



# Uncertain Justice: Crimes and Retribution in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction

*Nicoletta Di Ciolla*

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The crime genre entered Italy in the late nineteenth century, and if initially Italian authors followed models developed abroad principally in the United States, England and France a uniquely Italian brand began to emerge soon. Il giallo, as the crime genre has been known in Italy since the 1930s, proved to be the ideal instrument to confront pressing and often uncomfortable issues which were pertinent to the Italian context: it became a useful tool to restore, symbolically at least, the truth and justice that were, and still are, perceived by a large part of the Italian reading public to be systematically denied in reality. In today's Italy, the crime genre, and particularly its noir sub-genre, narrates so that readers might remember, so that they might take heed and action, turning cognition into an act of resistance against oblivion and of rebellion against injustice. *Uncertain Justice* explores three broad areas that contemporary Italian noir literature appears particularly keen to debate, retrieving them from the silence to which they might otherwise be consigned: unresolved historical and political legacies, the repercussions of which still inform and affect life and practices in the present times; the problematic institution of the family, considered as the bedrock of Italian culture and the founding principle of Italian society, with specific attendant questions of gender politics; and the justice system seen through some of its operators, nominally in charge of putting the wrongs right and frequently accused of preventing this from happening. These explorations are conducted through an analysis of texts published in the last twenty years, which represent an effort to expose and counter injustice through the power of the word. Crime literature authors often revisit recent Italian history in their novels, and genre fiction plays a prominent role in acts of resistance against cover-ups or revisionist views of history. The volume starts with an analysis of this role, through novels that look back at the years of the fascist regime and, more recently, at the period from the anni di piombo onwards. It then considers the contribution made to the giallo and noir genre by women writers, looking at the effects that female practitioners in Italy have had on the ethics and aesthetics of a genre that, in other cultures, has traditionally been firmly conservative. A further section examines novels set in a familial context and looks at a range of family dynamics, expressed in the relationships between mothers and sons, mothers and daughters, large extended families or small nuclear ones. If some of the texts expose the devastating effects of the violence perpetrated 'in the name of love,' others more positively offer hope, demonstrating how more desirable options do exist and can be pursued. Finally the volume looks at justice as a system and at its practitioners, as, in an interesting development peculiar to Italy, a significant number of judges, lawyers and senior police officers have recently become involved in crime fiction writing. The concluding chapter investigates the contribution that these 'specialists,' who have extensive theoretical and technical knowledge in a field which crime fiction routinely frequents, can make to the genre; it also analyses whether these authors, who bring together the moral function of unveiling the truth (prerogative of the investigator) and the social function of rectifying a wrong (prerogative of the upholders of the law), may have a role in forming a more ethically and socially aware Italian citizen.

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