character complicate the cultural and social implications of the humor of the series, which is especially focused on gender- and justice-related concepts and interpretations.

To sum up, Montalbano is witty and playful and the series ultimately presents a cautiously optimistic sense of humor that criticizes social and systematic ills with a certain amount of empathy. Coliandro is a butt of jokes while his own offensive jokes are as awkward as he is. Guerrieri is witty, but in a more pessimistic, sardonic way than Montalbano. His internal monologue, like Coliandro's, is full of hard-hitting witticisms that he, unlike the latter, is wise enough not to utter aloud for their lack of tact and compassion. Instead, the first-person narrative reveals his personal anxieties and the moral outrage behind the "kernel of irritation" driving him to find the truth. Or, at least, such is its effect on the page, the miniseries omitting this level of narration almost entirely. These *gialli* establish a pattern of humor and social critique functioning in terms of paradoxes and multiple frames of reference on several different levels of narration. The successful translation of both the humor and social critique onto the screen depends on the successful reproduction (exact or analogous) of the incongruities and conflicts.

I. *L'Ispettore Coliandro*: The “Mistake” of a Character We Love to Laugh At

Carlo Lucarelli's crime-related works span multiple genres, from graphic novels to radio to essays to reality television. His Bolognese police detective, Ispettore Coliandro, first appeared in print as the titular protagonist of a series of short stories, graphic stories, and novellas (first published 1991-1994) and then migrated onto the small screen (*Ispettore Coliandro*, 2006-2010). At first glance, Coliandro seems to be merely a caricature, an inept, macho, sexist, racist cop with an obsession for Clint Eastwood's character in the *Dirty Harry* films (see *Dirty Harry*, 1971) and other American, noir, maverick-type figures— all of them fictional. On the surface, he is an offensive, awkward and xenophobic character.²⁰ As a cop, he is inefficient; he is actually assigned to the commissary at first because of past errors and incompetence. He stumbles upon serious cases and their scandalous solutions largely by accident. In the character's migration from page to screen, these brash but colorful qualities become even more pronounced, as the actor Giampaolo Morelli plays Coliandro with a decided swagger that just manages to remain realistic. The TV character also wears a campy 1970's-style wardrobe consisting of aviator sunglasses and retro leather jacket, later paired with a rotation of t-shirts from various American police dramas and law enforcement agencies.²¹ Coliandro's place in the world of Italian television fits neatly into the relatively newly minted tradition of Italian police

20. His awkwardness calls to mind the classic *inetto* figure perfected by Italo Svevo in his works, such as *Senilità* and *La coscienza di Zeno*. Coliandro's “male di vivere” [“pain of living”] does not reach quite the same gray, monotonous depths, but he shares with Svevo's characters the inevitability of his ineptitude.

dramedies, the hybrid drama-comedy genre born in the mid-1990s, the new formula owing its success to the huge popularity of crime television in general and to its contrast to American police series of that decade, which were going through a pessimistic and embittered phase.²² The screen Coliandro, in fact, seems at times a caricature of the print character, exaggerating his distinctive facets (i.e. admiration for the American cop of pop culture, a vast array of prejudices of all kinds, stubbornness, professional honesty, and ineptitude paired with dumb luck), apparently to increase his appeal for an Americanophile, largely male, nostalgic audience (or, if not nostalgic, young, male, and attracted to fashionable retro styling).

But to look no deeper at the series would be a mistake. Coliandro's brashness and offensive jokes hide an imperfect personal moral sense and strong resistance to professional corruption, as well as a remarkable dedication to policework despite an inevitable Italian jadedness regarding the efficacy of the system as a whole. In the same way, the series (print and television) use humor and caricature to disguise a thoughtful, incisive critique of Bolognese society and politics during one recent black spot in its history. The 1990s, the setting of the original novels, were the most active years of the Banda dell'Uno Bianca [The White Uno Gang], a criminal organization named for the distinctive and ubiquitous white Fiat Uno automobiles often used in their criminal activities. Coliandro the character is unwittingly located at the center of this tactic, utilizing humor, stereotypes, and prejudice to address indirectly larger moral and ethical questions of justice, corruption, professional conduct, and duty. This is not to

21. E.g. CSI, NYPD, and DEA, seen in Season 4 Episode 1, "666," *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, RAI, 2010.

22. Milly Buonanno, *Italian TV Drama and Beyond*, 118.

say, however, that either Coliandro's personal ethos of humor or the series' use of humor and irony overall is unproblematic. At least part of his appeal to Italian audiences may be that many people share his prejudices, especially his machismo, consciously or not. The humor of *Ispettore Coliandro* is both a tool for raising consciousness of political and social issues, and also an instrument of 'othering,' even when the stereotypes held by the title character are ultimately reinforced or subverted; even when the work as a whole is making Coliandro the butt of the joke instead of laughing with him.

Coliandro the character and the novel use humor in very different ways. Coliandro uses it primarily to assert social dominance and create a highly masculine persona, while his internal monologue in the stories reveals his inconsistencies, prejudices, and illogic as well as his persistent sense of justice and integrity. As a whole, the stories celebrate the complexities of having these contradictory drives and are cautiously optimistic about the social outcome of the narrative. Fate seems to step in and take care of Coliandro's foibles and missteps, which is at different times either reassuring or unsettling.

This section will focus on how the *Ispettore Coliandro* television and print series utilize humor to engage with stereotypes and injustice linked to power structures, gender, and race, beginning with the first. Both print and television series consist of codified, even formulaic episodes revolving around the central archetypal character, making it the perfect recipe for a successful television show, combining popular culture's fascination with crime with what appears at first glance to be a familiar, easily digestible crime-investigation-solution format with frequent moments of comic relief. The Coliandro print series ends and the television series

begins with the same story, *Il giorno del lupo*, the television episode (2006) being a relatively straightforward adaptation of the novel (1994), with either version providing much material for exploring power relations and gender stereotypes. Treated separately or in contrast to each other, the Coliandro series' print and screen incarnations are problematic; it is exceedingly difficult to pin down whether they, and especially the main character, use humor to reinforce or epitomize corrupt social institutions and gender stereotypes, or expose and undermine them. I argue that the series' humor overall does both, imperfectly, as conflicting but essential parts of the social performance of the narrative. Nussbaum argues that "good literature is disturbing... Because it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions."²³ The fact that we laugh at Coliandro for his "painful confrontations" with social realities that differ from his own thoughts and assumptions allows the literary humor both in print and on screen to engage in a process of addressing and confronting problems of social and political injustice, but is ultimately constrained by social norms and by the personal limitations of the character Coliandro.

I.A. Narrator, Narration, or Implied Author

Identifying how humor functions in both incarnations of the Coliandro series (and how they differ in this respect) requires first identifying the different sources and narrative levels of

23. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 5.

humor and comedy. I will be operating on the commonly accepted assumption that social humor and comedy frequently rely on the juxtaposition of differing or even conflicting frames of reference in order to confront power structures or social ills and the like. This merging of different frames of reference means that understanding the overall structure of the narrative is vital to discussing how the work creates its delightfully campy and problematic sense of humor. On the macro level, there is the question of what kind of humor the work overall produces, what frames of reference and assumptions are placed in contrast to each other, and how this is facilitated by the narrative structure. In the text Coliandro series, this structure consists mainly of first person narrative by Coliandro himself, with a large amount of internal monologue; he is a highly unreliable narrator, the reader finds, given his ignorance of the details of political and criminal activity in Bologna, and his many prejudices. The first-person narrative is occasionally peppered with corroborative evidence in the form of police reports, depositions, newspaper articles, transcripts of illegal wiretaps, etc., inserted between some of the chapters of first-person narrative, filling in the many gaps in Coliandro's knowledge. The fictional sources of this documentation rarely have a direct connection to Coliandro and his own investigation; the person responsible for recording them might not even be named, such as the anonymous "Privato Cittadino Curioso" ["Curious Private Citizen"] who, without authorization, records telephone conversations between "unknown individuals" who are clearly criminal parties in the mafia case Coliandro stumbles upon in *Il giorno del lupo*.²⁴ Since the author Carlo Lucarelli is named as the journalist who writes some of the newspaper articles in this body of documentary

24. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 271, 253.

evidence, the overall impression is that the reader has in her hands the story Coliandro has told to a journalist, who has then collected corroborative documents.²⁵ This Carlo Lucarelli the journalist functions as the implied author of the novels and stories.

Once the reader has “accumulated” enough of the documentary evidence that he knows more about what is actually going on in underground Bologna than Coliandro does (which does not actually take long), it becomes more and more apparent that the detective is merely stumbling into these clues, sometimes literally, and the reader can start to laugh both at the protagonist’s clumsy good (bad?) fortune in walking into enormous corruption scandals and the like, and at the unsettling disconnect between what the reader knows and what the detective character is aware of as the facts. For example, in *Il giorno del lupo* (print), between chapters IV and V, the implied author has inserted the transcript of a conversation intercepted by the Carabinieri (state police) between Salvatori, a mafia boss, and an unnamed voice, lamenting the turf war going on between their organization and a rival one led by a don Masino, and complaining that the other organization has violated their agreement because Salvatori has “lasciato spazio per crescere fino a qua!” [“left them room to grow this far!”].²⁶ The reader now has the names of the leaders of two organized crime groups whose territorial struggle is the main impetus behind all the events in the story thus far: a hacker sending a computer virus on disk via Pony Express, Nikita’s subsequent discovery of the virus disk with a

25. The narrative metalepsis goes even deeper when the author Lucarelli’s fictional newspaper expresses sympathy in an announcement that he is *in the hospital with three broken bones*, having suffered a rather suspicious “fall” down the three small steps in front of his house. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 330.

large wad of cash, her attempting to report the suspicious package and soliciting Coliandro's help, their effort to find out where the disk came from, finally resulting in Coliandro discovering the body of the intended recipient of the disk after illegally entering his house and discharging his weapon at the man's guard dogs. Coliandro has broken a few laws in this escapade and risks being prosecuted for them and possibly losing his job,²⁷ and he still has no idea who the main players are or what the main crime being committed even is yet (corruption of the legal system by the mafia bosses), but with this strategically placed transcript, the reader is able to start tentatively piecing it together.

So, where is the humor coming from in this situation? Firstly, the irony of Coliandro the police detective completely losing control, firing off bullets in a nervous twitch, almost as if in an attempt to calm himself by releasing tension, then emptying the magazine in a panic, obliterating three guard dogs. The reader reacts with a kind of horrified amusement at his extreme reaction: "Cado all'indietro, contro la finestra, e lo schianto dei cani che abbaiano contro il vetro alle mie spalle mi ributta in avanti. Allora perdo il controllo, tiro fuori la pistola e come un coglione sparo un colpo in aria" ["I fall backwards against the window, and the crash of the dogs barking against the glass at by back throws be forward again. So I lose control, I take out my gun and like an asshole I send a shot into the air."] ²⁸ This scene lines up with Pirandello's *avvertimento del contrario*, as well as a Freudian explanation of humor as a kind of

26. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 217.

27. Most notably, he has broken into a residence without cause. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 211-2.

28. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 213-4.

release valve for socially unacceptable desires. Coliandro in this moment is seemingly wholly unlike the self-controlled image he tries to project, but then again, is not his idol, Clint Eastwood's interpretation of Dirty Harry, also quick to shoot at danger? The main difference between the print and film versions of this scene is minor; on screen, Coliandro's panic and terror are more immediate, lacking the distance of his own hindsight as narrator. In the same scene, there is also the absurdity of Nikita confusing the odor of a dead body with "marmellata" ["jam"].²⁹ But most of all, the unsettling irony of the situation lies in the fact that Coliandro and Nikita have stumbled upon a mafia execution with no idea who is involved or why apart from the victim, and Coliandro, in total violation of all his training as a police detective, contaminates the crime scene in nearly every possible way and, moreover, fails to report the death of the accountant. What is left unstated, beneath the detective's horror at his own actions,³⁰ is the implication that he and Nikita may have contaminated the crime scene to such an extent as to compromise the apprehension of the real killer, the mafia hitman. Coliandro the Bolognese police detective, upholder of law and order, and Coliandro the reincarnation of Dirty Harry turn out to be irreconcilable, and the conjunction of the two identities is an absurdity. A horrifyingly dangerous absurdity, but not without a strong comic sense of the ridiculous.

Coliandro seems to fall into typically heterosexual male joke-telling and masculine tropes at the same time: his toughness must be performed at Nikita's expense and despite her discomfiture, and his joke-telling is formulaic and frequently motivated by the attempt to

29. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 214.

30. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 219.

achieve social dominance in a given situation. Jennifer Coates examines all-female and all-male situations in which humor is utilized socially, and observes that males tend to use humor to emphasize or reinforce power differences more often than females. In the classroom, “one of the ways that boys ‘do’ masculinity is by fooling around. Boys try to be cool and to avoid the label or ‘nerd’ or ‘geek’ [or, analogously, ‘*inetto*’].... Having a laugh and being cool make it very difficult for boys to engage seriously with academic work.”³¹ Coliandro exemplifies a more adult version of the same masculine performance of “having a laugh” and verbal dueling, constantly trying to come out on top and compromising his policework in the process. His joke-telling style is designed to reinforce his heterosexual masculinity, a constructed persona and identity in which humor is often found in the form of aggression toward whatever does not concord with that identity, especially anything that might be interpreted as a “failure of masculinity” or as subverting masculine dominance. It is a public show of machismo, similar to the “game of one-upmanship that begins in humorous play but often transforms into the threat of violence, and sometimes into violence itself” that Fred Gardaphé identifies in Italian-American culture and that has its roots in the figure of the conventional Italian male.³² Although Coliandro’s jokes rarely cross that line into violence, they are certainly defensive and aggressive, testing others’ ability to endure insult and asserting his own ability to protect his image from outside threats, real or imagined.

31. Jennifer Coates, “Gender and Humor in Everyday Conversation”, 152.

32. Fred Gardaphé, “Italian American Masculinities” in Chiaro and Baccolini, *Gender and Humor*, 245.

In the television series, the necessary information provided by the transcript of Salvatori's conversation is substituted by very short scenes interspersed throughout the episode of the "other" plot, the criminal, underground storyline. They are inserted with very choppy editing techniques, with little to no transition from the Coliandro scene to the mafia scene and back, and very little context provided for the latter. A casual viewer might dismiss them altogether at first as part of the "description" of the setting, as they sometimes occur shortly before or after establishing shots of urban Bologna. Similar to the reader in the print story, the attentive viewer must accumulate enough of these seemingly disconnected short scenes before being able to make sense out of any of them, and by doing so, the viewer realizes the identity of the accountant's killer and the motivations for all the mafia-driven crimes in the story long before Coliandro and Nikita do. Another aspect in which these scenes differ significantly from the print story is the portrayal of the mafia characters, especially the bosses and the hitman, in a very clichéd style. The hitman wears a long, dramatically sweeping coat and dark glasses indoors. The meeting and reconciliation of the mafia bosses is filmed in slow motion and precisely choreographed, an immediately recognizable, even laughable trope of the epic face-off between two rival gangs.³³ The effect is that there are two frames of reference through which to view the criminal element in the episode: as a terrible, dangerous organization that is responsible for one of the darkest chapters in the city's history, or as a tired cliché. The juxtaposition of the two interpretative frames is what creates the unsettling comedy of these

33. This visual structure is repeated often in various genres, not just mafia and western television series and films. Take for example the faceoff between the two vampire groups in

scenes, while also undermining the mafia's power to terrorize and dominate to a further extent than in the novella.

I. B. Irony and self-reflection

Another crucial difference between the humor allowed by the structure and media of the two main incarnations of the Coliandro series lies in the transformation of first-person narrative (print) into the mainly single character focus (screen). As outlined above, the print stories consist mainly of Coliandro's present tense, first person narrative with frequent internal monologue. This format allows for a bit more introspection on the character's part, more explicit reflection on the events of the narrative, and even moments of self-irony. The screen format sees the camera focused primarily on Coliandro, except during establishing and transitional shots and the short side-plot scenes mentioned above, but not replicating his point of view. Coliandro is the object of the camera's lens, but the camera does not inhabit his gaze. As a result, the screen character's opportunities for reflection and self-irony are much more limited; he can only reflect on events to himself and engage in internal monologue during transitional moments, which typically occur while he is in motion, such as while driving, walking down a corridor, or driving a car. He comes off as somewhat less thoughtful in general and less self-aware than his print counterpart, holding onto his macho persona more stubbornly without nearly as much introspection.

Twilight (2008), a film that takes advantage of nearly every cliché available.

A closer look at how the character of Coliandro is constructed in both series is also needed in order to see how the humor surrounding him is built. He is certainly a problematic character, with many qualities that on their own sound highly objectionable. Even his surname is frequently mispronounced by other characters as if it were a relative of the word “coglione,” roughly translated as “asshole,” or “coglioni” as “balls”. The author Lucarelli describes Coliandro in the preface to the stories as “machista, rambista e anche un po’ razzista” [“macho, Rambo-esque, and even a little racist”]³⁴ Coliandro’s negative traits are not to be dismissed; his author also calls him “una bella schifezza” [“a nice piece of trash”]³⁵ composed of three principal “errori” [“faults”]: uncompromising professional integrity in a highly corrupt justice system, the tendency to always end up in ironic and embarrassing situations, and obtuseness paired with strong animal instincts.³⁶ But somehow, he is still not just naive or a meathead, and neither is he the typical tragic figure of the anti-hero. As Lucarelli admits, marveling himself at the character he has created, Coliandro is also “onesto, sfigato, sempre nei guai, preso in giro da tutti... un perdente e un perdente onesto” [“honest, uncool, always in trouble, made fun of by everyone... a loser, but an honest loser”].³⁷ The first-person narrative in the print series opens the character up to vulnerability; we see not only his macho flaws (prejudices, stubbornness) but also his more “human” imperfections and un-macho virtues, like compassion, that leave him open to ridicule, humiliation and personal risk.

34. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, V.

35. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, VI.

36. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, VI-VII.

37. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, VII.

In the final chapter of *Il giorno del lupo*, Coliandro and Nikita are hiding from the mafia gangs and decide to sleep in the car instead of risking other accommodations that might be under surveillance, the start of a hilarious scene of thwarted arousal in which we laugh at Coliandro's expense yet again. Inevitably, Nikita removes some of her clothes for comfort and the two of them end up reclined together under Coliandro's jacket, Nikita repeatedly warning him not to try anything, to which he responds, "Vaffanculo" ["Fuck off"]. Just as inevitably, he becomes aroused, she is outraged, and he defends his "physiological reaction." Excuses are made on both sides, and they settle again into the car seat. Coliandro the narrator reports that Nikita "dorme tutta la notte come un sasso, la stronza. Io no." ["sleeps like a rock all night, the jerk. I don't."] ³⁸ Coliandro tries so hard to be tough and hyper-masculine like his fictional maverick idols but is still a "sfigato" and ends up being the butt of the joke, yet still a very sympathetic character. Our amusement at his expense has the effect of binding us to him, an important feature of the novel in Nussbaum's conception of the genre's empathetic power. ³⁹ The reader can laugh at him and feel empathy for him at the same time; in fact, it is through laughing at his hapless swaggering and fruitless attraction to Nikita that the reader ends up liking him.

On screen, more or less the same qualities are played out, but in the visual medium the emphasis shifts from Coliandro's self-narrative and internal monologue to the visual style and details and different details emerge. The sense is even stronger that these are meant to be

38. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 282.

39. See Martha Nussbaum's discussion of *Hard Times* in *Poetic Justice*, 35.

American-style action stories along the lines of *Dirty Harry*, whom Coliandro cites as his role model as a cop. Nikita even refers to him as “Ispettore Callaghan,” Dirty Harry’s surname, in various moments including on the last page of both *Falange armata* and *Il giorno del lupo*.⁴⁰ The stories’ stereotypical American-ness seems to be at least in part the source of Coliandro’s more objectionable and humorous personality traits. Starting with the opening titles, 1970s cop movies are the clear inspiration for the show as a whole as well as Coliandro’s character. The typeface is thick, white block letters like many 70’s TV shows, and very similar to the typeface used in the opening titles of *The Rockford Files* (1974-1980) and the original *Hawaii Five-O* (1968-1980), but the Coliandro opening is actually more cinematic in style than most TV shows from that decade, and most similar to the opening titles of two Clint Eastwood films, *The Good the Bad and the Ugly* (1966) and *Dirty Harry* (1971), with the still photos of characters, guns, bullets, and money scrolling across the screen accompanied by solid blocks of color and vintage 70’s rock music.⁴¹ The retro, campy styling leads the viewer to expect a fitting protagonist, and Coliandro certainly delivers visually, from his leather jacket to his aviator sunglasses, his open-neck shirts to his scruffy hair. There is an extremely strong element of physicality to the character, starting with his self-consciously macho stance; he clearly conceives of himself as a man of action and has trouble doing even simple tasks perceived as more intellectual, such as turning on an

40. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 180, 334.

41. Another interesting critical approach to Coliandro would be to examine closely the cinematic intertextuality of both the print and screen series. Coliandro and Nikita namedrop film titles frequently in print, and on screen Coliandro often says out loud or in a voiceover, “È come un film!” [“It’s like a film!”] or words to that effect.

unfamiliar computer.⁴² These visual elements not only fit perfectly into the overall style of the show, but they point the reader unmistakably at the traits of machismo, stubbornness, sexism, and racism that are stereotypes of the 1970s cop genre.⁴³

Still, Coliandro is unmistakable as an Italian character in an Italian setting, perhaps even more Italian and less American than he himself would like to admit. The episodes from each season are full of establishing shots of Bologna, as firmly situating the action there as the reference in the first episode to the Banda dell'Uno Bianca. The detective also has strong personal ties to the city through his father, a Bolognese cop who gave his life protecting judge Malerba (who turns out to be corrupt in the first episode).⁴⁴ Unlike the Hollywood maverick cops, action heroes, and idols of masculinity he admires (among those named are Chuck Norris and Humphrey Bogart), when Coliandro goes rogue, everything goes wrong. He ends up a caricature of the *noir* side of Bologna, functioning as a humorous negative archetype.⁴⁵ He becomes more an object of humor in the TV show than the stories; the visual details add more

42. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 195.

"Il giorno del lupo." *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

43. Ted Cohen, *Jokes*, Ch. 6, "Taste, Morality, and the Propriety of Joking." Like Ted Cohen explains about jokes that cause offense and discomfort (e.g. jokes that make use of stereotypes), it is possible to acknowledge something as humorous even while rejecting the proposition embedded in it as false and deciding not to pass on the joke or, in this case, imitate the controversial teller of the joke.

44. The actor Giampaolo Morelli is Neapolitan, but the TV series still maintains this backstory consistent with the print series.

45. The setting of Bologna is just as, if not more significant to the verisimilitude of the print series, since two years after the first standalone Coliandro novella *Falange armata* was written in 1992, the Banda della Uno Bianca scandal became international news. The details of the criminal organization's exposure made it "sembrava di leggere parte del mio libro" ["seem like they read part of my book"] (Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, VIII).

swagger, more exaggeration, more ineptitude, more awkwardness with women, less introspection. This might make him sound like nothing more than the worn out trope of the unintelligent, ineffectual policeman, and in laughing at Coliandro we are certainly being invited to laugh at the patriarchal institution of the police and at male pride in general.

However, when things start going right for Coliandro, it is because ultimately his desire for social dominance and *bella figura*⁴⁶ takes second place to his “kernel of irritation,” the detective’s inevitable drive to find out the truth of the case, his suspicion of institutions, and his personal integrity and sense of justice in the absolute, even though his pursuit of the source of “irritation” is inevitably disorganized and flawed. This makes both the print and screen versions of the character fit perfectly into the pantheon of Italian detectives; the point of Coliandro is neither that he is a buffoon nor that he is a jerk: he is, in the end, in a position of inviting the reader to participate in constant confrontation with failing power structures and conflicting concepts of justice even as he embodies them.⁴⁷ While the character embodies the “ambiguità ideologica di fondo dei romanzi di Lucarelli” [“ideological ambiguity at the heart of Lucarelli’s novels,”]⁴⁸ he is nearly as much a social healer as Carofiglio’s Avvocato Guerrieri or De Giovanni’s Commissario Ricciardi. It turns out a character can be a nexus for social critique

46. The Italian phrase for one’s outward self, the projection of ourselves that we show to the public, including appearance and behavior.

47. As Ridanpää points out, this use of “folk humour” (including caricature) is very Bakhtinian: “As emphasized in Bakhtin’s classic work *Rabelais and His World*, laughter, in the case of Bakhtin, folk humour and carnival, can be perceived as a shared, confronting attitude towards prevailing power structures.” Juha Ridanpää, “Politics of Literary Humour and contested narrative identity,” 712.

48. Giuliana Pieri, *Postmodern impegno*, 299.

as well as a morally ambiguous buffoon and a jerk; ironically, these last two qualities make the first stand out even stronger. Despite the fact that Coliandro has landed in the role of a detective without fully understanding the *impegno* of the office at the outset and his fulfillment of that *impegno* is largely the result of dumb luck, he has plenty of chances to relinquish the confrontation with corruption and failures of institutional justice that would be a return to personal and professional safety, taking none of them. I would argue that in the print series, at least, the “kernel of irritation” is also experienced in part by Lucarelli the journalist character, who functions as a historian or documentarian of sorts, when Coliandro is too unfocused and out of the loop to fulfill those roles, which are part of Pieri’s characterization of the detective function.⁴⁹ When Coliandro does not fulfill all his duties as a detective, the novel or novella as a whole takes on some of that role itself. In the television series, the complementary function of Lucarelli the journalist is omitted entirely, and as a result Coliandro’s *impegno* is only partially fulfilled, despite his continued good intentions.

Coliandro the character also makes use of humor in his own discourse and internal monologue, both in print and in voiceovers in the television series. He seems to be somewhat aware of his ironic characteristics, more so in print than on screen. In print, he makes himself vulnerable to the reader by retelling the thought processes of fear, doubt, and panic when he is in danger. On screen, we are rarely privy to these types of intimate thoughts, and the actor’s swagger and physical displays of confidence hide much of the character’s vulnerability that comes through in his self-reflections in print: “...cazzo... non sono di ferro neanche io...comincio

49. Giuliana Pieri, *Postmodern impegno*, 298.

a piangere... con la faccia nelle mani, perché mi vergogno" ["...fuck... I'm not made of iron, either... I start to cry... with my face in my hands, because I'm ashamed."]⁵⁰ Especially in the presence of Nikita, the print Coliandro exhibits deep emotional conflict and insecurity, whereas on screen he comes off as mainly awkward and socially inept with women. At the end of *Il giorno del lupo*, there is a moment when the two characters have finished their escapades and now the intimate connection that mortal danger creates is coming to an end. Coliandro the narrator describes Nikita's and his own awkward gestures with an honest and delicate touch. They are clearly drawn to each other despite the knowledge that any relationship would be impossible for various social, professional, and personal reasons. Nikita walks away, "Finché non scompare tra la gente e non la vedo più" ["Until she disappears into the crowd and I don't see her anymore"].⁵¹ Coliandro's final internal comment is "Merda" ["Shit."] The screen series does not allow him a similar moment of intimacy either with Nikita or the viewer.

For analogous reasons, the screen series misses out on much of Coliandro's dry, ironic humor found in his internal monologues in print. Ted Cohen claims that jokes and humor are conditional on many elements, including the affective disposition of the audience; the degree of success can depend a great deal on the shared feelings and emotional disposition of both the teller and the hearer.⁵² Coliandro uses humor to try to assert dominance and build confidence; his jokes are often at odds with the overall spirit and intent of the print work as a whole and add another dimension to his objectionable qualities, but they are also sometimes terribly funny

50. Carlo Lucarelli, *Falange armata*, 151.

51. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 334.

and a biting critique of his colleagues and the institution of the police. They are successful because the hearer of the joke is the reader, rather than his colleagues or other characters; this audience relationship is much harder to establish on film without voiceover narration. For example, Coliandro likens his punishment of working in the commissary to working in a grocery store rather than a police station.⁵³ Of his colleague Trombetti he says to himself, “Lí per lí mi chiedo se mi sta prendendo per il culo, ma poi mi ricordo che Trombetti ha il quoziente di intelligenza piú basso di tutta la Questura di Bologna, cosí mi stringo nelle spalle e non dico niente” [“Right then I ask myself if he was taking the piss, but then I remember that Trombetti has the lowest I.Q. of the entire Bologna police headquarters, so I shrug my shoulders and say nothing”].⁵⁴ In instances like this, the series masterfully engages both the comic and humorous modes; it can be read both as *avvertimento del contrario* and *sentimento del contrario*. This is exactly the incisive humor that the TV viewer is missing; on the rare occasions when Coliandro tells similar jokes on screen, it sounds much more offensive and inappropriate than when they remain unspoken thoughts because of the asymmetrical understanding between the onscreen teller and hearer. Consider, for example, if Coliandro had teased Trombetti about his IO out loud: if the joke spread, it might lead Coliandro and others to internalize the negative assessment of Trombetti and treat him badly, one of the conditions Cohen identifies as a reason to not share a joke, instead of remaining a moment in which Coliandro uses a biting joke to critique not only Trombetti himself but the bureaucratic police force that hired him and

52. Ted Cohen, *Jokes*, 21.

53. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 185.

prioritizes mindless record keeping at the expense of more direct solutions to problems of crime and injustice.⁵⁵ Shared between Coliandro and the reader instead, the joke is still in poor taste, but not actually harmful to Trombetti. The television medium limits the amount of internal humor we are privy to by necessity; constant voiceover seems to be the only narrative technique analogous to first person narration, and that would be intrusive in the extreme. The script simply does not give the character as much room for ironic and humorous critique of persons and institutions. It spends more time in the comic mode than the humorous.

I. C. Racial Jokes and Stereotypes

In the print series, encounters with racism are much more violent and racism itself is more obviously a social ill than in the screen episodes; in the television series such encounters come across as problematic clichés only implicitly indicative of deeper systematic prejudice and cultural appropriation. The novella *Falange armata* details the investigation and exposure of a group of Aryan extremists, “naziskin” [“skinheads”].⁵⁶ Their extreme and wide-reaching racism makes Coliandro’s occasional, clichéd, unintentional and ignorant racist comments and assumptions apparent for what they are: the product of the cultural surroundings that he

54. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 186.

55. Ted Cohen, *Jokes*, 79-80.

56. The *naziskin* in Italy originated during Mussolini’s tenure and the anti-Semitism that erupted during that time, but since then they have directed their attacks at other races and ethnicities, most recently immigrants and especially those of African descent. See Angela Zanotti, “Undercurrents of Racism in Italy,” 1993, p. 174.

partially finds around himself and partially constructs, rather than deliberate hate speech. The racism of the skinheads is too dangerous and violent to be any laughing matter and its threatening presence lessens the humor of Coliandro's incongruous racism. In *Falange armata*, Coliandro arrives at the scene of an attempted burglary and immediately assumes the one Moroccan he sees is the criminal: "Lancio un'occhiata di disapprovazione all'agente anziano, poi tiro uno schiaffo secco sulla coppa del marocchino" ["I throw a disapproving glance at the elderly officer, then give the Moroccan a dry slap."] ⁵⁷ Once the other officer corrects him, saying the Moroccan is the victim, he kicks the actual suspect in the behind and treats the officer with disrespect to cover his embarrassment at his mistake, is though rudeness to all somehow lessens the gravity of his racially biased assumption. At another point, Coliandro has to sort out some error-ridden paperwork regarding a naturalized Chinese man's passport with a name that does not match the one on the accompanying documents. His internal remark disapproving the maddening practice of allowing the Chinese to naturalize, with their impossible names, comes back on himself when he realizes that "quel coglione" ["that asshole"] ⁵⁸ who wrote down the Chinese man's name incorrectly in the original paperwork was, in fact, himself. In another story this behavior might be primarily comedy at Coliandro's expense as a casually racist buffoon, but in the atmosphere of neo-Nazi attacks that are claiming lives of civilians and police officers, they take on a much darker tone as Coliandro accidentally slips into similar modes of thinking

57. Caro Lucarelli, *Falange armata*, 58-9.

58. Carlo Lucarelli, *Falange armata*, 65.

and acting.⁵⁹ His attitudes reflect a growing undercurrent of racism in Italy that has been exacerbated by right-wing anxiety about the growing presence of immigrants in the country since the 1990s (the official title of these persons is not longer “migranti” or a cognate, but “extracomunitari”, an orthophemism that emphasizes their other-ness while being hypercorrect in its description of their status).⁶⁰ It is especially problematic that Coliandro does not experience any significant consequences from his xenophobia in the climate of *Falange armata* or the other stories and episodes; the rather unsatisfying reasons seem to be that 1) he is the protagonist and therefore somewhat immune, 2) he is a male, native Italian and therefore even more immune to negative consequences than he would be otherwise, and 3) his ignorance and awkward expression of xenophobic attitudes (when his offense is accidental, rather than intended as a joke) induces a comedic, if not humorous reaction and therefore absolves him of some of the offense. The latter is especially true on the television show, where the visual comedy verges on an uncomfortable kind of slapstick.

When deliberately telling jokes and not functioning as the butt of them, Coliandro follows what Rod A. Martin identifies as the formula for typically male humor: his “canned” jokes follow strict schemas and are typically aggressive, or at least designed to assert and maintain dominance in social situations.⁶¹ Most of his racist and sexist jokes and posturing, however, remain unspoken; they are generally part of his internal monologue, since as soon as

59. Carlo Lucarelli, *Falange armata*, 52.

60. Angela Zanotti, “Undercurrents of Racism in Italy,” 1993, p. 176.

61. Rod A Martin, “An Overview of Psychological Research” in Chiaro and Baccolini, *Gender and Humor*, 129-130.

he thinks them, something often happens to undermine them and turn the joke back on him: “riempio il bicchiere fino a metà e lo mando giù in un sorso, tanto per farle vedere chi è il maschio, qui. Poi mi volto verso la finestra che ho alle spalle, perché non si accorga che ho le lacrime agli occhi” [“I fill the glass halfway again and I send it down in one gulp, to show her who’s the man here. Then I turn to window behind me, so she doesn’t notice that my eyes are tearing up.”]⁶² His internal assessment of the female magistrate Longhi interprets her aggressiveness and detachment as sexual frustration and extreme authoritarianism, a typical misogynistic reading of female authority figures: “È più fredda di un ghiacciolo... Potrebbe fare la parte di un nazista in un film di ebrei se non fosse per le calze nere...” [“She’s colder than a popsicle... She could play the part of a Nazi in a film about the Jews if it weren’t for her black stockings....”]⁶³ The whole internal monologue, the description of Longhi as a popsicle especially, tries to hit a comic register. Instead, the whole set of images is so clichéd and so overpowered by Longhi’s obviously superior competence that Coliandro gains no dominance or prestige with the reader by comparison. Coliandro seems to be self-aware enough not to utter most of the similar sentiments he has out loud, lessening their offensiveness for other characters if not for the reader.

On screen, Coliandro tries to make jokes about groups he views as inferior, especially racial and ethnic minorities. He again follows the typical male formulaic humor described above, but it comes off as possibly even more offensive, since it is now both visual and verbal,

62. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 222.

63. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 260.

and less frequently 'censored' as part of his internal monologue in the form of voiceovers. In the first episode, he is in an elevator at the police station with a black man (who is smoking) and a white woman when he goes on a voiceover rant about "questa gente" ["these people"], culminating in tearing the cigarette out of the black man's mouth.⁶⁴ The black man turns out to be a fellow cop, so in his embarrassment Coliandro passes his incredible insensitivity off as obsessive enforcement of the no-smoking policy. It seems simply an amusing faux pas in which we laugh at Coliandro's expense, but it is actually part of a troubling pattern of the series' depiction and treatment of ethnic minorities as strange, mysterious, exotic, and fundamentally, incontrovertibly 'other,' and the protagonists insistence on treating them as such. In "La vendetta cinese,"⁶⁵ the episode is full of stereotypical depictions of the Chinese as secretive, exotic, violent, cunning criminals, etc. There are comic moments similar to the elevator scene, such as when Coliandro makes the "squinty eyes" gesture or mimics martial arts moves with sound effects. He also encounters a Chinese man in the office of a colleague and asks him what he is doing there. "Furto," ["Theft,"] he answers. Coliandro counters by automatically assuming the man is the thief and asking what he stole with aggressive 'tough cop' body language, but it turns out the man's car was stolen and the police just recovered it for him. Again, the audience has a laugh at Coliandro's expense, because he, a policeman who ought to know better, cannot distinguish between cops, victims, and criminals when race is a factor. Coliandro and the show as a whole are also sometimes guilty of *descriptive romanticism*, "the expression of a romantic

64. "Il giorno del lupo." *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

65. "La vendetta cinese." *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

longing for exotic experiences that our own familiar lives seem to deny us,"⁶⁶ especially in the way the detective ogles women of other races to "exotic" background music, highlighting their differences (some of which Coliandro only imagines) as excessively alien, seductive and mysterious.

In "Magia nera,"⁶⁷ Coliandro makes racially biased assumptions about a murdered African girl, the victim of what falsely appears to be a "voodoo" [sic] rite gone wrong. The detective carelessly identifies her as a prostitute to the press and says to his colleague Trombetti, "li manderei tutti a casa" ["I'd send them all home"]. He is punished for the public indiscretion by being assigned to accompany the victim's sister. He continues to make racist remarks similar to the above, and apparently thinks they make amusing jokes, but his colleagues, especially Trombetti, disagree and criticize him for saying them. Coliandro's racism can overall be characterized as pseudo-comic, ignorant, and only somewhat conscious; he never crosses the line into overtly malicious racism even though his xenophobia does significantly decrease his ability to be unbiased in his job as a police inspector.

Since Coliandro's racist humor is not shared by the other characters, causing his jokes to fail and making him look foolish, one might think that the series is taking a firm anti-racist position, exposing racial bias and racist discourse as unjust and outmoded. Critchley explains this key to success or failure in jokes: "in listening to a joke, I am presupposing a social world that is shared, the forms of which the practice of joke-telling is going to play with. Joking is a

66. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 124.

67. "Magia nera." *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

game that players only play successfully when they both understand and follow the rules.”⁶⁸

But Coliandro does not quite share a social world or a conceptual common ground with everyone around him. In his social world, most stereotypes are taken for truth, unquestioned, and so his tasteless jokes at the expense of women and minorities fail to reach the other characters. In print, we are implicitly invited to find some humor at Coliandro’s expense, sharing some more liberal social worldview—not with Coliandro the narrator but with the implied author who collects the detective’s memoirs and the supporting documents—in which Coliandro is an outdated, prejudiced, minor absurdity. In the TV series, however, while Coliandro is still somewhat laughable in his social failures, like “La vendetta cinese” does with Chinese characters, “Magia nera” actually supports racist stereotypes by characterizing nearly all the African characters as violent, sensual, exotic, subject to passions and greed, and/or habitual criminals. It also misidentifies the West African religion Vodun as “voodoo,” characterizes the religion as “black magic” and superstition, and utilizes stock pseudo-tribal drum music in the background of scenes dealing with the religion and its practitioners to further exoticize the mood. In the final scene, four young African men steal a police agent’s car with Africanized Italian-language music (a clear case of cultural appropriation) playing through into the final credits. Coliandro’s colleagues might disapprove of blatant racism and his racist jokes might fail as a result, but the episode as a whole instead exploits racist tropes.

Despite the fact that Coliandro’s racist humor fails to reach his hearers, this is not enough to successfully confront the systemic cultural racism that informs his humor and

68. Simon Critchley, *On Humour*, 4.

provides the formulaic structure for his offensive jokes and clichés. Nor is it enough that Coliandro is able to overcome his initial mistrust of all African people by listening to his ‘kernel of irritation’ that tells him there is more going on in the case than he first assumed. Fulfilling his basic role as a detective by following the crime-investigation-solution model to completion is insufficient to either make him a progressive hero or instill in the viewer’s imagination a new idea of racial and social justice in this instance; it is too easy to view the ‘good African’ characters as the exception to the stereotypes. The culturally acceptable, more insidious unstated racism present in the show’s narrative remains extremely problematic, not only in this episode but also in others,⁶⁹ regardless of the identities of the ethnic ‘other’ in question.

This is not to say that the print Coliandro character is not racist; he certainly is. But he is less so than his screen counterpart based on his ability to censor his offensive discourse, and the implied author of the print series is certainly guilty of far less ‘passive’ racism than the narrative of the television series. In the print series, the “*naziskin*” are unquestionably terrorists and their clear criminality and moral failure implicitly calls Coliandro’s lesser form of racism into question, challenging the reader’s imagination with the contrast between the two forms of racism and requiring us to make an informed evaluation of both, rather than dismissing or excusing the lesser. The dubious humor of Coliandro’s jokes may trick the reader into thinking, “I have had thoughts like that, but maybe that’s not a good thing either.” The screen series reaches no such level of ethical or moral implications in the episodes in question; with no ‘real’

69. Most notably, Season 3 Episode 4, “Cous cous alla bolognese” (feat. Bologna’s Muslim community), and Season 1 Episode 2 “Vendetta cinese” (feat. Bologna’s Chinese community).

harm done by the racism depicted and perpetrated by the episodes, there is no empathetic crisis, no challenge to the viewer's moral imagination.

There is still much work to be done in the service of understanding concepts and representations of race and racism in Italian culture and media productions, how immigrant culture in Italy is influenced by global black culture, etc., and I do not propose to fill those gaps here. The racism of both versions of the Coliandro character does indeed cue up Italy's colonial heritage,⁷⁰ doing a rather unsatisfying job of reminding the audience of Italy's past colonizing of Africa and its current status as an immigrant nation. In the context of the global intertextuality of Coliandro's pop culture obsessions, it is also a reminder of the weighty influence of "mediascapes" in forming identities; the term coined by Arjun Appadurai to refer to print and electronic media in production and dissemination and the images of the world that they create.⁷¹ That the print Coliandro series (if not the character) seems more or less aware of its own racism while the television series does not points to the latter at the very least participating in the continuation of racism in the national relationship to immigrants and the ethnic "other." All this is despite the comedy of Coliandro's jokes around race and the absurdity of his treatment of characters of other races; the television series mostly remains on the level of comedy, or of the *avvertimento del contrario*, rather than humor and the *sentimento del contrario*,

70. Despite Italy having been relatively less studied in the world of postcolonialism than England and France, for example, there is a significant body of literature proposing postcolonial theories specific to the Italian context, and re-reading the Italian literary canon through a postcolonial lens. See for example *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity*, Ed. Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, 2012.

which would lead to not only awareness but contemplation and some understanding of issues of race and xenophobia. The print series engenders considerably more Nussbaumian narrative imagination through the inclusion of documents and corroborative narratives from other perspectives than Coliandro's; the collection of narratives calls out for the kind of imaginative deciphering that Nussbaum sees as essential to intelligent citizenship. She emphasizes the difficulty of recognizing each other as diverse citizens of the same humanity;⁷² even if Coliandro is not the kind of sensitive, empathetic interpreter who can do this, perhaps the reader can be.

I. D. Nikita and Gendered Humor

There are further significant differences between the print and screen versions of the series, even if it does not seem to be the case at first viewing. There are even discrepancies in the overlapping story/episode *Il giorno del lupo*, especially in the relationship between Coliandro and the character Nikita (nicknamed for the main character in the Luc Besson film, *La Femme Nikita* (1990)), which makes a comparison of the print and screen series essential to any conversation about gender in the Coliandro franchise. The print Coliandro is already well familiar with Nikita, since she appears in the original Coliandro short story.⁷³ On screen, *Il giorno del lupo* is their first meeting. The screen Nikita is considerably less punk and less self-

71. Appadurai, Arjun, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy" in M. Featherstone, Ed., *Global Culture*. 1990, 295-310.

72. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 63.

assured than the print Nikita or her (their) Luc Besson namesake. Print Nikita is less of a caricature than either version of Coliandro, while screen Nikita is constructed of still resilient, yet softer and more feminine stuff, and is far more dependent on Coliandro's dubious heroics and policing skills to get her out of trouble than her print counterpart. It is not at all a stretch to imagine that screen Coliandro and his exaggerated, less self-aware chauvinism would be threatened by print Nikita's self-assuredness and status as co-protagonist.

In the print series, Coliandro is indeed co-protagonist with Nikita, although she appears in just two of the television episodes.⁷⁴ In some ways, the conflicting perspectives and attitudes typically observed in Italian detective characters exist between the two protagonists as a unit; his vulnerable vanity is contrasted to her independence and un-self-consciousness. His social sphere consisting mostly of cops is balanced by her connections to hackers, squatters, stoners, etc. The value he places on the performance of masculine tropes is countered by her apparent effortless sex appeal and strong individual identity. It would therefore be remiss not to discuss the characterization of Nikita in this chapter as well as the opportunities for humor that her presence creates. As mentioned above, Coliandro tries to use humor as one of many ways to assert dominance, but often fails, especially in front of Nikita. Nikita's presence is also an occasion for Coliandro to attempt to use typical masculine humor to assert his position in front of his colleagues, with little to no success. Her usual response in both media is different from that of his colleagues; she returns his banter in kind and the two play off each other, trading

73. The short story "Nikita" first published in *I delitti del Gruppo 13: Antologia illustrata dei giallisti bolognesi. 10 racconti*. 1991.

movie references and teasing remarks, Nikita frequently calling him “Ispettore Callaghan” (Dirty Harry), teasing him for his attempts at hypermasculinity rather than lauding him for it.⁷⁵

In print, Nikita is decidedly punk; she dresses in miniskirts, torn net stockings and black combat boots. This look apparently belongs too much to the fringes for television; the screen Nikita is more alternative than punk, with messy but un-dyed hair, cargo pants, and natural, organic jewelry. Both versions play in a band, but the genre of music corresponds to the look of the character in each case. Her toned-down image on television corresponds to the watering down of her personality traits, turning her from a protagonist into a sidekick at best. In print, Nikita better knows her own mind and exchanges banter with Coliandro on an even footing for the most part, except when her lack of education means that she misses a joke.⁷⁶ Nikita is the one to break up with Coliandro, asserting her will power and autonomy by telling him simply that she doesn’t like him.⁷⁷ When he gives her a hard time about driving without insurance, “Mi lancia uno sguardo così duro che mi fa venire i brividi e tiro indietro la testa con la netta sensazione che potrebbe darmi un morso” [“She throws me such a hard look that I get the shivers and I pull back my head with the definite feeling that she could be about to bite me.”]⁷⁸ Print Nikita’s habit of chewing the inside of her cheek is less an expression of insecurity than a sign of the inexperience of her age, an age difference that is maintained on screen. Like

74. Namely, “Il giorno del lupo” (2006) and “666” (2010).

75. e.g. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 221.

76. For example, she has never heard of *Casablanca* and Coliandro lets her believe it is a film starring Jean Claude Van Damme in order to cover up the fact that the reference to the Bogart film was bordering on the sentimental. (Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 334.)

77. Carlo Lucarelli, *Falange armata*, 179.

Coliandro, in print she is both more self-aware and self-assured, both more open to being vulnerable in front of her co-protagonist and more willing to call him out on his inappropriateness. When she catches him looking at her breasts months, if not longer, after they have broken up, she pointedly zips up her jacket: “mi fa capire che, come al solito, anche questa volta mi ha beccato...merda” [“she makes me understand that, just like usual, once again she’s caught me out...shit.”]⁷⁹ She gives Coliandro a harder time about his own foolishness and ill-formed opinions. Her namesake from the Luc Besson film,⁸⁰ while more violent and deeply angry and resentful toward all forms of authority than Lucarelli’s character, is notably characterized by her moral nonconformity, fierce survival instincts, and outspokenness, at least at the beginning of the film. Besson’s Nikita is in short much more credible as an inspiration for her Italian namesake on the page than on the small screen.

Examples of the characters’ exchange of banter as a basis for their friendship is found in both versions of *Il giorno del lupo*. The extraordinary thing about their relationship is that the mismatched pair exploits every square inch of their shared common ground through jokes in order to make their relationship survive. Their banter is highly affective in nature and conditional on shared feeling, preferences, and disposition. While on screen this is the first time the two meet, in print they have known each other for some time and have slept together, but never had a successful relationship more intimate than friendship. Early in the novella, when Coliandro gives Nikita a hard time for her reckless driving habits, Nikita responds with a look

78. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 191.

79. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 189.

and the rejoinder, “E che sei, un vigile?” [“what are you, a traffic cop?”] (a decidedly inferior rank of police officer).⁸¹ In the final chapter, Nikita teases Coliandro for having had a good idea for once (leading to the solution to the case), and he responds that he is equally surprised, then gives her a startling impression of Clint Eastwood’s Gunny snarling in *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986). She is alarmed at first, but then replies in a friendly, teasing way, “Sei scemo” [“You’re an idiot,”] and the two go off to smoke and eat breakfast together.⁸² Joking, teasing, and other forms of humor here serve to smooth over the many obstacles to friendship between two people who inhabit vastly different social spheres, have different educational backgrounds, and hugely diverse personal goals. It allows them to point out each other’s foibles, tacitly admit their own, and avoid openly discussing subjects that would lead them to argue, such as Coliandro’s barely suppressed physical attraction to her, by diffusing the sexual tension between them. Cohen would perhaps say that the common ground on which both their jokes and their relationship is based seems to be the unspoken acknowledgement that they are both a bit screwy and damaged and sometimes act like idiots. He notes that the best jokes are concise; “What matters is what makes the concision possible. What makes it possible is that so much can go unsaid. And why can it go unsaid? *Because the audience already knows it.*”⁸³ Conditional, affective jokes like these do not require the teller or hearer to believe the “knowledge” referenced in the joke, but merely an

80. Luc Besson, *La femme Nikita*, 1990.

81. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 191.

82. Carlo Lucarelli, *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, 291.

83. Ted Cohen, *Jokes*, 25.

awareness of said knowledge.⁸⁴ Thus Coliandro and Nikita can joke about each other's idiocy without taking it literally, and can leave their affective connection unsaid because the jokes between them assume it to be there and to not need saying. On screen, there is still some banter, but without the sense of shared history, the full effect of their camaraderie is missing, and the teasing allows them to merely tolerate each other more than anything. After she shows up in *Il giorno del lupo*, Coliandro claims that she is mainly an irritation,⁸⁵ although this is belied by his physical reaction to her presence and his suggestion that he take her case, even though she has come looking for another police inspector. Since Nikita on screen is a less developed character and cannot interact with Coliandro on an equal footing, the potential for shared humor between them is much reduced, as well as the humanizing effect that she has on Coliandro in print. Instead, her appearance and manner that contrast to a higher degree with the main protagonist's serve to throw his various irritating and charming attributes into higher relief, establishing his "look" and character for the screen series.

So much is the characters' relationship weakened that Nikita functions mainly as a plot device on screen, initiating the investigation phase of the plot and prodding Coliandro forward at times. When the case is over, so is her role in the narrative. On screen, Nikita's contributions to the investigation are more incidental and accidental than in print, even though superficially she says and does mostly the same things. In fact, when she exits the story at the end of "Il giorno del lupo" and Coliandro sees her ride off into traffic on her moped, it is more or less a

84. Ted Cohen, *Jokes*, 20-21.

85. Carlo Lucarelli, *Il giorno del lupo*, 203.

variation on the typical exit of the “Manic Pixie Dream Girl” stock character identified by Nathan Rabin.⁸⁶ Her purpose has been to give the male lead an impetus to embrace his true role, in this case, that of the investigator; her existence as a character is predicated on the male lead’s need for her inspiration and conversation, but in order to fill that role she must remain ultimately unattainable. Once he no longer needs her, she disappears. Only, in Nikita’s case, the trope has morphed into more of a Moody Alternative Dream Girl, more fitting for the *noir* setting of Coliandro’s crime-ridden Bologna than Rabin’s chronically cheerful version.

After Nikita disappears from the screen, other women feature in the series as secondary characters, on both sides of the law, but none of them come close to achieving the rapport between Coliandro and Nikita that exists in print; most are caricatures of variations of the *femme fatale* or ice queens. His colleague Balboni is a notable exception, in that she inhabits the “strong independent woman” trope instead. Coliandro is threatened by her toughness and efficacy on the job, and accuses her of trying to be “più maschile dei maschi” [“more manly than the men”], an empty, sexist criticism that she handily picks apart “Posso portare la pistola nella borsetta? No!” [“Can I use a purse to carry a gun? No!”] (implying that carrying a purse and other feminine trappings would be useless to a policewoman).⁸⁷ They exchange insults and animosity (e.g. Coliandro calls her “Rambo” to impugn her femininity and “garden gnome” because of her short stature),⁸⁸ rather than friendly banter. Without the shared connection, their bitter

86. Nathan Rabin, “The Bataan Death March of Whimsy.” *A.V. Club*, Jan 25, 2007.

<http://www.avclub.com/article/the-bataan-death-march-of-whimsy-case-file-1-emeli-15577>

87. *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, Season 3, Episode 1, “Sempre Avanti”.

88. *L’Ispettore Coliandro*, Season 3, Episode 1, “Sempre Avanti”.

interactions lack the good humor, the empathy, and the humanizing effect on Coliandro that his exchanges with Nikita had. His tasteless jokes at her expense only serve to underscore his misogyny, something he unfortunately never grows out of in five seasons, despite showing some promise in print by being capable of something resembling mutually beneficial friendship with Nikita.

Screen Nikita emphasizes Coliandro's attempts to cultivate a macho exterior that is slightly "vintage," like his preferred clothing. Sandro Bellassai describes the ideal man of the 1960s "boom" as "non più tirannicamente patriarcale; sarebbe dunque stato moderatamente liberale e tollerante verso le donne, ma anche incline ai piaceri della vita e ai beni voluttari; giustamente narcisista e individualista; brillante in società e competitivo; pragmatico, scettico e cinico quanto basta" ["no longer tyrannically patriarchal; he would therefore have been moderately liberal and tolerant toward women, but also inclined toward the pleasures of life and consumer goods; justly narcissistic and individualistic; socially brilliant and competitive; pragmatic, just skeptical and cynical enough."]⁸⁹ The typical man of the 1960s would have been only just "tolerant" of women but also wary of them gaining any more social, political, or economic capital because of the "threat" it would pose to men. Coliandro seems to have this model man in his head, guiding the internal justification of his prejudices, his offensive joke-telling, his tolerant but wary treatment of Nikita, his inept attempts at being a social luminary. Print Coliandro suggests that some prejudices are so deeply ingrained they never completely go

89. Sandro Bellassai, *L'invenzione della virilità*, 115.

away, though people can change for the better to a limited extent; screen Coliandro's character makes no suggestion of significant change being possible or even entirely necessary.

The only other way in which Nikita's presence in the screen narrative creates opportunity for humor is by providing an occasion for Coliandro to make sexist jokes in reference to her, again underscoring his ingrained sexism and either enamoring him to audiences looking for that kind of machismo, or exposing him to ridicule based on the absurdity of his exaggerated prejudices. In both versions of *Il giorno del lupo*, shortly after Nikita has brought Coliandro the material evidence that sets the investigation in motion and left again, Coliandro's colleague compliments him on landing such an attractive girl as Nikita. Coliandro, instead of recognizing their friendship, dismisses her in a joking manner as "una con chi esco" ["a girl I go out with"]. Coliandro is too concerned with his macho image to have a 'real' girlfriend or indeed an emotional life of any kind, so Nikita is merely "scopabile" ["fuckable"].⁹⁰ His humor about women, especially but not exclusively Nikita, depends on asserting male dominance and on the assumption of the perpetual availability of women. But his attempts at humor fall flat for the reader/viewer, because the audience is privy to the social interactions that precede the joke in which Nikita is unavailable and easily slips out of Coliandro's presence with a simple distraction. Despite his sexist jokes that continue through all five seasons, Coliandro with his exaggerated macho posturing and occasionally embarrassing failed sexual encounters becomes the laughable one instead. It is perhaps his greatest flaw as a TV character that he

90. Carlo Lucarelli, *L'Ispettore Coliandro*, 200.
"Il giorno del lupo." *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

engages primarily in the kind of typically male humor that emphasizes power relations (whether he imagines them accurately or not), and more often than not omits the function of humor that both sexes typically use, to create solidarity.⁹¹

Nikita and other women are often laughing at Coliandro, in fact. In the screen series in particular, Coliandro is called out for his sexist, racist, and generally immature remarks by many people, most notably by just about every woman who enters his life. After his partner calls Coliandro “scemo” and “imbecile” [fool, idiot] for his racist views about the Chinese,⁹² this evaluation gets repeated primarily by women in the episode, including the Chinese undercover police detective, and Coliandro’s niece Angelica.⁹³ In the following episode, Coliandro is ridiculed by an unnamed woman in a nearby car at an intersection for his irresponsible joking around with the police car radio.⁹⁴ Coliandro is the butt of many jokes, but more so the jokes of women than men. Perhaps this constant making fun and censure from other characters in the television series, especially those of the opposite gender, is an attempt to fill in some of what the reader gets from Coliandro’s internal monologue but which is absent from the screen. Print Coliandro’s self-reflection is imperfect, but not without irony directed at himself, such as when he curses himself for getting caught looking at Nikita’s breasts in *Il giorno del lupo*. With very little voiceover and few other ways to create analogous self-irony through the camera lens, perhaps it is necessary to have others point out the irony in his behavior and utterances instead.

91. Jennifer Coates, “Gender and Humor in Everyday Conversation,” 163.

92. “La vendetta cinese.” *L’Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

93. “La vendetta cinese.” *L’Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

94. “Magia nera.” *L’Ispettore Coliandro*. RAI. 2006.

The many, varied levels of humor in the Coliandro series create a complex commentary on the character, his relationships, on common stereotypes and the institution of the police force. The character himself makes wide use of humor to establish himself as a dominant white male figure at the expense of women and minorities, but also to cement his friendship with Nikita—at least in his print incarnation. On screen, his banter creates plenty of tension and helps move the plot but fails to create strong social bonds with either Nikita or Coliandro's colleagues. On the level of the television series' narration and the implied author of the stories and novellas, Coliandro's sexist and racist jokes are exposed as ridiculous and undesirable, but while the reader can laugh at him for this in both series, the television version also reinforces stereotypes and prejudices through characterization and styling. In the end, Lucarelli's evaluation of his character applies mainly to the print version. Maybe Coliandro is only sexist, racist, and macho on the outside and his 'true' self is not as much of any of those things as it first seems, but it is much harder to say the same of the screen Coliandro when he never moves past his sexist construction of his relationship with Nikita, and when the very narrative structure of the episodes reinforces his bad qualities instead of consistently exposing them to ridicule and ironic reversals.

Coliandro's flaws mean that he is far from fulfilling the role of a Nussbaumian poet-judge. That role is not filled by the implied author of the novels, either, with his anonymity and lack of direct engagement in the conflicts between corruption, risk, and *impegno*. If anything, the reader is called on to fill this office, taking part in judicious, empathetic spectatorship of Coliandro with all his contradictory parts and his larger social and institutional contexts. It is

the reader who must “go beyond empathy, assessing from her own spectatorial viewpoint the meaning of those sufferings and their implications for the lives involved,”⁹⁵ since Coliandro is definitely often wrong about what is happening to him and to Bolognese society.

II. Commissario Montalbano: Ironic Humor, *Sfogo* and Social Commentary

Andrea Camilleri's beloved character, Commissario Montalbano, is less an object of humor than he is an adept comic and ironist. He uses humor and irony primarily in two ways: first as a means of expressing criticism for things like hypocrisy, ineptitude, and social injustice, and second as an emotional release for the frustration and tension the character experiences in the face of the above and the conflict between "official" justice and justice in the abstract. The implied author and narration of the television series seem to be in fairly close harmony with the character on this point: the sense of humor, the comic strategies, and the implicit social critique are more or less the same on the level of how the character expresses humor through words and actions and how the narrative as a whole creates humor. In fact, the narrator, character, and implied author all seem to be in exceptional harmony on this question, which may account for some of the series' longstanding popularity.

95. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*, 90.

Some authors downplay Montalbano's potential impact on the reader/viewer beyond the "pleasure of reading,"⁹⁶ Not only is this a reflection of the tendency to think of genre entertainment as inherently of lower intellectual and moral impact, but also a reflection of attitudes toward the television medium as a whole and crime television in particular, attitudes that assume a passive viewer and treat the medium as "mind candy" or a panacea. I agree with Richard Sparks instead; while television (specifically crime television) is consumed passively at times, "in reality people are capable of many and varied responses to television, some of them quite at odds with one another, and some of them passionately engaged."⁹⁷ Rather than being exclusively a tool for promoting withdrawal and stupefaction, "Crime fictions address themselves to the anxieties of their inferred or target audience, by deploying narrative strategies which both evoke and yet contain the world's dangers.... [T]he audience, being disparate, are not uniformly entertained or reassured."⁹⁸ The crime fiction strategy I am most interested in is humor, since the humorous mode is also often downplayed in regards to its ability to draw the audience to meaningful engagement with their anxieties about society's dangers and problems. In Montalbano's case specifically, Sicily's historical and present day struggles with mafia and large-scale corruption create an atmosphere rife with anxieties and frustrations about the

96. Elena Past, *Methods of Murder*, 105.

97. Richard Sparks, *Television and the Drama of Crime*, 56.

98. Richard Sparks, *Television and the Drama of Crime*, 57.

island's past, present, and future, and Montalbano's ironic, witty sense of humor is perfectly adapted to engaging with those anxieties.⁹⁹

In this section, I will focus primarily on an early novel/episode, *Il ladro di merendine*, since it is the earlier seasons in the television series that exclusively adapt Montalbano novels and stories instead of introducing new storylines and plots. *Il ladro di merendine* is the third Montalbano novel but the first episode in the TV series (the first few episodes are in a different order from the novels). Humor in the Montalbano series and in this installment in particular takes a few different forms and fulfills several functions: curse words and linguistic taboos are part of the overall comic playfulness of the series. They play a part in the characters' reaction to frustration and anger, they help create empathy and facilitate critique simultaneously, and they play a significant role in maintaining linguistic registers and social cues, as well as lubricating certain social interactions. Ironic or sarcastic remarks about other characters and their personal traits reveals the cynical side of Sicilian humor while other instances exemplify the region's particular cautious optimism and the habit of using humor to bring lightness to tragedy and suffering. Comic side-plots and anecdotes create opportunities to reach for an alternate interpretation of the main plot, or to raise uncomfortable questions for the audience to consider. There is a remarkable harmony between the print and screen series in all these functions of humor and comic discourse, with only minor variations due to the nature of the respective media.

99. The use of the humorous mode in the television series can also be read as a push back against increasingly pessimistic meditations on mass media culture.

II.A. Curse Words and Biting Linguistic Jokes

Profanities and obscenities are not always expressions of humor, but the way Montalbano uses them, they frequently are, and their ironic and humorous use facilitates the criticism implied by each utterance as a whole. Taboo words have many potential discursive and expressive functions including denotation, euphemism, emotive expression, insult, and emphasis.¹⁰⁰ (Montalbano most often makes use of these last three.) The enormous flexibility of taboo words in general make them extremely useful for creating humor and irony, since multivalent words naturally facilitate the conjunction of multiple interpretative frames. As for the particular taboo lexicon used by Montalbano, he typically utters the most common of sexual or scatological taboo words like "cacare" ["to shit"] or "coglioni" ["balls"]. The frequency with which these words occur in Montalbano's speeches is noticeable, but not overwhelming, giving the impression that the use he makes of them is fairly ordinary for his social and professional context. There is also no significant difference between the taboo lexicon or frequency of use between the print and screen series.

The first use of an obscenity in either version of *Il ladro di merendine* is in the very first scene and represents a recurring comic situation in the series. Catarella the desk officer calls Montalbano on the phone early in the morning and, with his usual inability to be either concise

100. See Allan, Keith & Kate Burridge. "Taboos and their origins." *Forbidden Words: Taboo and the Censoring of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 1-28.

or comprehensible, manages to enrage the Commissario with irrelevant, inaccurate information instead of telling him that a dead body was discovered within their station's jurisdiction:

"Ci fu un morto acciso a Mazàra del Vallo."

"E che me ne fotte a me? Io a Vigàta sto."

["Somebody was killed in Mazàra del Vallo."

"What the fuck is that to me? I'm in Vigàta."]¹⁰¹

Nearly every time Montalbano communicates with Catarella, the conversation ends up seasoned generously with obscenities and confusion. Catarella is so incapable of speaking sensibly and so genuinely earnest at the same time, he is a fantastic example of the stock comic relief figure. For the character Montalbano, however, he is the most frustrating interlocutor possible and frequently impedes the Commissario's ability to do his job through unintentional obfuscation of relevant facts and names. In the television version of *Le ali della sfinge*, Montalbano convinces the local news channel to ask the public's help in identifying the murder victim and to give the TV station's phone number instead of the police station's, precisely because Catarella would make an unholy mess of the incoming messages.¹⁰² The print version of the same story begins with an early morning call from Catarella, and only after a tedious back-and-forth does Montalbano gain a reasonable summary of the situation so far:

"Catarè, vuoi vedere che so perché mi telefoni? Hanno trovato un morto. Ci 'nzertai?"

101. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 10. All translations of the novel, unless noted, are the work of Stephen Sartarelli in Andrea Camilleri, *The Snack Thief*, New York: Viking, 2003.

The Italian swear word "fotte" does translate literally as "fuck," which is unusual; the translation of any swear word is more often a word used in similar instances but with a different denotative meaning.

102. *Le ali della sfinge*, 2008.

"Sì e no, dottori."
"Dov'è che mi sbagliai?"
"Trattasi di morta fimminina."
Santiò.

["Cat, wanna bet I know why you're calling? A dead man was found somewhere. Am I right?"
"Yes and no, Chief."
"Where am I wrong?"
"Iss a dead lady, Chief."
He cursed the saints....]¹⁰³

Montalbano's swear words in the first example as in all his conversations with Catarella obviously serve as a much-needed *sfogo* or release valve for his frustration, which usually helps him avoid committing actual violence against the desk officer. As such, the swear words he uses in such cases are primarily emotive and emphatic in function, and as for their contribution to the humor of the situation, they emphasize both Catarella's hilarious ineptitude as well as Montalbano's overpowering emotional response. Their interchanges are somewhat reminiscent of a classic straight man-comic formula, like that of Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, if the radio and Hollywood producers had allowed those two actors to use obscenities in their routines.

There is more to these conversations than just a standard comic routine, however. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Montalbano has a complex and difficult relationship with the institution of the police force as a whole, as well as the bureaucracy of his station in particular. Catarella is not just an unwitting comedian; he is a metonymy for the inefficiency and blind, bureaucratic detachment of the police force that makes it incapable of administering

103. Andea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 12. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of this novel are from *The Wings of the Sphinx*, translated by Stephen Sartarelli, 2009.

true, humane justice. Catarella's utterances technically include information that is superficially factual, but lacking in awareness of larger contexts, failing to make connections between disparate pieces of information, and completely missing the point most of the time. In fact, Montalbano blames him for the newscaster's misunderstanding of the investigation currently underway regarding Francois' missing mother, Karima. On TeleVigàta, the newscaster thoroughly roasts the police force for expending time and resources "Al-la cac-cia di un la-dro di me-ren-di-ne!" "On-chas-ing-af-ter-a-snack-thief!"¹⁰⁴ This time Catarella ensures that the institution itself is also seen to lack the common sense that can only be exercised by an individual who makes reasonable deductions informed by emotions and human experience, like Montalbano. Technically, the information is not far from wrong; Montalbano has been searching for the child who keeps stealing snacks, but because he is missing and probably orphaned, not to prosecute him for stealing sandwiches.

Ironically, the second institution, the press, that exposes the police's supposed incompetence and wasteful nonsense fails to meet the same standards of common sense and reasonable deductions and takes Catarella's remarks at face value. (Sadly, this scene does not make it into the television series, the moments in which the viewer is shown the news channel are drastically abbreviated in general.) By making Catarella a comic figure instead of merely a humorless, horrifying caricature of the inept policeman, Camilleri plays on the reader's empathy for Montalbano's frustration, keeping the somewhat controversial critique of the institution implicit, an insidious but highly effective rhetorical technique for poking fun at the

104. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 119.

police and law and order. Camilleri here displays the usual cautious optimism, but also a strong sense that it is vital not to take any institution too seriously, not to raise them up so high in our estimations that they are no longer accountable to their citizens. The newscaster's failure to recognize what is essentially a joke to those with inside knowledge also hints at the danger of taking things too seriously at the risk of spreading misinformation.

The only significant difference in the humor created by Catarella and his relationship with the detective between print and screen is in the physical appearance of the desk officer in the television series. Catarella is only lightly sketched in the novels; his appearance is left mostly to the reader's imagination, and his characterization consists almost entirely of his peculiar way of communicating. The actor Angelo Russo brings inevitable specificity to the character's appearance; now the character is a bit on the heavy side, his eyes are very close together, his face is somewhat pock marked, he has a double chin and a crooked, bulbous nose, and his mouth is often hanging open in confusion. These details reinforce the overall impression of Catarella created in the novels, but it flirts with a fine line between characterization and caricature. With the necessary abbreviation of many dialogues in the episodes given the time constraints of television, the screen Catarella often crosses that line from mimesis to exaggeration, distracting at times from the critical social implications of his conversations with Montalbano. In *Le ali della sfinge*, Catarella once again butchers a name, this time of a deputy Garrufo, while reporting that the police station is out of gas money. Montalbano corrects him, and Catarella responds, "Comu si chiama si chiama. Basta che vossia accapisce di chi parlo, dottori" ["Is name is what 'is name is. All 'at matters is you unnastand

who I mean, Chief.”] This spontaneous metalinguistic observation from Catarella distracts for a moment from the incredibly frustrating fact of a police force that cannot afford for most of its officers to drive anywhere, and the momentary distraction adds furor to Montalbano’s silent tirade against the long list of “inutili scorte ai ministri, ai viceministri, ai sottosegretari, ai capigruppo, ai senatori..., quella non ammancava mai” [“useless escorts of ministers, vice ministers, undersecretaries, committee chairmen, senators...” “for them there was always plenty of gasoline.”]¹⁰⁵ Catarella’s unnervingly earnest and comically digressive dialog distracts him from the outrageously misplaced priorities of the establishment, though only for a moment, and his rant is left narrated but unspoken. In the television adaptation, Catarella’s distracting comic speech patterns remain, but Montalbano’s internal critique of the bureaucratic mess is omitted.

Frustration with Catarella is of course not the only occasion that leads Montalbano to use obscenities. Near the beginning of both the episode *Il ladro di merendine* and the novel, the detective encounters two women, a mother and daughter, who have seen a dead man in their building's elevator but failed to report anything or even check if the man was truly dead, giving the excuse that they are “persone perbene” [“decent people”],¹⁰⁶ implying that decent people should not be expected to have to deal with such distasteful matters as helping their neighbors in trouble or cooperating with the police. Montalbano sees this as prioritizing their reputation over any sense of compassion or civic duty. To punish them, he sends them to the police station

105. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali dell sfinge*, 12.

106. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 27.

to make a statement, which is also completely within his purview as the lead detective. However, instead of taking their statement himself, he leaves it to his subordinates, then tells them to send the women home with this message: "Che l'indagine continua. Accussì si cacano, queste persone perbene" ["The investigation is ongoing. Let them shit themselves, these decent people."]¹⁰⁷ Once again, the obscenity is clearly a *sfogo* for his frustration and disdain for such hypocrisy and bad citizenship. The image conjured up by the denotative meaning of the word "shit," though, is terribly, subversively funny; that these two hyper-respectable women might soil themselves as a consequence of not doing the responsible, civic-minded thing and helped another human being and the organs of law and order.

Montalbano also uses curse words liberally with the medical examiner, Pasquino; this case is a clear example of taboo words serving to cement a tense but amicable professional relationship. Ironically, the doctor uses *less* offensive obscenities the more upset he is: "'Che càspita vuole?' Aviva ditto càspita. Non cazzo, non minchia. Il che viniva a significari che era veramenti arraggiato" ["'What the heck do you want?' He had said 'heck,' Not 'fuck,' not 'hell.' Which meant he was really enraged."]¹⁰⁸ Montalbano takes this cue and matches the M.E.'s register perfectly, incorporating more numerous and transgressive taboo words as they discuss Pasquino's poker losses and the murder case, the exchange of curses lubricating the conversation and their relationship, and in the television series the conversation is nearly

107. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 31. (my translation)

108. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 60.

identical. They tease and insult each other in good humor, the reader/viewer amused by their linguistic transgressions, even if neither character dares laugh out loud at the other.

Italian is a language that rhymes rather easily, thus it also lends itself easily to puns, malapropisms, and word play; Montalbano is a master of these in the service of incisive irony, preferring the latter two to actual puns. Helen Zalzman expresses a possible reason why Camilleri and Montalbano omit that particular kind of linguistic humor: "Surely the most important thing about a word is its meaning, whereas that's almost an encumbrance to a pun, which reduces a word down to merely its superficial resemblance to another word."¹⁰⁹ Montalbano seems to relish the meanings of words too much, even taboo words, being an especially well-read character modeled after Leonardo Sciascia himself.¹¹⁰

II. B. Localism and Humor

When Montalbano slides into a lower conversational register to use these and other curse words, the actor often shifts into a more heavily accented and dialect-colored speech habits, as well. (E.g. "Accussì" is Sicilian, not Italian, as is the variation of the verb "cacare," which in standard Italian is "cagare.") This kind of code-switching can have various effects. It might create and reinforce rapport with his colleagues by signaling familiarity and social cohesion, or it can be simply an indication that informal speech between equals is more fitting

109. Helen Zalzman, "Ban the Pun."

110. Marcello Sorgi, *La testa ci fa dire*, 89-99.

in *vigatese* dialect than Italian. With his superior Mimì Augello, Montalbano uses little dialect at all, although he does use the informal form “tu”.¹¹¹ In conversation with Fazio, an inspector and closer to being Montalbano’s peer, both use dialect-colored speech the majority of the time.¹¹² Use of dialect can also be a signal of strong emotions and affective ties,¹¹³ paired with the strong emotive power of the curse words themselves. Camilleri includes such an idea in his author’s definitions of “dialetto” introduced to the 2016 edition of *lo Zingarelli* dictionary: “la lingua esprime il concetto, il dialetto il sentimento di una cosa: è diventata la base del mio scrivere” [“language expresses the concept, the dialect the understanding of a thing; this became the basis of my writing.”]¹¹⁴ According to Gian Luigi Beccaria, when Italians speak in dialect, it grants the speaker “un secondo livello, quello più liberamente familiare e casalingo, spesso più intimo, talvolta il momento dell’affettività” [“a second level, one more freely familiar and domestic, often more intimate, at times a moment of affectivity.”]¹¹⁵ A study of Ticinese children’s linguistic perception revealed that dialect, not Italian, is the language preferred for expressing

111. e.g. Chapter 2 of *Le ali della sfinge*, 24-26.

112. E.g. “Dottore, non oggi come oggi, ma da sempri ‘na buttana è ‘na fimmina che vende il corpo sò per dinaro” [“Chief, a whore’s always been a woman who sells her body, not just nowadays.”] Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 19.

113. Pasolini is another author known for valuing and problematizing the fraught relationship between dialect and Italian. Francesca Cadel, in *La lingua dei desideri*, sums up that for Pasolini, “la poesia in dialetto doveva rappresentare l’altra faccia della poesia, mai dimenticata, che si nasconde nella poesia in lingua, e ne costituisce il fermento segreto” “dialect poetry must have represented the other face of poetry, never forgotten, that was hidden within ‘language’ poetry, and constituted its secret ferment.”] Furthermore, “il dialetto rappresenta per lui un riavvicinamento ai luoghi familiari, un’ancora di salvezza” [“dialect represents for him a return to familiar places, an anchor of salvation.” (p. 19).

114. “Dialetto”. *Lo Zingarelli* 2017. Web. 17 Mar. 2017.

115. Gian Luigi Beccaria, *Per difesa e per amore*, 217.

affectivity in exchanges between adults and children.¹¹⁶ (This runs counter to many assertions made about the relative “value” of Italian and dialect in terms of the expressive potential of each; it is important, here, to distinguish between affective and “poetic” expressivity.) In the same study, children were ambivalent at times about preferring dialect or Italian, but while they found the former “difficult” and “strange,” they also described it as beautiful and fun, the language of emotions, family; it was for them a language of identity in a way that Italian was not.¹¹⁷ Accessing the audience's affective ties to family, home, etc. is a fundamental reason why humor is also so rhetorically effective, and Camilleri's masterful combination of humor, taboo words, and dialect show just how well both the author and Montalbano understand and exploit the complexity of human experience and emotions to promote critical reasoning and social critique.

The coincidence of humorous moments and the increased presence of *vigatese* dialect points to a function shared to some extent by both fiction and “fiction” (the Italian borrowed term for television drama). Of the latter, Prattichizzo points out, “lavora su un registro dell’immaginario, *punto di coincidenza di immagine e immaginazione*... ossia luogo per eccellenza in cui la trascrizione del reale può allontanarsi dai limiti dell’oggettività e inserirsi in una dimensione più soggettiva.” [“It works on a register of the imaginary, *a point of coincidence between image and imagination*... or a location par excellence in which the transcription of the real

116. Sandra Tommasini, “Il dialetto e l’Italiano è come un coniglio e una lepre, si assomigliano ma non sono uguali,” 37-38.

117. Sandra Tommasini, “Il dialetto e l’Italiano è come un coniglio e una lepre, si assomigliano ma non sono uguali,” 68.

can distance itself from the limits of objectivity and insert itself into a more subjective dimension.”]¹¹⁸ In the screen series, though, the dialect-heavy humor (exaggerated sometimes, such as with the character of Catarella) appears in higher contrast to standard Italian, I would argue, because of the addition of a soundtrack. Actually hearing the spoken registers between pure dialect and Italian creates an even stronger sense of this being a replica of our world and not “reality.” Vigàta is not a “real” place any more than the *vigatese* dialect and its jokes, but as a possible world like our own, it functions as a way of reading the real “e a sua volta ci invita a leggerlo nella stessa maniera” “and in its turn it invites us to read it in the same way.”¹¹⁹ And this is what the readers and viewers in the Camilleri Fans Club have done, going so far as to create an online *vigatese*-Italian dictionary¹²⁰ that purports to help one “orientarsi meglio nel Camilleri-linguaggio” [“better orient oneself in Camilleri-language,”] with the added benefit of bolstering the fan community in the ability to imagine inhabiting and communicating in the fictional world of Vigàta.

Humor and localism in the form of dialect are so closely connected that one might expect to see a great deal of the Sicilian landscape in the television series. At first glance, this is certainly the case, although the ratio of internal scenes to external ones is sometimes higher than in the novels, due perhaps in part to the costs associated with shooting on location. The effect is that the narration of the screen series is slightly more circumscribed; scenes may appear in slightly different order in order to minimize the number of changes from internals to externals,

118. Giovanni Prattichizzo, *Narrami o fiction*, 69.

119. Giovanni Prattichizzo, *Narrami o fiction*, 70.

as in the case of *Il ladro di merendine*. The context of certain conversations changes slightly, but seldom with any significant effect on either the plot or the pointedness of the humor and social critique. The fact that one can take tours of “Montalbano’s Sicily” and visit certain iconic locations points to both the relative scarcity of such locations (they are not found on every street corner) and the heightened significance the locations take on for the viewer.

In the novel, comments exchanged between Montalbano and his girlfriend Livia reveal that the detective's tendency to give others a hard time and make fun is part of Sicilian culture and more or less built into the language itself. Livia starts at the name of a Sicilian variation of involtini, 'brusciuluni': “Mi sono quasi spaventata. Avete certe parole in Sicilia...” [“You nearly frightened me. Some of your Sicilian words...”].¹²¹ As Barbara Pezzotti points out, her reaction is an indication of her continuing discomfort with the Sicilian 'other'.¹²² As long as Livia and Montalbano are together, she never fully integrates into *vigatese* society and remains separate from many parts of Montalbano’s life. Montalbano's response to her criticism of Sicilian words, though, points at something else that creates tension between the couple: “Magari in Liguria non scherzate” [“As if you don't kid around in Liguria, too.”]¹²³ Livia, a northerner, simply does not share his same sense of humor (incidentally, neither do many of his northern colleagues at the police station, who are also uncomfortable with extreme Sicilian-ness). This exchange is left out of the television episode, but the larger problem of unshared humor is also apparent when

120. http://www.VIgàta.org/dizionario/camilleri_linguaggio.html

121. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 112.

122. Barbara Pezzotti, *The Importance of Place in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*, 134.

123. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 112. (my translation).

he tells her about the initial investigation into the elevator victim and his interactions with the witnesses in the building. In addition to the two women whom he sent to the police station to be humiliated, there was also an old man who rode the elevator with the dead body and left a bottle of wine behind, which was then entered into evidence. In contrast to his treatment of the women Montalbano has taken pity on him and bought him a new bottle of wine. He tells Livia about both interactions intending for her to share in his amusement, but instead she calls him, "stronzo e maschilista... Dimmi tu se non è agire da mentecatti" ["You're an asshole and a sexist... You tell me that's not acting like a jerk."]¹²⁴ It is one of the couple's many disagreements.

In reality, another reason that one can ascribe to Montalbano having treated the man differently is that unlike the two women, the man's actions are actually humorous while theirs are not. First of all, the man sought out the detective to tell him exactly what he had done instead of trying to hide it like the women did.¹²⁵ The old man's concern with getting his bottle back does, in fact, come off as a great deal more humorous than the two women's reaction; their obsession with respectability has less humorous potential than the man's request for his wine back. It is difficult to pin down why this is the case. On some level, perhaps the pursuit of alcohol, associated with the appetites and bodily concerns, simply has more comic potential than the more abstract hunt for respectability. Culturally ingrained sexism may indeed play a role as Livia claims; certainly all parties ignored the dead man out of self-interest, and Livia may be correct in accusing Montalbano of some unconscious sexism. I argue that the real

124. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 98-99.

125. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 29.

difference, though, is that the anecdote of the two women is operating within a single, consistent interpretative mode, with no incongruity to their interpretation of the situation, while the man's story is a humorous one rooted in contradiction. They see a dead body, they go out of their way to leave it alone, they pretend it never happened and deny knowledge of the death when confronted by the police. The man also sees a dead body and does nothing about it, but goes on his way in the presence of the body as if everything were normal, then casually tells the police about it in order to have his wine restored to him. The humor lies in the fact that he sees the dead body, and instead of it being a disturbing presence or causing him any revulsion, which would be normal, he behaves unexpectedly, as if it were the same as every other day when it is anything but. The man is a walking joke, and the bizarre dark humor of his story is what prompts Montalbano's sympathetic decision to buy the man a new bottle of wine. Livia, the slow-to-laugh Northerner, fails to see the joke. On screen, the incident remains little more than an anecdote to set the tone of the episode and the series, but the implications in the novel for Livia's and Montalbano's relationship are dire.

North-south prejudice in Italy works both ways, to some extent. Since the industrialization of the North, the inhabitants there have harbored resentment toward incoming Southerners, this internal ethnically-based prejudice often expressed in concert with prejudice against *extracomunitari* (non-EU immigrants) from south of Italy, also in search of work in the North.¹²⁶ Southerners have also reacted with resentment toward Northern outsiders coming to the South and trying to diagnose or “fix” Southern problems of crime (mafia-related, for the

most part), poverty, etc. Sometimes even presuming to understand the South on the part of Northerners can result in ostracism and other forms of backlash, or simply failures to understand, as seen in Sciascia's *Il giorno della civetta*, discussed in the first chapter. Livia is rarely, if ever, overtly prejudiced against Montalbano's Southernness, but examples like the above point to a latent, unconscious prejudice on her part, supported by the fact that she rarely has any substantial contact with anyone in Vigàta apart from her lover. When Montalbano's local identity is highlighted in moments such as these that depend on both knowledge of local cuisine or culture and a local sense of humor, her failure to get the joke is also a failure to understand or embrace Montalbano's Southernness and *sicilianità*.

Another question is whether the humor of the Montalbano series (both of them) might be giving Northerners and urbanites an excuse to laugh at the South and small-town Sicilians in particular. North-South prejudice in Italy presents a "seeming paradox that while prejudice is usually stronger among the poorer and socially disadvantaged groups in society, in Italy ethnic particularism is rooted in the (wealthier) North and directed against the poorer Southerners. Fear of a loss of relative privilege, blamed on the 'corrupt South' and its criminals and politicians, is a factor in this, but only as a secondary feature of much broader and deeper economic trends."¹²⁶ Does the combination of the Sicilian specificity of the series and the centering of humor around that Sicilianness constitute an invitation to indulge in ethnic prejudice under cover of laughter? In more general terms, does humor with an ethnic

126. Angela Zanotti, "Undercurrents of Racism in Italy," 174.

127. Angela Zanotti, "Undercurrents of Racism in Italy," 179.

component reinforce prejudice? I would argue that the identity of the joke-teller or humorist matters a great deal in this case, again agreeing with Cohen on this matter. An ethnically charged joke carries vastly different connotations and cues up stereotypes in a very different way when told by a member of that ethnic group than by an outsider of the group. This is not meant to absolve members of a particular ethnic group of internalized prejudices against their own group, or to say that it is impossible for an insider to tell an offensive joke about their own group. But self-ironizing humor is considerably less offensive than humor that insults or makes fun of others, and the same joke told in different contexts will vary in its offensiveness.

Consider the case of *Seinfeld*: the American sit-com makes numerous jokes at the expense of New York Jews in particular and Jews in general, and through the Jewish main character it highlights Jewish stereotypes and sets them up to be laughed at on a regular basis. One episode even seems to try to fit as many stereotypes into 30 minutes as possible.¹²⁸ But there are limits to the appropriateness of Jewish jokes even in *Seinfeld*. The character of Jerry Seinfeld's dentist converts to Judaism and immediately starts telling Jewish jokes non-stop, making Jerry uncomfortable, suspecting that he converted "for the jokes."¹²⁹ That is, for the permission to tell jokes about Jews that he would otherwise not be able to make. In an extreme example, Jews can make Holocaust jokes, but non-Jews cannot. Part of the effect of a Jew telling such a joke, depending somewhat on the particulars, could be a kind of re-assertion of one's ethnic and religious identity through the reclaiming of one's history from the hands and mouths of the

128. *Seinfeld*, Episode 151, "The English Patient."

129. *Seinfeld*, Episode 153, "The Yada Yada."

persecutors, and it could even elicit a sense of pride and resilience. Now consider the difference between Livia saying that Sicilian dialect words like “brusciuluni” are “frightening,” and the effect it would have if Montalbano said the same thing about his own dialect. A similar, but less pronounced difference in connotation becomes apparent. In Montalbano’s mouth, what was Livia’s refusal to imagine Sicilianness as anything but “other” becomes an ironic assertion of *sicilianità*; “frightening” would not mean literally alarming or shocking, but rather would paradoxically reference an insider’s knowledge of and familiarity with the dialect and highlight an outsider’s imperfect understanding of what it means to be Sicilian and speak the dialect. Only the unknown is frightening; understanding (and empathy) erase the fear and shock, and humor allows the joke-teller to access these, under the right circumstances of shared common ground with the audience.

At least one other example of Sicilianness being integral to the comedy and humor of the series is not so clear-cut. The character Catarella has strong Sicilian physical features on screen and is always bumbling, with an inability to remember facts or speak clearly, that seems to be tied up with his mix of dialect and Italian. He is a Sicilian buffoon, not a character who consciously ironizes his own ethnic and regional identity. While his general ineptitude certainly implicates jokes at the expense of the police department that employs him, and by extension institutions of law and order, his extreme Sicilianness also seems to invite ridicule and reinforce prejudice against Sicily and the South. His misunderstandings are an invitation to laugh at the vicissitudes of language and contemplate the ultimate impossibility of perfect human communication, perhaps, but it seems impossible to separate that entirely from his Sicilian

identity and the implications of laughing *at* an ill-educated and inarticulate Sicilian. Does it matter that Catarella is written by a Sicilian author? Perhaps, yes, Catarella is less overtly offensive a figure for that. But the fact that Catarella is largely unaware that he is the butt of these jokes still makes them problematic for the attitude that the series takes toward Sicilian identity, especially on screen, where the character's Sicilianness is even more pronounced for being physically present and visually and auditorily rather striking.

II. C. Social Conscience and Cynicism

Camilleri's narrator more or less shares Montalbano's socially conscious and pointed sense of humor. While the novels are written in third person, the narrative features an abundance of free indirect discourse, filtered exclusively through the protagonist's consciousness. For example, when the wife of the murdered man found in the elevator returns home, she asks in alarm, "Che successe?" [What happened?].¹³⁰ The narrator remarks, "Non c'è fimmina siciliana di qualsiasi ceto, nobile o vidrana, la quale, passata la cinquantina, non si aspetti il peggio. Quale peggio? Uno qualsiasi, ma sempre peggio" ["There is no Sicilian woman alive, of any class, aristocrat or peasant, who, after her fiftieth birthday, isn't always expecting the worst. What kind of worst? Any, so long as it's the worst."]¹³¹ Here, too, the narrator's discourse is also colored by dialect ('fimmina,' 'vidrana') in the same way as Montalbano's, and

130. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 39.

131. Andrea Camilleri, *Il ladro di merendine*, 39.

the reader easily imagines Montalbano thinking this very thing, but restrained by politeness conventions from saying it aloud. The point is not that the widow is actually right and something terrible has happened; the tragic humor of the situation is that even if that were not the case, her reaction would still presumably have been the same. The irony is that she happens to be correct this one time out of imagined thousands. The unkind, ironic remark reveals another important facet of Montalbano's character and the outlook of the novel of the whole: both are rather cynical when it comes to the opinion of others' capacity for balanced thinking. In the television episode, this same cynicism must be conveyed non-verbally, though the actor's facial expressions and body language, which succeeds quite well, though the explicitness of the above remark is lost, and the nonverbal communication in question must be clear to both the viewer and the widow, making Montalbano seem more rude and less compassionate than in the novel.

Montalbano's reaction on film and the lack of the narrator's commentary also has another effect; it is much less funny. Thus, the opportunity to mitigate some of the tensions of the serious world through the humorous mode is lost. Montalbano on screen must speak in the serious mode, given the tragic situation; "speaking and acting in the serious mode is a continual problem for us all because the unitary principles of serious discourse conflict with the underlying multiplicity of social life, and because each social actor's serious discourse is in recurrent danger of being deconstructed by those with whom he deals and undermined by his

own interpretative variability.”¹³² There is no way to provide for the same comment being made in the serious mode on screen without giving grave offense to the hearer, the widow. The additional layer of narration in the novel allows for dual modes in this scene, Montalbano remaining serious and the narrator providing the humor that “furnishes a realm of safety and release from these problems... enabl[ing] participants periodically to enter a domain in which the features suppressed with difficulty under normal circumstances are allowed free rein.”¹³³ In this way, the unkind but funny remark about Sicilian women’s pessimism can work to release some of the social tension felt in a society where the worst actually does happen rather often, though not as often as the women seem to think.

Starting with the episode *Il senso del tatto* (2002, the 4th season), the camera’s point of view is no longer always internal to the narrative; this episode is the first with an objective camera that does not follow any one character consistently, creating the sense of an omniscient, objective narrator, much less in harmony with Montalbano and his sense of humor. There is even less opportunity for the detective’s more sardonic humor, reported indirectly in the novels by the narrator, to address an audience other than the characters in the episode. Which is not to say that his sense of humor or that of the series is lacking entirely; the audience simply is not let in on more private jokes between Montalbano and themselves. Some viewers claim that Catarella also becomes less funny in later seasons; perhaps his over-the-top, unchanging caricature is less sustainable on screen than in print. The overall effect of these shifts from the

132. Michael Mulkay, *On Humor*, 215.

beginning to later seasons marks a slight increase in the tone of cynicism that is given fewer moments of recovery and release through sharing jokes with the viewer alone.

II.D. Anecdotes and Side-Plots

The Montalbano novels often include side-plots and minor investigations like the domestic disturbance I describe in a previous chapter from *La forma dell'acqua*,¹³⁴ in which the side case lasts only a few pages and can be read in parallel to the overarching plot of the main investigation. These side investigations are usually left out of the television adaptations, lessening the sense of intertextuality within the narrative and leaving out some of the interpretative clues for the viewer. In *Il ladro di merendine*, however, the novel and the episode both narrate the same situational comedy just a few minutes or pages in, in part because the side case later turns out to be actually connected to the main one. The dead body is found in the elevator, and once Montalbano has ironed out the convoluted, partially retracted and retold stories of the witnesses, the image emerges of a macabre comedy of errors. The corpse gets sent up to another floor, then down to the first, then a man rides up with the corpse and their groceries, leaving a bottle of wine behind, and the elevator gets called away again just as he misses the chance to retrieve the bottle. It is a credit to the television series' dedication to the everyday realism found in the novels that the up-and-down adventures of the elevator corpse

133. Michael Mulkay, *On Humor*, 215.

134. Andrea Camilleri, *La forma dell'acqua*, 74.

were *not* filmed as a darkly comic interlude with ironically playful background music, as they might have been if this were *L'Ispettore Coliandro*. Instead, one gets the sense that everyday realism furnishes enough strangeness and irony on its own. In fact, the scenes as they stand furnish a biting commentary on social cohesion and civic conscience in the apartment building and urban life in general. It is a tragedy, an outrage, that a man's remains should be treated with such disregard by the people who lived in such close proximity to him. The contrast between their physical closeness and complete social detachment from one another is the source of both the humor and the accompanying outrage.

In *Le ali della sfinge*, both in print and on screen, there is a scene in which Montalbano interviews an old man who recognizes the murdered girl's tattoo from the TV news broadcast. What follows is like the opening of a bawdy joke, or easily something that could have been adapted from a set piece of comic theater from any time in the last 400 years. There was a young woman named Katya assisting the old man and living in his house, and the old man deliberately enlarged a hole in the bathroom door so that he could spy on her bathing, which is how he came to recognize the tattoo on her shoulder. The man's justification and excuses just make the whole story at once more ludicrous and familiar, the story of any lusty old man anywhere: "Un jorno che Katia era nisciuta a fari la spisa, ho pigliato il trapano e ho allargato un pirtuso che già c'era nella porta...La porta è vecchia assà" ["One day, when Katya was out shopping, I took my drill and enlarged a hole that was already there in the door... It's a very

old door.”]¹³⁵ On screen, the man’s enthusiasm for Katya’s youth and beauty and his equal reluctance to be harshly judged for his violation of her privacy are a comic performance worthy of Totò.

Scenes like this are a large part of why the series is so popular in Italy and abroad; even given old man’s deplorable treatment of his employee (who is not, in fact, the murder victim), he ends of being another controversially sympathetic character, the relatively harmless victim of appetites that “any man” such as Montalbano himself might identify with. The audience can also laugh at the incongruity of an old man (presumed impotent) going to such lengths for the mere *sight* of a naked woman, nothing more. His violation of Katya’s privacy does also pale in contrast to the physical and psychological violence of the murder under investigation. Of course, the fact that he actually provided information that would eventually turn out to be relevant to the case also works in his favor. But to stop there is to sell short the function of comic scenes like this one. The scene is funny partly because it causes discomfort; it works as a joke because it references the shared idea (whether or not one believes it to be true, and whatever that says about men and humans in general) that heterosexual men of any age will inevitably take all opportunities to gaze upon the female body in lust. It is an uncomfortable idea; the scene forces the audience to confront it and its implications for the possibility or impossibility of male self-control and respectful behavior. It lays before the audience the question of whether any harm was done, since Katya was presumably unaware of the violation of her privacy without her consent.

135. Andrea Camilleri, *Le ali della sfinge*, 70.

As you can see here, the humorous mode is ubiquitous in this novel and episode as in the rest of the Montalbano series in print and on screen. It goes so far beyond simply providing pleasure to the audience, it is crucial in creating the alternate world of Vigàta, making it meaningful reflection of the anxieties and concerns of this world. Montalbano's witty and ironic sense of humor is perfectly suited for making fun of institutions, vices, and weaknesses without losing entirely that element of cynicism to balance out moments of nearly complete absurdity.

III. Avvocato Guerrieri, the Adaptation that Failed to be Ironic

In contrast to the Coliandro and Montalbano, Gianrico Carofiglio's character Avvocato Guido Guerrieri hardly ever laughs. Nor do his internal commentary and the events of the novels make the reader laugh often, if at all. If the novels can be said to have a sense of humor, it is extremely dry, melancholy, and sardonic, even more so than Montalbano's witty social critique and Coliandro's moments of ironic self-deprecation. Guerrieri employs irony and sarcasm mainly in his internal monologue to ironize himself, exaggerate the corruption of the legal system, and silently criticize the faults of the people surrounding him in a sort of grumpy, conspiratorial relationship with the reader. Sometimes, the reader is left with the impression that Guerrieri might be considered funnier by the other characters if he would say some of these witty criticisms out loud, though perhaps not more likable. Guerrieri's irony and sarcasm are

also closely tied to him being a well-read and well-educated character, and to a deep sense of literariness that the novels convey. It is also tied to varying degrees to his legal acumen, his philosophy of justice, and his argumentative style inside and outside the courtroom.

The television miniseries produced by Palomar in 2007-2008 was halted after the first two installments (“Testimone inconsapevole” and “Ad occhi chiusi”), never made it to DVD, and remains difficult to find. Without any element to correspond to or transport Guerrieri’s witty, sardonic internal monologue onto the screen, the miniseries fails to capture that aspect of his character. Guerrieri on screen is less cultured and well-read, whereas each of the novels could be mined for an impressive international reading/listening/watching list, from *Blade Runner* to *The Little Prince*, Dostoyevsky to Patsy Cline. Screen Guerrieri shows much less verbal expertise, and expresses much less righteous anger or other passion, and even his melancholy and sardonic self-directed humor are missing; in short, a large portion of his characterization is omitted entirely. Dry, sardonic facial expressions simply do not have the same effect.

The novel *Ad occhi chiusi* starts with Guerrieri’s rant against people who cannot manage to quit smoking, beginning with short, plaintive fragments: “Non c’è nessuno che smette di fumare. Si sospende, al massimo. Per giorni. O per mesi; o per anni. Ma nessuno smette” [“There’s no one who quits smoking. They take a break, at the most. For days. Or for months; or for years. But no one quits.”]¹³⁶ It goes on for several paragraphs, eloquently describing every temptation and weakness that keeps these sorry people from quitting. And then on the following page, the reader realizes that Guerrieri is talking about himself, painstakingly

creating an ironic self-portrait as a failed quitter of cigarettes who has gone several months without smoking. After this self-deprecating opening, the first chapter takes a sharp turn to recount the results of a recent case that resulted in a young girl's report of sexual assault being dismissed as "morbid fantasy" and the pedophile being sentenced to house arrest. This, it turns out, is where Guerrieri draws the line; he will defend clients charged with any number of crimes, "ma non stupratori di bambini. Comunque sia, volevo spaccare la faccia di qualcuno. O fumare. O fare qualsiasi altra cosa che non fosse rientrare in studio e lavorare" ["but not child rapists. However it was, I wanted to break someone's face. Or smoke. Or do anything that wasn't going back to my studio and working."]¹³⁷ In three pages, we get a fairly comprehensive picture of Guerrieri's character; dedication to the law but within the limits of her personal sense of justice and morality; weakness for a minor vice that will not turn out to be his only one; a marked talent for constructing a story and laying the irony on thickly without too much hyperbole; even an indirect reference to his pugilistic hobby.

In contrast, the opening scene of the television adaptation of the same novel begins with dramatic jazz music in the background and Guerrieri driving fast to get to his legal studio.¹³⁸ He is on the cell phone having his secretary order roses for his girlfriend, and loses his patience with her when she hangs up abruptly. This is far from the introspective, self-ironizing attorney who reflects on the limits of law and conscience and spends pages setting himself up for an ironic one-liner about falling off the wagon and picking up smoking again. The television

136. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ad occhi chiusi*, 11.

137. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ad occhi chiusi*, 13.

adaptation continues in the same vein, trying to make Guerrieri's cases as fast-paced and overtly dramatic as that first scene: unnecessarily explicit depictions of domestic abuse accompanied by exaggerated sound effects for emphasis, more transition scenes with Guerrieri driving in a hurry from one place to the next. Whether it is the awkward use of jump cuts and tacky sound effects, or the attempt to force the character of Guerrieri into a fast-paced, hard-boiled detective mold, or both, the episode is strangely awkward and underdeveloped, despite the fast pacing relative to the novel.

Another aspect found in the novels that one misses in the miniseries is the attention Carofiglio pays to the textuality of legal culture, especially the text of the law and legal documents, and to literature in general; the richness of the law and literature are integral to Guerrieri's attitude toward justice as well as to his general use of wit and irony. Though this attention to textuality on the part of the novels admittedly presents rather a challenge to the medium of television, the series largely ignores it instead of attempting to engage with it. While recreating Guerrieri's lengthy, formal courtroom speeches on screen, even in their drastically abbreviated form in the novels, would be far too experimental a move for this kind of consumer television, the wit and mastery of words that they demonstrate is barely hinted at on screen. Likewise the attention Guerrieri must pay to physical legal documents and their contents, some of which are reproduced for the reader but would be tedious in the extreme on screen,¹³⁹ crime fiction has developed shorthand for just these kinds of challenges for the genre through

138. "Ad occhi chiusi," 2008.

conversations between colleagues about the documents, relating only the most crucial information, etc. This series largely ignores these strategies and downplays the importance of the text as a motor of the plot. The first literary reference in the novel is to the Greek poet Costantinos Kavafis; Guerrieri buys one of his books and brings it over to his girlfriend's house to ingratiate himself after a disagreement, just one of many works of literature, film, and music scattered throughout the series, quoting some of the non-textual media and effectively treating them as texts upon which to meditate as well as setting and atmosphere. They all play into the creation of Guerrieri's emotional and mental state and his ability to cope with the disheartening facts of a case full of violence and abuse. Just after his friend and his client's, Sister Claudia, has nearly killed the abuser in question, stopped only by Guerrieri knocking her out with a classic boxer's punch, he quotes T. S. Eliot, whose poem *The Wasteland* perfectly mirrors his own ironically hopeful pessimism: "Pensai che era aprile. Il più crudele dei mesi" ["I thought, it's April. The cruelest month."]¹⁴⁰

Guerrieri's self-directed ironic and sardonic humor is inextricable from his legal acumen and literary and cultural knowledge. These ironic internal monologues (humorous in the sense of Pirandello's *umorismo*, his *sentimento del contrario*) are full of the kind of rhetorical techniques that Guerrieri would absorb from his favorite works of literature and culture, and are of the kind that make his arguments in court both moving and persuasive. They also often reference a literary work, a movie, or a song. He reflects on what led him to a certain gray point in his life,

139. e.g. an official, detailed list of accusations made by his client against her abuser, Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ad occhi chiusi*, 59-60.

“Mi ero iscritto a giurisprudenza perché pensavo di guadagnare tempo, visto che non avevo le idee troppo chiare. Dopo la laurea avevo pensato di guadagnare altro tempo andando a parcheggiarmi in uno studio legale, in attesa di chiarirmi le idee.

Per alcuni anni, dopo, avevo pensato che facevo l’avvocato in attesa di chiarirmi le idee.

Poi avevo smesso di pensarlo, perché il tempo passava e avevo paura di dovere trarre qualche conseguenza, dal fatto di chiarirmi le idee... Anno dopo anno. Fino a quando Sara mi aveva messo alla porta.”

[“I majored in law because I thought I could buy time that way, seeing that I didn’t have very clear ideas. After graduation I thought I could buy more time by going and parking myself in a legal studio, while waiting for my ideas to become clear.

For a few years afterward, I thought I was practicing law while waiting for my ideas to become clear.

Then I stopped thinking that, because time was passing and I was afraid of having to take some consequences or other, from the fact of clarifying my ideas... Year after year. Until Sara showed me the door.”]¹⁴¹

This reflection on the anesthetizing effects of complacency and indecision is followed by a quote from Dostoyevsky’s *Notes from the Underground*, regarding the half-hidden thoughts that all men are afraid to reveal to themselves. Then Guerrieri makes a final comment,

“Non è bene quando quelle cose accantonate vengono fuori. Tutti insieme.”

[“It’s not good when those set-aside things come out. All at once.”]¹⁴²

The passage highlights a bittersweet contrast between young Guerrieri’s uncertainty about his profession, his *life*, and certainty that some day he will have clarity, and then as he gets older the dynamic is reversed, the tension now comes from dreading that clarity and how it would upset his complacency in his avocation. There is very little *comedy* in Carofiglio’s novels, but

140. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Ad occhi chiusi*, 234.

141. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Testimone inconsapevole*, 222.

there is much in this ironic vein of *humor* rooted in Guerrieri's (and Carofiglio's) legal acumen and literariness.

Again, in the novels, many of the more ironic aspects of Guerrieri's character are found in his internal monologue, as well as in more thorough representations of court proceedings and the whole or partial reproduction of legal texts that Guerrieri writes or consults during his cases. I posit that the loss of Guerrieri's internal monologue and the intertextuality of the novels is one main reason why the TV series falls as flat as it does; the main character cannot stand up to a comparison with Montalbano, Coliandro, or other original television detectives when his wit, irony, and love of words and language are left out.

IV. Conclusion

The essentially human and social nature of humor and irony can be an especially useful mode for the *giallo* to challenge existing norms and structures, but also to fill more immediate functions such as creating rapport with the audience and accessing their capacity for empathy. All three series examined here share a frequent use of irony, which seems to be the specific humoristic mode best suited for the Italian attitude toward crime and law and order, namely, one of reluctant optimism, or hopeful pessimism, depending on where one places the emphasis.

142. Gianrico Carofiglio, *Testimone inconsapevole*, 223.

Beyond the instinctual reaction to the comic *avvertimento del contrario*, humor and the *sentimento del contrario* encourages empathy and understanding of the other, which is essential to meaningful social critique and to Nussbaum's construction of the ideal citizen, capable of imagining what it is like to be someone different from oneself. Humor is also a mode created by the bisociation or reversal of multiple frames of reference that must be found in the common ground between humorist and audience in order to succeed. While ignoring this mode and its roots in textual culture proves part of the Guerrieri television adaptation's failure to succeed, the irony and humor of the other two series does transfer to the screen to one extent or another, inevitably transformed by the medium to some degree. In each case, humor reveals something about personal and social anxieties around crime, morality, vice, and the truth by pointing out incongruities and conflict.

The Coliandro series is the most difficult to pin down in terms of whether the comedy and humor it utilized in the service meaningful social critique or to indirectly reinforce or reify corrupt institutions and stereotypes. Ultimately, the series does both through its conflicting performances of humor. It is possible to read the series on two levels at once: an *avvertimento del contrario* that makes the inept protagonist the butt of jokes and gives him room to make racist and sexist jokes himself, and a *sentimento del contrario* in which the series is aware of its own racist and sexist prejudices and reflects on their ironic coexistence with the character's integrity, compassion, and willingness to risk himself in the pursuit of the truth behind the case. The print series succeeds to a great extent than the screen series in navigating this paradoxical use of humor; Coliandro's hypermasculinity is more prone to being dismantled by other characters

like Nikita while still making him out to be a sympathetic character. It is easier for the audience to simultaneously laugh at and empathize with the flawed but ultimately well-meaning print detective, leaving more room for implicit criticisms of society and its institutions as well as our own tendency to have internalized prejudices. While one can laugh at both versions of the character, the television version also reinforces stereotypes in a way that the novellas do not.

Montalbano himself is an accomplished humorist and ironist, making him the orchestrator of jokes instead of the butt of them. In print and on screen, the narrator and the character are more in harmony in their use of humor to criticize and to expose tensions between moral and social values and the institutions that should uphold them. It is easy to focus on the pleasure of reading and viewing the Montalbano series with the rich setting and colorful characterization throughout, but one must not automatically dismiss the humor of the series as bearing no serious content. In fact, it addresses the anxieties of its audience by marrying certain instances of humor with the use of dialect and curse words, and by employing extreme specificity in the characterization of the setting and its inhabitants, challenging the audience to come to terms with ethnically-based prejudices internal to the nation of Italy as well as social and moral ills that are more universal. In this series, we see more than in Coliandro how much the identity and common ground of the joke-teller and their audience really matters in the joke's construction of meaning. The more caricatured inhabitants of Vigàta present a problem in this context; to some extent they invite laughter at Sicily's and the South's expense, but overall the series employs a sophisticated and socially pointed sense of humor.

The Guerrieri series in print offers an example of highly successful humor that does not necessarily have to make one laugh in order to succeed in either accessing the paradoxical or causing the reader to reflect on it. The lawyer-detective is the most melancholic and self-ironizing of the three, and employs his legal acumen, literary knowledge, and ironic humor to excoriate the corrupt legal system, and general human moral weaknesses, especially his own. The television series' failure to translate most of the humorous mode onto the screen is arguably the strongest reason for the series' short lifespan and the unsatisfactory flatness of the episodes that did see the light. Guerrieri's humor turned out to be subtle, ruthless, and essential.

Conclusion

When one treats the *giallo* detective character as a guide for reading the work as a whole, it emphasizes the *giallo's* potential for social critique and even social healing. He embodies the tensions that have been integral to the genre since its beginnings: legal and personal definitions of justice; received notions of regionalism, localism, and center-periphery paradigms; incongruities in cultural notions of gender, race; the humorous mode that brings all these things to the forefront. "Ironically hopeful pessimism" sounds like a paradox and an impossible attitude to have toward society and its structures, but the detective is in fact the focal point for the *giallo's* paradoxical, distinctly Italian attitudes in the face of violence and corruption. On the one hand, he shows an almost idealistic optimism about theoretical or absolute justice, a strong sense of how things *should* be, and a deeply felt and genuinely lived attachment to the regional and the local. All this is pitted against a pessimistic, ironic view of how flawed systems actually operate, a critical eye toward the strictures and limitations of insider-outsider paradigms, and a

distrust of official narratives and their ability to successfully uphold justice and the social good. In the paradoxical middle is often the humorous mode that allows the conflicting attitudes and frames of reference to coexist temporarily and encourages their exploration and critique.

It is primarily through the detective that the reader encounters the world of the story and interprets the setting and context, challenging our received notions of all kinds of power structures and mores. Authoritarian systems in particular are threatened by the *giallo* precisely because of its ability to expose and criticize incongruities in our social concepts and the way our institutions interpret them, and distinctive, highly characterized detectives like the ones in these chapters are the central figures in the construction of social meaning and critique within the narrative. This study has found this to be true from the early days of the genre in Italy with De Angelis' anti-fascist stance that is echoed and transmuted in later depictions of the same era in De Giovanni's recent historical detective novels. Both are highly critical of the totalitarian regime of the 1930s, albeit in vastly different ways and to varying degrees of transparency; despite their differences, both series expose the extreme difficulty of holding to abstract, personal standards of justice under an authoritarian state that insists on an official narrative in conflict with the quotidian realities observed and lived by the detective characters. Two Sicilian detectives, Camilleri's Montalbano and Sciascia's Bellodi, have in common a measure of idealism regarding the primacy of the truth over rules and procedure, even those of their profession as police detectives. They uphold the former over the latter when the official institutions of justice are inclined to misinterpret and come to "wrong" conclusions according to

their understanding of absolute justice, refusing to treat those institutions as self-governing machines with no need of maintenance and progress.

Besides these more visible institutions and systems, the *giallo* also challenges authority and received wisdom from less concrete sources, like regional and local identity, cultural conceptions of space and place, and insider-outsider paradigms, even those not strictly geographical. Detective novels are typically centered around an intense violent event that takes place in a particular location or space, one that carries with it certain cultural and personal associations that not only play into solving the mystery but also reveal a great deal about how we are meant to read and interpret those spaces and the larger social issues at stake. Montalbano's somewhat exaggerated Sicilianness and the intensely colored surroundings of the fictional town of Vigàta, the eerie semi-paranormal Naples of Commissario Ricciardi - these distinctive settings are part of their novels' allure, but they also highlight the contrast between beauty and optimism on one hand and social unease and unrest on the other, or the tension between duties to justice for the living and for the dead. The social problems in each series are inextricable from their setting, forcing the reader to confront conflicts within regional and local identities and the stereotypes, injustices, values, and ideologies they bring with them. The detective character inhabits a peculiar space both inside and outside of society, with his employment of both insider knowledge and detachment. His complex identity stands in for the reader's own, connecting the narrative and the characters to a real-world geographical and temporal context, or deliberately distancing it from the same, in either case often challenging our received notions of geography and its relation to violence, crime, and death.

At the center of how these critiques play out in the novels is the fact that the detective characters are the source of the empathy and ethical standards that form the basis for evaluating public and official execution of law and justice in the *giallo*. Simply by virtue of being the main character, the detective's perspective on human complexity is the main one presented by the novel, and the *giallista* tends to exploit this privileged position to systematically use the protagonist as the nexus of conflicting values of ethics, law, and emotional intelligence. Rather than undermining the power and efficacy of reading as a social activity, the embodiment of paradoxes and conflict in the detective character upholds the narrative's ability to see clearly, uphold society where it succeeds and challenge it where it fails. There is a very real tension between the correctness and letter of the law and the demands of empathy and compassion each time a detective character is confronted with the victims of crime and its far-reaching consequences. The most productive reading of these conflicts is to read them *as conflicts* that must be negotiated with care, rather than to look to the *giallo* for a simplistic answer to which kind of justice should be paramount.

This capacity of the detective character for empathy and compassion and the tensions that come with them also makes the detective an excellent vehicle for the humorous mode that the *giallo* frequently employs to highlight various conflicting mores and concepts in a way that momentarily suspends cognitive dissonance, demands a reflective attitude, and allows for us to make some sense of the incongruities. Since so much of the detective's role is rooted in paradox and conflict, humor, which employs multiple frames of reference and layers of meaning, is a perfect framework for engaging the human imagination in social critiques. Humor can take any

form from dry, sardonic irony as in the case of Carofiglio's novels, stereotypical caricatures like Lucarelli's *Ispettore Coliandro*, or puns and anecdotes in Camilleri's *Montalbano* series. It is no coincidence that the most successful television adaptations of *gialli* are those that successfully adapt the novel's humor for the screen on multiple levels of narrative. Many incongruities that give rise to humor are even more pronounced when interpreted with visual media, as is certainly the case with *Montalbano* and *Coliandro*. However, humor can and does do the opposite of challenging existing norms, such as the *Coliandro* television series, in which we laugh more at the protagonist than with him, and which ends up perpetuating more stereotypes, prejudices, and other problematic institutions, because the screen series loses sight of the importance of empathy, and because *Coliandro* is often very wrong about what is at stake for him and his society. But when the detective is intensely aware of these things as *Montalbano* is, humor is extremely powerful in disrupting the seemingly inevitable shortcomings of the flawed system he operates within.

When we approach narrative, and especially the *giallo*, we should do so with the consciousness that while the work itself is not moral or immoral, contemplation of the work is almost inevitably a moral activity. "[T]he activities of imagination and emotion that the involved reader performs during the time of reading are not just instrumental to moral conduct, they are also examples of moral conduct, in the sense that they are examples of the type of emotional and imaginative activity that good ethical conduct involves."¹ While no one work or reader is guaranteed to produce outstanding moral progress, contemplation of the *giallo* in

particular offers assistance in the moral task of contemplating aesthetic works. In this study, I have indicated some important areas of moral significance that the *giallo* is especially disposed to provide material or just such contemplation.

1. Martha Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly," 354

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