

Call for Papers

Giallo! The Long History of Italian Television Crime Drama

Special issue edited by Luca Barra (Università di Bologna) and Valentina Re (Link Campus, Rome)

Most of the Italian television drama able to circulate internationally belongs to the multifaceted crime genre, both in some sparse examples from the past and in growing contemporary productions (from premium channels and digital platforms to public service and commercial broadcasters). However, for many decades, only a limited range of titles has been given scholarly attention, drawing a useful yet partial account of an otherwise dense and multilayered history. Moreover, exceptions have often been studied far more than the most conventional crime series in the 'giallo' spectrum: most police procedurals are deemed too formulaic, or too popular, to be distinguished. Therefore, this special issue intends to overcome these limits by focusing on the historical evolution of the crime genre inside the development of Italian television, from the early stages to the latest mainstream and niche successes, and by highlighting the many crime titles that have become familiar to large Italian audiences.

Through the Italian crime drama and its evolution over the decades, an original history of Italian television and media can be easily outlined, where 'giallo' would often mark changes of pace, innovations, successes and failures. Already in the first twenty years of the so-called paleo-television and monopoly period, crime drama was facilitating the Italian 'sceneggiato's turn towards a medium-long seriality: the investigations of 'tenente' Sheridan (from 1959 to 1972, first with *Giallo club. Invito al poliziesco* and later with *Ritorna il tenente Sheridan*, *Sheridan squadra omicidi* and *Le donne del tenente Sheridan*) or *Le inchieste del commissario Maigret* (1964-1972), starring Gino Cervi; or *Nero Wolfe* (1969-1971). Further on, it was crime drama that marked the transition—even the lexical transition—from 'sceneggiato' to 'fiction', with the great success of *La Piovra* (1984-2001). It was crime television that punctuated the golden age of public service fiction in the late Nineties: *Il maresciallo Rocca* (1996-2008), *Il commissario Montalbano* (1999-), *La squadra* (2000-2007) and the reassuring *Don Matteo* (2000-). It was crime drama that underlined the innovations of commercial networks: *Distretto di polizia* (2000- 2012), *RIS. Delitti imperfetti* (2005-2009) and *Squadra antimafia. Palermo oggi* (2009-2016). Once again, it was the crime genre that marked the arrival of premium original productions, first with Sky – *Quo vadis, baby?* (2008), *Romanzo criminale. La serie* (2008-2010) and *Gomorra. La serie* (2014-) – and later with Netflix – *Suburra. La serie* (2017-2020). Lastly, crime is one of the main battlegrounds for the return of Rai and Mediaset competition, innovating genres and aesthetics and establishing global partnerships, with titles like *Non uccidere* (2015-2018), *Rocco Schiavone* (2016-), *La porta rossa* (2016-), *I bastardi di Pizzofalcone* (2017-), *Maltese* (2017), *Il cacciatore* (2018) and *Il*

processo (2019). In Italy, as in many other countries like the United States, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia, the entire nation is reflected in the history of its TV crime drama, mixing the reverberations of a changing society – which experiences new tensions and conflicts in terms of economic insecurity, political uncertainty, family and gender norms – with formal experiments and the shared imageries of a long-lasting, rich and always new genre.

The editors encourage submissions that cover, but are not limited to, the following subjects and topics:

1. The genre and its polymorphism. How has Italian TV, across its entire history, interpreted the many subgenres of ‘giallo’ (noir, police procedural, legal drama, detective story, crime, etc.)? How are these subgenres related to different periods, specific formats, channels and platforms?
2. The familiar hybridizations with comedy and melodrama. What are the strategies to ‘balance’ the roughness of crime in the Italian tradition? How have these interacted with the crime genre?
3. The less familiar hybridizations with other genres. How have popular genres like fantasy, the supernatural, gothic, science fiction and thriller impacted the ‘giallo’ traditions and innovations?
4. The geography of Italian crime. How have the places represented in the Italian ‘giallo’ changed in television history (centre vs. peripheries; urban vs. rural stories)? How have locations affected the narrative developments, the production and the national and global circulation of these series?
5. Literary adaptations and original productions. How has the frequent adaptation of literary investigators (i.e. Maigret, Nero Wolfe, Montalbano, etc.) influenced the narratives, characters, production and promotion strategies of Italian TV dramas? How do fully-original stories differ?
6. The Italian ‘giallo’ as a transmedial phenomenon. How have crime dramas hybridized languages, figures, characters and topics from different media, such as radio, comics and cinema?
7. Mainstream dramas and quality ‘giallo’. How has ‘quality’ or ‘complex’ TV impacted Italian crime by featuring ambiguous heroes and antiheroes, multiple storylines, unconventional locations and a sophisticated visual style? And what is the role of more traditional, mass-oriented crime?
8. From amateur to professional female investigators. How have crime dramas, from Laura Storm to *Thou Shalt Not Kill*'s Valeria Ferro, shown an increasingly strong interest in female detectives? How does this help us understand, question and renegotiate evolving gender and genre norms?

9. The reality and fiction of Italian 'giallo'. How have Italian crime dramas reinterpreted or hinted at the news of 'cronaca nera', in a complex entanglement between unsolved cases and judiciary truths? In which ways has the recent explosion of serial true crime also impacted fictional series?

10. The international circulation of Italian crime. After the first success of *La piovra*, in recent years more and more national productions have met with foreign acclaim. What are the elements that facilitate this international circulation, and what are the effects on narratives and productions?

11. Italian 'giallo' and the past: national history and national memory. How has the Italian 'giallo' tradition been proven capable of turning our gaze on the past and addressing unresolved social and political conflict? How do 'gialli' contribute to a shared national memory of mysteries and traumas?

12. Italian 'giallo' and the present: social tensions and moral dilemmas. From financial issues to terrorism, from immigration to the ties between politics, corruption and organized crime, how has the contemporary crime drama contributed to narrating conflict and fear in our societies?

The deadline for the submission of abstracts is 30 April. Interested contributors should send the following materials to the guest editors Luca Barra, Università di Bologna (luca.barraATunibo.it) and Valentina Re, Link Campus, Rome (v.reATunilink.it): a 500 word abstract in English of original and unpublished articles, outlining the topic, approach and theoretical bases with a relevant bibliography and filmography; and a 200 word biographical note. The accepted proposals will be notified by 31 May; completed articles should be sent by 15 October for peer-review; authors will be notified of the results of the peer-review by 15 December 2021.