“I AM JUST A POLICEMAN”:
THE CASE OF CARLO LUCARELLI’S
AND MAURIZIO DE GIOVANNI’S
HISTORICAL CRIME NOVELS SET DURING FASCISM

BARBARA PEZZOTTI

Summary: This article analyzes two successful Italian novels set during the *Ventennio* and the Second World War, namely Carlo Lucarelli’s *Carta bianca* (1990) and Maurizio De Giovanni’s *Per mano mia* (2011). It shows how Lucarelli confronts the troubling adherence to Fascism through a novel in which investigations are continually hampered by overpowering political forces. By contrast, in spite of expressing an anti-Fascist view, De Giovanni’s novel ends up providing a sanitized version of the *Ventennio* that allows the protagonist to fulfil his role as a policeman without outward contradictions. By mixing crime fiction and history, Lucarelli intervenes in the revisionist debate of the 1980s and 1990s by attacking the new mythology of the innocent Fascist. Twenty years later, following years of Berlusconi’s propaganda, De Giovanni waters down the hybridization of crime fiction and history with the insertion of romance and the supernatural in order to provide entertaining stories and attract a large audience. In the final analysis, from being functional to political and social criticism in Lucarelli’s series, the fruitful hybridization of crime fiction and history has turned into a mirror of the political and historical de-awareness of Italian society of the 2000s in De Giovanni’s series.

This article analyzes two successful Italian novels set during the Fascist period or *Ventennio* (1922–1943) and the Second World War, namely Carlo Lucarelli’s *Carta bianca* (1990; translated as *Carte Blanche* in 2006), featuring Inspector De Luca as the main protagonist, and Maurizio De Giovanni’s *Per mano mia* (2011; *By My Hand*, 2014), with Inspector Ricciardi as the police detective. Lucarelli’s book is part of a series that sees the protagonist investigating murders in the Republic of Salò in 1945 and in post-war Italy. De Giovanni’s novel instead belongs to a series that takes place in Naples in the 1930s, after the consolidation of Mussolini’s

regime. This analysis of these two novels aims to see if the intersection between crime fiction and the historical novel can be fertile ground for addressing Italy's past, and in particular the hot topic of personal and collective responsibilities, in the context of 1980s and 1990s revisionist theories on Fascism and the anti-Communist rhetoric of Berlusconi's governments.

Interest in the Fascist era has proven to be long-lasting within the tradition of the *giallo*.¹ In particular, the 1990s experienced a boom of crime stories set in this troubled period of Italian history. Several crime authors seem to have responded to a specific political and social climate and in particular to the revisionist debate. Especially from the late 1980s onwards, some revisionist historians, most notably Renzo De Felice, have argued that the history of twentieth-century Italy has been hegemonized by the Left, and that Fascism and the Resistance have been misinterpreted. Revisionist historians emphasize that the Fascist years were a period of modernization for Italy that helped to generate a greater sense of national identity among Italians. Revisionists have also criticized anti-Fascism and the Resistance as a movement dominated by their Communist components.² While this position has been contested, several left-wing historians and politicians have admitted the need for new research into the recent past in order to free the interpretation of this crucial part of Italian history from the ideological constraints of the Cold War period. However, while historians were debating this, right-wing parties used revisionist declarations to bolster their political position. The year 1994 saw the rise to power of a post-Fascist party called the *Alleanza Nazionale* (born from the ashes of the neo-Fascist party *Movimento sociale italiano*, MSI), in alliance with

¹ The term *giallo* is used here in its broadest meaning, to indicate any story containing a crime and an investigation; see Petronio.

² As many scholars have argued, the term "revisionism" is ambiguous, since a certain kind of revisionism is implicit in the historian's work. However, in the last twenty years the term has progressively changed, acquiring a less neutral and more politically oriented perspective on the past. More specifically, in Italy, revisionism has come to signify "in popular terms, a revaluation of the Fascist experience" (Ganapini 128). Among the most important revisionist texts, Renzo De Felice's *Rosso e Nero* (1995) and Ernesto Galli della Loggia's *La morte della patria* (1996) offer a critique of anti-Fascism and of the Resistance, described as being controlled by its Communist components. Other books, such as De Felice's *Intervista sul Fascismo* (1975), re-interpret the regime as a "soft" dictatorship. In "Retoriche di fine millennio," Raffaele Romanelli disputes this image, speaking of a "mondanizzazione" (339), or normalization, of Fascism. For an overview of the different subjects of revisionist historiography, see Domenico Losurdo and Emilio Gentile. See also Jonathan Dunnage (224–25). For an analysis of the changing treatment of the Resistance in Italian culture, see Cooke.

Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*. In this period, as Dunnage explains, the *Alleanza Nazionale*'s success revealed that "a significant number of Italians did not identify with the anti-Fascist tradition on which the Republic had been founded" (224). Furthermore, the proliferation of books, memoirs, and newspaper articles featuring young men fighting for the Republic of Salò decontextualized stories of the Republic of Salò and the Resistance, showing what Raffaele Romanelli describes as a "discursive tendency to dissolve all distinctions, often through an appeal to individual experience and to emotions" (343).

In this climate of revisionism and propaganda, a number of crime writers of the 1990s set their stories during Fascism and the war.³ As Luca Somigli points out, the development of this particular narrative tendency at the same time as the so-called revisionist debate was hardly a coincidence: using a genre in which topics such as the dichotomy between good and evil and themes such as violence and justice are central, many writers highlighted the contradictions and flaws of Mussolini's regime in terms of civil rights and personal freedoms (Somigli 18). These writers also stressed the often ambivalent attitudes of many Italians who survived during Fascism without taking sides. In particular, all their fictional detectives—who are police officers and therefore working within Fascist institutions—are investigators interested in justice and do not hesitate to confront the authorities if they constitute an obstacle to their inquiry. Some fictional detectives also refuse to acknowledge their collusion with Fascism, and their attitude is stigmatized in the narrative. By contrast, other sleuths question their role as individuals in the chaos of the war and make choices of a moral and political nature. All these novels contribute effectively to the debate opened in the 1990s.⁴

A resurgence of anti-Resistance rhetoric occurred in the aftermath of the new alliance between *Forza Italia*, *Alleanza Nazionale*, and the *Lega Nord* that brought Berlusconi back to power in 2001. While in power, Prime Minister Berlusconi

³ Among the most popular are Edoardo Angelino's *L'inverno dei mongoli* (1995); Corrado Augias's *Quella mattina di luglio* (1995); Leonardo Gori's series featuring Carabinieri Captain Bruno Arcieri as the main protagonist begun with *Nero di maggio* (2000); Lucarelli's series; and some of Marrocu's series featuring police inspectors Luciano Serra and Eupremio Carruezzo begun with *Fåulas* (2000).

⁴ For example, Piero Contini in Angelino's *L'inverno dei mongoli* and Luciano Serra in Luciano Marrocu's series are not able to fully understand the extent of their collusion with Fascism. By contrast, other sleuths, such as Inspector Flaminio Prati in Augias's *Quella mattina di luglio* and Bruno Arcieri in Gori's *Il passaggio*, question their role and their moral and political responsibilities as individuals in a time of war. For more detailed analyses of these novels, see Somigli; Pezzotti (63–168).

played down Mussolini's dictatorship and sought to establish an equivalence between Fascism and Communism, emphasizing Communist crimes globally and the relationship between the Italian left and Communist dictatorships.⁵ As Lichtner explains, Berlusconi "made an excellent use of elements already present in Italy's political and cultural discourse: anti-Communism had been the staple diet of Christian Democratic rhetoric for decades, and Nazi Germany had long been the ideal reference point of Italy's collective postwar acquittal from its Fascist past" (22–23). Only a few years later, De Giovanni returned to the Fascist setting with a series that has enjoyed extraordinary success both in Italy and abroad. As we will see, unlike the crime fiction output of the 1990s, this series presents a detective that never questions his ambiguous position as a representative of law and order in a dictatorship.

"Sono solo un poliziotto": Lucarelli's Inspector De Luca

Carlo Lucarelli is one of the most famous Italian crime writers. Born in Parma in 1960, he is a television celebrity who hosts shows about unsolved crimes and mysteries in Italy. He made his debut with a crime trilogy set between 1945 and 1948, featuring Inspector De Luca as the main protagonist. The trilogy comprises *Carta bianca* (1990; translated as *Carte Blanche*, 2006), *L'estate torbida* (1991; translated as *The Damned Season*, 2007), and *Via delle Oche* (1996; translated as *Via delle Oche*, 2008).⁶ Lucarelli's series, which has enjoyed great success, is particularly notable as these were the first novels to investigate the dissociation of individuals from the responsibilities of the regime that they served in the name of alleged apolitical professionalism or loyalty. This attitude is exemplified by a key figure in crime fiction, namely the detective, Inspector De Luca. As Lucarelli explains, the figure of De Luca was inspired by a real policeman whom the writer had interviewed over the course of the research for his university thesis on the police of the Republic of Salò (Bacchereti 185). A former commander of the notorious

⁵ For example, Berlusconi dismissed the Fascist practice of sending political opponents and homosexuals to internal exile as a "holiday camp" as reported in the article "Mussolini non ha mai ammazzato nessuno" in *Il Corriere della sera* online, 11 September 2003.

⁶ He has also written other novels set during Fascism, such as *Indagine non autorizzata* (1998), and *L'isola dell'angelo caduto* (1999).

“Brigata Ettore Muti”⁷ and an inspector with the Republic of Salò police, the protagonist of the trilogy, De Luca, is only interested in solving crimes. The first novel is particularly interesting because it is set in 1945 during the last days of the Fascist puppet regime in the north of Italy (while the second and third novels are set in post-war Italy).

In *Carta bianca*, De Luca has transferred back to the “normal” police from the political police and is tasked with finding the murderer of wealthy playboy and prominent member of the Fascist Republican Party, Vittorio Rehinard. De Luca is promised he will have full cooperation, or *carte blanche*. However, his investigation is soon compromised by an internal political battle within the Fascist party. De Luca’s chief, who belongs to one of the many factions of the Fascist party in disarray, presses him to charge an important member of a rival faction with the murder. During the investigation De Luca also finds out that the victim and a network of corrupt Fascist officers are involved in drug trafficking. In addition, the inspector’s investigation reveals that several influential members of the Fascist party are secretly negotiating their way out of Italy either with the Vatican or with the Allies. Finally, after escaping an assassination attempt, De Luca solves the crime but is forced to leave before the partisans’ arrival.

Carta bianca presents some typical characteristics of the whodunit: a hideous victim whom many people wanted to see dead, a series of red herrings, and a final, clear-cut resolution of the case.⁸ However, the culprit is not delivered to justice since she is arrested on the very day the partisans arrive in Bologna and the Fascist administration collapses. Everybody leaves and the villain, a poor servant seduced by the evil Rehinard, is free to go. The fact that a culprit gets away with it is not a novelty in crime fiction and in the whodunit subgenre.⁹ However, in the

⁷ The *Brigata Muti* was one of the Fascist paramilitary corps *Brigate nere* that operated in Northern Italy from 1944 until the end of World War II. They acted as political police and were responsible for the repression of the Resistance. The *Brigata Muti*, operating in Ravenna, was responsible for several episodes of violence and torture.

⁸ Classic detective fiction, also called whodunit or golden age-style detective fiction, usually indicates a pattern of death-detection-explanation in which “the reader’s attention is focused on the process by which a brilliant or at least uncommonly perceptive detective solves a case so intricate and puzzling that ordinary minds are baffled” (Horsley 12).

⁹ Nancy Wingate analyses the endings of early crime fiction and identifies many different types of closure that diverged from the concept, erroneously attributed to the whodunit, of a final triumph of justice and the restoration of order. Wingate’s conclusions are that the whodunit exhibits a wide variety of attitudes toward

case of *Carta bianca*, the aborted arrest is symbolic of Fascism's inability to deliver justice. The novel implies that an investigation run by a regime that denies basic civil liberties has no moral ground for demanding legality of its citizens. Indeed, the ruling party is not driven by fairness, and its exponents are depicted acting—often illegally—for personal gain. Finally, in the novel the police are bullied to find a solution that will please the elite. In this scenario, a proper investigation is impossible and the assumption upon which the whodunit is based—that justice can eventually be done—is untenable. Equally interestingly, the protagonist-detective is flawed. In a situation of political turmoil, De Luca is characterized by a selective desire for truth that he only applies to his investigation while ignoring the many flaws of the Fascist regime he serves. De Luca justifies his obstinacy: “Il mio guaio è che sono nato curioso, è sempre stato così... Bisogna che tutto sia chiaro, tutto a posto, nei minimi particolari, con un come e un perché razionali, se no impazzisco” (*Carta bianca* 88). His obsession with his investigation isolates him from the wide historical context in which he operates, and he never questions the moral validity of his job. In particular, in spite of being openly challenged throughout the novel (and the entire series), Inspector De Luca invariably refuses to admit to being compromised by his association with the regime:

“Quando mi hanno chiamato alla sezione speciale della Muti ci sono andato subito, di corsa. Perché là si lavorava bene, capisci? [...] Là era tutto efficientissimo, c'erano gli investigatori migliori, gli schedari migliori, c'erano fondi... Da sempre è così il mestiere del poliziotto ed è quello che ho sempre fatto io.

Non si chiedono scelte politiche a un poliziotto, gli si chiede solo di fare bene il suo mestiere.” (*Carta bianca* 88)

Unlike other fictional detectives investigating in Fascist times, he never expresses doubt or disgust but thinks he is doing the right thing. However, in spite of his constant justifications, he seems to be the first person not to believe in what he says. In particular, his refusal to negotiate his difficult position causes him both psychological and physical discomfort:

justice. For example, some endings fit in Wingate's “detective justice” category (where the detective, on the basis of his or her own code, lets the culprit off). Others fit in the “charming rogue” ending where the culprit is portrayed as a sympathetic character and allowed to escape (581–603).

Non aveva fatto colazione ma come al solito quando si sedeva a tavola la fame gli passava, come il sonno la sera, per tornare quando era meno opportuno. In quel momento aveva addirittura la nausea. [...] Bevve un sorso di vino rosso e attese con una smorfia che il bruciore allo stomaco si facesse sentire e allora, ostinato, ne bevve un altro. (*Carta bianca* 27)

De Luca lives a very difficult life: he cannot sleep at night, and during the day he cannot eat. He often smells a “pesantissimo odore di fritto” (56) or an “odore insopportabile di cavoli e di chiuso” (57) that nauseates him. He feels weak and paces like a sleepwalker during his investigations. In the above passage, in spite of his nausea, he keeps on drinking wine in an unconscious attempt to punish himself. In a highly volatile historical situation, when people are asked to make their choices—either supporting the Republic of Salò or joining the Resistance—De Luca’s answers are weak and fail to convince his interlocutors and even himself. From the very first novel, it is clear that De Luca is also a disempowered character. The title of the novel alludes to a freedom of movement that he does not possess. He has a brilliant mind, but his meetings with his chief clearly indicate his subordinate position:

Il Questore si alzò dalla poltrona e girò attorno alla scrivania, piantandosi davanti a un De Luca che sedeva scomodo su una sedia di legno, rigido come un imputato, con le braccia conserte sul petto, guardando per terra. (*Carta bianca* 24)

In this passage, the detective sits uncomfortably like a defendant in front of a judge. He does not meet his superior’s eyes and listens to him passively. In other words, De Luca is far from being a champion of justice and the “original and poetic figure [...] fearless amid the knives and fists of a thieves’ kitchen” (162) described by one of the fathers of detective fiction, G. K. Chesterton. Later on, he does not openly oppose his chief when the latter wants to instigate a dubious line of investigation:

[Vitali] “C’è odore di folle gelosia, orge, riti massonici...questa è la strada giusta!”

“La strada giusta!” disse il questore.

De Luca li guardò rigido, pieno di brividi, e annui lentamente.
“Lo farò” disse, “lo farò”. (66)

De Luca is unconvinced by his superior's theory, and he senses that he wants to manipulate him, but he does not contradict his chief. On the contrary, he shows complete submission (“Lo farò”). However, De Luca is a policeman obsessed with his cases, and he wants to find the real culprit. Like many of his fictional colleagues, he finds ways to pursue his own investigation. Katharina Hall argues that novels featuring police protagonists in dictatorial states “risk generating a textual crisis” if the reader is unable “to identify with the detective as an upholder of justice” (292). Lucarelli is shrewd in depicting a flawed detective who nonetheless is honest, allowing the reader to identify, at least partially, with him. In the novel, it is explained that De Luca has never tortured anyone and that his job was more investigative than “physical.” However, in spite of distancing himself from any ideological affiliations, he shares the responsibility for being part of a police force that has tortured partisans and civilians. De Luca is constantly stigmatized by his collusion with the regime and his inability to take sides throughout the series.

Indeed, Lucarelli is interested in exposing the attitudes of many Italians whose job became an alibi and a way not to distance themselves from the regime (Sangiorgi 131). As Somigli highlights, far from justifying this attitude, Lucarelli condemns the new mythology of the innocent Fascist brought about by the revisionists. He depicts De Luca's stance as “a conscious and deliberate blindness, which, far from absolving the character from his responsibilities, implicates him all the more in the injustices of the regime” (23). In so doing, Lucarelli intervenes in the revisionist debate, contesting the myth of “italiani, brava gente” or rather of the “good fascist” that the revisionists wanted to impose in the national discourse of Italy's recent past.¹⁰

De Giovanni's Inspector Ricciardi and anti-Fascism by chance

De Giovanni was born in 1958 in Naples, where he still lives and works. In 2005 he won a writing competition for unpublished authors with a short story set in the

¹⁰ In an interesting article, Rodogno disputes the validity of the concept of Italians as “brava gente.” He explains that the idea, still widespread among Italians, that during the Second World War Italians behaved humanely with the populations of occupied countries, such as Greece and Albania, as opposed to the Germans, is only a myth.

1930s, which was then turned into a novel published first by Graus with the title *Le lacrime del pagliaccio* (2006) and later as *Il senso del dolore. L'inverno del commissario Ricciardi* (2007; translated as *I Will Have Vengeance*, 2013) by Fandango. Three other novels followed: *La condanna del sangue. La primavera del commissario Ricciardi* (2008; translated as *Blood Curse*, 2013); *Il posto di ognuno. L'estate del commissario Ricciardi* (2009; translated as *Everyone in Their Place*, 2013); and *Il giorno dei morti. L'autunno del commissario Ricciardi* (2010; translated as *The Day of the Dead*, 2014). The tetralogy was an immediate success among Italian readers, and De Giovanni was able to publish the subsequent adventures of Ricciardi with the prestigious Einaudi publishing house. They are: *Per mano mia. Il Natale del commissario Ricciardi* (2011; translated as *By My Hand*, 2014); *Vipera. Nessuna resurrezione per il commissario Ricciardi* (2012; translated as *Viper*, 2015); *In fondo al tuo cuore. Inferno per il commissario Ricciardi* (2014; translated as *The Bottom of Your Heart. Inferno for Inspector Ricciardi*, 2015), *Anime di vetro. Falene per il commissario Ricciardi* (2015) and *Serenata senza nome. Notturmo per il commissario Ricciardi* (2016).¹¹ The series is still ongoing.

Unlike other crime novels set during Fascism, the Inspector Ricciardi series mixes historical narrative and the supernatural. The protagonist is attuned to the inner nature of those who die violently. He actually sees these victims in their last moments and suffers intensely from the occult experiences he “shares” with them, overhearing their final words or thoughts. As Ascari demonstrates, the supernatural has been present in crime fiction since the origins of this genre, being particularly prevalent in “the fin-de siècle climate of syncretism” at the end of the nineteenth century (77). However, in the De Giovanni series this “gift,” or rather “curse,” is not functional to Ricciardi’s investigations (the victims’ last thoughts are never pivotal in discovering the culprit). Rather, it is used to explain Ricciardi’s personality and complicate his personal life. Gloomy and introverted, he is not popular among his colleagues and is also feared by his own boss, the vain deputy commissioner Angelo Garzo, who is a fervent (but harmless) Fascist. Coming from a rich and aristocratic family, the police inspector lives alone assisted by his old nanny, Rosa. He is secretly in love with Enrica, a young single woman who lives with her parents in a building opposite the place where Ricciardi lives. Ricciardi is also attracted to Livia, a former opera singer and a widow whom he meets during his first investigation in *Il senso del dolore*. However, paralyzed by

¹¹ In the meantime, Einaudi also republished the first four books under the title *Le stagioni del commissario Ricciardi* (2012).

his own secret, the police detective is unable to commit to any woman for fear of transmitting his powers to his offspring. Hopeless in his private life, Ricciardi is the typical whodunit sleuth who is at his best in his job: endowed with a superior mind, he does not hesitate to challenge authority in order to pursue his investigations. In spite of being labelled as noirs in their English translations, Ricciardi's investigations are in fact typical whodunits in which all the clues are scattered throughout the narrative and the police inspector solves his crimes thanks to a sudden enlightenment.¹²

If the hybridization between crime fiction and the supernatural is confined to the detective's personality, the encounter between crime fiction and history is not the result of a conscious choice. In an interview, the writer explains that he simply wanted a period setting for his stories and chose the *Ventennio* by pure chance.¹³ This functional choice, however, results in a contradictory representation of life in Italy during Fascism. On the one hand, De Giovanni acknowledges Fascist violence and restriction of civil liberties in his books. On the other, he seems to downplay the Fascist party's control over Italy, portraying, in fact, an Italy of the 1930s where the police were completely independent from the regime and people could freely express their criticism. All these contradictory elements are present in *Per mano mia*.

In this novel, as Naples prepares for the Christmas celebrations, Ricciardi investigates the death of a Fascist port militia officer and his wife. On the surface, this investigation, which involves the death of an exponent of the Fascist army, might appear to echo De Luca's investigation in *Carta bianca*. However, in this case the result is different, as *Per mano mia* provides a problematic representation of life under Fascism and of Italian Fascism per se, and endorses the idea of the "good Fascist."

¹² Noir fiction (or *roman noir*) is a literary genre closely related to hardboiled genre with the distinction that the protagonist is not a detective but is instead a victim, a suspect, or a perpetrator. Other common characteristics include the protagonist's self-destructive qualities. A typical protagonist of noir fiction is dealing with a legal, political, or other system that is no less corrupt than the perpetrator, who victimizes the protagonist and/or causes him/her to victimize others; see Marling. On the Italian noir, see Carlotto and Amici.

¹³ As he explained in an interview with Daniela Palamidese: "Su questo punto De Giovanni è chiaro [...]. Semplicemente si è trattato della prosecuzione della *location* già presente nel primo fortunato racconto scritto in diretta ad un tavolo del *Gran Caffè Gambrinus*, dove si teneva la fase napoletana del primo concorso. Si tratta di un locale storico con arredi liberty: da qui appunto l'idea—del tutto estemporanea—dell'ambientazione d'epoca."

In De Giovanni's crime series, Naples is an extensive urban landscape depicted through the lives of its inhabitants. It is a city traditionally portrayed as split into two spaces: that of the rich and that of the poor, with Via Toledo as a divide between the wealthy areas at the bottom of the hill and those of the working class and poor near the top. This divide is not connected to the Fascist regime, but is rather seen as an endemic condition of the city. In spite of the description of some poor areas, such as Sanità, De Giovanni mostly describes an industrious city and the lively life of its inhabitants, especially through the description of food:

Spettacolari le vetrine dei dolcieri, al centro delle quali si stagliava un Bambinello di zucchero filato, traboccanti di ogni genere di croccante, di colline di struffoli, le palline di pasta fritta guarnite con miele e confetti colorati, di cassate, e degli immancabili dolci tradizionali, dalle coloratissime paste di mandorla disposte su ostie tagliate a misura ai taralli duri a base di mandorle, chiamati roccocò. (*Per mano* 237–38)

Michel de Certeau identifies two spatial practices as analogous to the linguistic figures of asyndeton and synecdoche (101). The first, the figure of disconnection, undoes continuity and fragments places into separate islands; the second is the figure of displacement, where a part is taken to stand for the whole that includes it. In this passage, the narrator describes the Neapolitan city centre through its Christmas shop windows. They display an abundance of festive food, from dried fruit to suckling pig, from quarters of beef to sophisticated treats filled with honey, cream, and nuts sold in “quintali” (*Per mano* 238), in stark contrast to some sparse comments about a hard life during Fascism, convey an overall image of a wealthy city. This opulence is not confined to the space of the rich, but is also present in the poorest suburbs, where delightful food is sold in the streets (*Per mano* 191–92). Not only do the numerous descriptions of lively markets, shops, and food deliver the idea of a good life in Naples in the 1930s, but signs of the *fascistizzazione* of Neapolitan society are also seen as unproblematic: “le antiche tradizioni si mischiavano felicemente ai nuovi costumi, e donne con enormi ceste di uova in bilico sulla testa, incedevano inseguite da stuoli di bambini vestiti da balilla, che andavano all’adunanza in piazza” (*Per mano* 39). This passage clearly refers to the Fascist youth paramilitary organization, the *Balilla*, described as a new custom that “felicemente” blends with old traditions, such as elderly women carrying baskets of eggs on top of their heads, providing an idyllic representation

of life under the dictatorship. This novel also provides a fictitious separation between Fascism and the state. While walking to the port militia headquarters, Ricciardi thinks “che un’organizzazione militare parallela a quella dello stato ma riferita a un partito fosse tendenzialmente pericolosa. D’altra parte, era anche vero che quel partito aveva riscosso alle ultime elezioni oltre il novanta per cento dei consensi, e quindi era facile confonderlo con lo stato stesso” (*Per mano* 60). In this extract, Ricciardi endorses the idea that the Fascist party is only one party in the political spectrum. The inspector seems to forget that by 1931—the date of the investigation—the “Leggi fascistissime” had come into effect. Among other things, the Fascist party was the only legal party in Italy at the time, freedom of press had been abolished, and new rules condemned dissidents to internal exile. By 1930, Italy was under a dictatorship.¹⁴ Ricciardi’s lack of awareness and inability to see the evils of his times may be a realistic representation of an attitude that was widespread among Italians in this dark period of Italian history. However, this attitude is never problematized in the series, as instead happens in previous crime novels set during Fascism, the De Luca series *in primis*.

Ricciardi’s questionable distinction between Fascism, as an external if disturbing “something,” and Italian society—reiterated throughout the series—allows him to do his job as a policeman without being compromised with the regime. As the police inspector repeats several times to his sidekick brigadier Maione: “Sì, Maione. Facciamo i poliziotti” (*La condanna* 253). This constant repetition of Ricciardi’s affiliation may sound similar to De Luca’s justification for being compromised with the Republic of Salò. However, this is far from the truth. While De Luca is constantly challenged for his role in the police force during the Republic of Salò—and his uneasiness is symbolized by his lack of sleep and persistent nausea—Ricciardi is never questioned, can easily have the better of his boss Garzo, never addresses his role in representing law and order in a dictatorship, and happily eats his beloved *sfogliatelle*. The investigations—which in many other crime series (especially in Lucarelli’s novels) are hampered by constant interference from the militia or the Fascist secret services—are very easy tasks in Ricciardi’s world.

This is very clear in *Per mano mia* when Ricciardi and Maione meet the head of the port militia, Consul Freda di Scanziano. He is described as a curious and clever man: “gli occhi, che sotto il fez con al centro il fascio, l’ancora e la corona,

¹⁴ Indeed, in 1926, all political parties, associations, and organizations opposed to the Fascist regime were dissolved. By 1928 Mussolini had completed the party’s transition from a major political force in Italy to a regime in its own right (Whittam 41–52).

esprimevano curiosità e intelligenza” (*Per mano* 62). The consul explains that as an officer of the Navy he has been asked to manage this corps and that he feels trapped in this position and would like to return to sea. This confidence stirs up feelings of sympathy in Maione and Ricciardi: “si aspettavano di non essere nemmeno ricevuti, e adesso si ritrovavano destinatari delle confidenze personali del comandante della legione” (*Per mano* 64). Consul Freda politely asks Ricciardi to update him about any aspect of the investigation that could cause embarrassment to the militia. Ricciardi, who is always ready to oppose his own boss’s interference, obliges: “Ricciardi volle essere più conciliante; aveva apprezzato l’approccio del console, che aveva condiviso con loro la propria difficile posizione” (*Per mano* 70). In return, he asks for *carte blanche*, and this is immediately granted by a benevolent Freda. Soon Ricciardi’s investigation reveals that the victim was corrupt. This is another characteristic that is seemingly in common with Lucarelli’s novel. However, contrary to De Luca’s adventure, this corrupt militiaman represents only one “rotten apple” in an army otherwise described as efficient and well organized. Ricciardi fears that the consul may intervene and ask him to arrest Lomunno, a disgraced militiaman, for the murder in order to close the case quickly. However, the inspector’s worries are dispelled when the consul tells him: “ve lo chiedo da uomo e da padre: fate in modo che Lomunno sia accusato solo se davvero siete persuaso che non può che essere stato lui” (*Per mano* 227). In these pages, the consul is described as a loving father and a husband, and ultimately the typical “good Fascist” of the revisionists’ argument. In dealing with such a gentleman, Ricciardi retains all his power and is free to investigate as he pleases. At the end of the novel, Ricciardi solves his case, which turns out to be a classic crime of passion, as in Lucarelli’s novel. However, unlike De Luca’s investigation, Ricciardi’s enquiry does not unmask the flaws of the Fascist regime, and the culprit is also delivered to justice.

There is only one anti-Fascist character in the series, Dr. Modo, a pathologist who is often involved in Ricciardi’s investigations. The description of this character is also problematic: in spite of venting his dissatisfaction with the regime, he keeps his job and happily enjoys life by drinking, eating, and visiting Naples’ brothels. More interestingly, his attitude in voicing his dissent is stigmatized in all the novels. For example, in *Il posto di ognuno* the narrator comments that Modo “purtroppo, non aveva peli sulla lingua” (40). Whenever the doctor attacks the regime, inspector Ricciardi reproaches him, treating him as a nuisance. He describes Modo’s behaviour as naïve and foolish (*La condanna* 173) and also makes

an appeal to the doctor's common sense when he reminds him of how many people need him as a doctor. This line of thought seems to endorse the idea that it is enough to do one's job to feel at ease with one's conscience, a stance put under scrutiny in Lucarelli's series. Moreover:

Per quanto lo riguardava, e come cercava di far capire al dottor Modo quando questi lo coinvolgeva nelle sue rabbiose tirate antifasciste, la politica non gli interessava affatto. Pensava che, alla fine, la radice dei problemi fosse la natura umana: e a quella non c'era rimedio. (*Per mano* 60)

The inability of Fascism to provide peace and happiness is not the regime's fault. Instead, it is a permanent condition in Naples and in Italy. In this way, the regime is associated with every other government that preceded it, reiterating the idea that any opposition would be fruitless. From this extract it is clear that Ricciardi is a *qualunquista* whose personal tragedy (the ability to see and hear dead people) becomes a comfortable fig leaf for his paralysing pessimism.

We cannot expect fiction to have the rigour of historical essays, but it is interesting to investigate why De Giovanni decided to give a sanitized version of the Fascist regime. One plausible explanation is that having Ricciardi as an anti-Fascist or a police inspector whose efforts to bring about justice are hampered by an overarching dictatorship would have added a layer of complications that the author simply did not want to have. The Ricciardi series follows a common trend in recent crime fiction that has registered a progressive shift "from investigation and case to protagonist and life" (Molander Danielsson 148–49). This shift has allowed Walton and Jones to compare crime series to an autobiographical style of writing (153–54). By freeing Ricciardi from the troubles of a twisted conscience, its author is equally free to concentrate on the inspector's personal life: Ricciardi's adventures are closely intertwined with his sentimental adventures. In De Giovanni's *gialli*, the romance occupies the same number of pages as the investigation itself. The intersection of crime fiction and romance has sometimes proven to be fertile ground for subverting traditional gender roles.¹⁵ However, this is not the case with the Inspector Ricciardi series: the police inspector's tormented relationship with the sweet and subdued Enrica and the passionate and cat-like Livia reiterates trite stereotypes about women. Equally significantly, De

¹⁵ See Claudia Bernardi's article in this special issue. 141–158.

Giovanni's series trivializes a crucial period of recent Italian history by using it as a mere background—described sometimes with nostalgic tones—to Ricciardi's adventures. This retreat into the private life of the characters marks a change—and perhaps an involution—in a genre that in Italy has historically been characterized by social and political *impegno*.¹⁶ The favourable reception of De Giovanni's series from both critics and readers may be also interpreted as a sign of a historical amnesia within Italian society at large.¹⁷

Conclusions

In conclusion, Lucarelli confronts Inspector De Luca's troubling adherence to Fascism (as was the case with the majority of Italians in those times) through a novel in which investigations are continually hampered by overpowering political forces. By contrast, in spite of expressing an anti-Fascist view, De Giovanni's novel ends up providing a sanitized version of the *Ventennio* that allows the protagonist to fulfil his role as a policeman without outward contradictions. In the 1990s, by mixing crime fiction and history, Lucarelli intervenes in the revisionist debate by attacking the new mythology of the innocent Fascist and by exposing Inspector De Luca's stance as "a conscious and deliberate blindness" (Somigli 23). Twenty years later, following years of Berlusconi's propaganda, De Giovanni waters down the hybridization of crime fiction and history with the insertion of romance and the supernatural in order to provide entertaining stories and attract a large audience. Being overloaded with multiple layers of hybridization, his series ends up

¹⁶ See Cannon; Pieri; and Pezzotti (*Politics and Society*).

¹⁷ Maurizio De Giovanni has a substantial fan club on Facebook. The series has also obtained bipartisan endorsements from intellectuals of the right and the left who never dispute De Giovanni's problematic representation of Fascism. Among the endorsements of the series are: "I numerosi personaggi sono così credibili nelle loro debolezze, desideri e ipocrisie da moltiplicare il numero dei possibili colpevoli lasciando intatta la suspense" (Corrado Augias); "Il commissario Ricciardi, coi suoi occhi verdi, da angelo oppure da demone, costretti a vedere ciò che gli altri—i vivi—possono evitare, si muove ai margini di un confine. Noi abbiamo il privilegio, o la condanna, di condividere la sua stessa visione" (Donato Carrisi); "De Giovanni mi ha catapultato per tutta l'estate nella Napoli degli anni Trenta insieme col suo commissario Ricciardi, di cui mi sono segretamente innamorata" (Serena Dandini); "Servendosi del suo investigatore come di un esploratore delle trame del dolore, de Giovanni inscena una poderosa commedia umana che ricorda i Comandamenti di Viviani e le 'cantate' di Eduardo" (Giancarlo De Cataldo). In <http://www.einaudi.it/libri/libro/maurizio-de-giovanni/in-fondo-al-tuo-cuore/978880620344> (consulted on 17 November 2015).

dissolving all distinctions through an appeal to individual experience and to the emotions identified by Romanelli (343).

In the final analysis, from reflecting upon the revisionist theories of the 1980s and 1990s and being functional to political and social criticism in Lucarelli's series, the fruitful hybridization of crime fiction and history has turned into a mirror of the political and historical de-awareness of Italian society of the 2000s in De Giovanni's series.

Australasian Centre for Italian Studies (ACIS)

WORKS CITED

- Angelino, Edoardo. *L'inverno dei mongoli*. Turin: Einaudi, 1995.
- Ascari, Maurizio. *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational*. London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007.
- Augias, Corrado. *Quella mattina di luglio*. Milan: Mondadori, 1995.
- Bacchereti, Elisabetta. *Carlo Lucarelli*. Fiesole, FI: Cadmo, 2004.
- Cannon, JoAnn. *The Novel as Investigation: Leonardo Sciascia, Dacia Maraini and Antonio Tabucchi*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2006.
- Carlotto, Massimo, and Marco Amici. *The Black Album. Il noir tra cronaca e romanzo*. Rome: Carocci Editore, 2012.
- Chesterton, G. K. "A Defense of Detective Stories." In *The Defendant*. Ed. G. K. Chesterton. London: Verso, 1922. 155–62.
- Cooke, Philip. *The Legacy of the Italian Resistance*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- De Felice, Renzo. *Intervista sul Fascismo*. Ed. Michael Leeden. Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1975.
- _____. *Rosso e nero*. Milan: Baldini e Castoldi, 1995.
- De Giovanni, Maurizio. *Anime di vetro. Falene per il commissario Ricciardi*. Turin: Einaudi, 2015.
- _____. *La condanna del sangue*. Turin: Einaudi, 2008.
- _____. *Il giorno dei morti*. Turin: Einaudi, 2010.

- _____. *In fondo al tuo cuore*. Turin: Einaudi, 2014.
- _____. *Per mano mia*. Turin: Einaudi, 2011.
- _____. *Il posto di ognuno*. Turin: Einaudi, 2009.
- _____. *Il senso del dolore*. 2007. Turin: Einaudi, 2012.
- _____. *Vipera*. Turin: Einaudi, 2012.
- Dunnage, Jonathan. *Twentieth Century Italy: A Social History*. London and New York: Longman, 2002.
- Galli Della Loggia, Ernesto. *La morte della patria*. Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1996.
- Ganapini, Luigi. *La repubblica delle camicie nere*. Milan: Garzanti, 1999.
- Gentile, Emilio. *Fascismo: storia e interpretazione*. Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2005.
- Gori, Leonardo. *Nero di maggio*. Milan: Hobby and Work, 2000.
- Hall, Katharina. "The 'Nazi Detective' as Provider of Justice in post-1990 British and German Crime Fiction: Philip Kerr's *The Pale Criminal*, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, and Richard Birkefeld and Göran Hachmeister's *Wer übrig bleibt, hat recht*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 50.2 (2013): 288–313.
- Horsley, Lee. *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005.
- Lichtner, Giacomo. *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945: The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory*. London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
- Losurdo, Domenico. *Il revisionismo storico. Problemi e miti*. Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1996.
- Lucarelli, Carlo. *Carta bianca*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1990..
- _____. *L'estate torbida*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1991.
- _____. *Indagine non autorizzata*. Bresso, MI: Hobby & Work Publishing, 1993.
- _____. *L'isola dell'angelo caduto*. Turin: Einaudi, 1999.
- _____. *Via delle oche*. Palermo: Sellerio, 1996.
- Luzzatto, Sergio. "Partigia". *Una storia della Resistenza*. Milan: Mondadori, 2013.
- Marling, William. *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain and Chandler*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996.
- Marrocu, Luciano. *Fáulas*. Nuoro: Il Maestrale, 2000.
- Molander Danielsson, Karin. *The Dynamic Detective: Special Interest and Seriality in Contemporary Detective Series*. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2002.
- Palamidese, Daniela. "Maurizio De Giovanni, il lettore che scrive." *L'Ora del té Blog*. Biblioteca di Spinea, 23 Feb. 2014. 15 June 2015. <<http://www>.

- biblioteca-spinea.it/blog/2014/02/23/maurizio-de-giovanni-il-lettore-che-scrive/>.
- Petronio, Giuseppe. *Sulle tracce del giallo*. Rome: Gamberetti, 2000.
- Pezzotti, Barbara. *Investigating Italy's Past through Historical Crime Fiction, Films and TV Series: Murder in the Age of Chaos*. London and New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2016.
- . *Politics and Society in Italian Crime Fiction: An Historical Overview*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014.
- Pieri, Giuliana, ed. *Italian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2011.
- Rodogno, Davide. "Italiani brava gente? Fascist Italy's Policy toward the Jews in the Balkans, April 1941–July 1943." *European History Quarterly* 35.2 (2005): 213–240.
- Romanelli, Raffaele. "Retoriche di fine millennio." In *Due nazioni. Legittimazione e delegittimazione nella storia dell'Italia contemporanea*. Ed. Loreto Di Nucci and Ernesto Galli Della Loggia. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003. 335–65.
- Sangiorgi, Marco. "Il fascismo e il giallo italiano." In *Il giallo italiano come nuovo romanzo sociale*. Ed. Marco Sangiorgi and Luca Telò. Ravenna: Longo, 2004. 117–52.
- Somigli, Luca. "Fighting Crimes in Times of War: Detective Fiction's Visions and Revision of Fascism. A New Social Novel?" In *Uncertain Justice: Crimes and Retribution in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction*. Ed. Nicoletta Di Ciolla. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010. 15–35.
- Walton, Priscilla L., and Manina Jones. *Detective Agency: Women Rewriting the Hard-Boiled Tradition*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1999.
- Whittam, John. *Fascist Italy*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Wingate, Nancy. "Getting Away with Murder: An Analysis." *Journal of Popular Culture* 12.4 (1979): 581–603.