

Exquisite Corpses

*Visualization and Domestication of the Dead Body
in Italian Crime Fiction*

Barbara Martelli

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Abstract

In 1990s' Italy, crime fiction reached a position of centrality and prominence in the publishing market, the consumption of literature and the attention of critics. Indeed the success of contemporary crime fiction is a worldwide cultural and transmedia phenomenon. My research argues that the popularity of this genre is due mainly to its depiction of bodies and crime scenes, a representation that incorporates the specific ontological and epistemological paradigms of an era.

Although there has never been a crime story without a good body, today any crime fiction story, written, televised, filmed or on the Internet, has the representation of the corpse as its distinctive and essential element. The corpse has become the real tool of the detective and the international hallmark of the genre. A visual/medical culture has permeated and transformed contemporary society and has entered the genre as a recognizable background, hardly needing translation, eroding local features and rewriting the dynamics between local and global.

Yet the diffusion in crime fiction of a necro aesthetic of corporal dismemberment, with its fetishism of pieces and organs, has not always been isomorphic to a hegemonic discourse. In fact the representation of the body resulting from the progressive medicalization of Western society has also been the means of an alternative discourse which is dissonant with that of science, medicine and socio-cultural models of compliance. In the 1990s both the neo-noir writers and the literary group of the so-called Young Cannibals renewed the Italian literary panorama with works overflowing with extreme and detailed violence. Their protest against the status quo has been inscribed in tortured, killed, dismembered and commodified bodies.

More recently crime fiction has been invaded by pornographic and gore motifs. The constant reiteration of torn apart bodies has domesticated their description, eroding the disturbing effect that such representation previously had on the public's perception. Behind sensationalistic and graphic representations of corpses, the genre has returned to a moralistic and biologizing neo-conservatism in the depiction of deviance, abnormality and crime. It looks spectacular, standardized by the cultural industry and sanitized by scientific and medical imagery.

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Introduction

In 1990s' Italy, the narrative genre labelled as crime fiction, *giallo*, reached a position of centrality and prominence in the publishing market, the consumption of literature and the attention of critics.

It became a worldwide cultural phenomenon, articulated in innumerable local variations and expressed in original combinations of genres and media. Its constituent features have not only become characteristic of contemporary fiction and a common cultural heritage, but they have also been taken as a metaphor for human action and feeling (Petronio, 1998, p. 80).

Authors more and more often choose the form of the mystery or the police investigation to meet the expectations of a large audience. This pan-social and pan-cultural preference reflects the intellectual habit of reading everyday reality as an enigma to be solved: searching for the culprit, discovering the motive, collecting the evidence, evaluating the suspects and verifying the clues are the expression of a collective way of thinking shared by writers, readers, producers and critics (Manai, 2006, pp. 66-67). Bertolt Brecht argued that, in an era marked by the influence of science, such as the one in which we live, a logical puzzle pleases readers because they see causality functioning precisely and satisfactorily since in reality it rarely happens (1967, pp. 93-102).

However, the prime mover of detective literature is the fascination emanating from the death drive: murder, together with its most tangible by-product, the corpse, is the essential starting point of the narration. *Le plaisir du texte* is not just the intellectual challenge cast to the reader, who must reconstruct the dynamics of the crime, and the suspense that goes with the discovery process. Every investigation alludes to the greatest human drama, the insoluble and inevitable one of death. Detective fiction teaches its

readers how to play with mourning by exorcizing it, chastising it and domesticating it (Spinazzola, 2010, pp. 12-30).

Consolation, or catharsis, is guaranteed by the positive outcome of the detection, which cannot erase the tragic effects of the crime but still promises the restoration of the infringed order, by punishing those responsible according to the laws of society, the ruling class that is. Detective stories, in fact, while amusing the readers, also participate in their education at the level of the collective imagination. Depending on the historical period, they have performed an integrative or disintegrative function of respect for the hegemonic system of values, norms and beliefs accredited by bourgeois and patriarchal society, which remains the dominant one today (Mandel, 1984, pp. 31-35).

From its very beginning, the popularity of crime fiction has been linked to a specific way of looking at the world, namely the tendency to transform both the crime into an object of investigation and the body of the crime (first among the clues) into a corpse to be dissected and interrogated. This is the specific historical and epistemological context of the positivist era of both Europe and North America, confident in scientific and technological progress.

Today any crime fiction story, whether written, or on television, film or the internet, has the representation of the dead body as its distinctive and essential element. The cadaver is not just essential, it is also “exquisite”, if we may borrow the term from the literary game invented and enjoyed by the Surrealists and later introduced into crime fiction by Francesco Rosi’s 1976 eponymous movie. Even if we rarely, if ever, come across an actual corpse in our everyday life, the corpse is a most familiar, routine item on the page and, even more often, on the screen. We are so used to seeing this that we hardly notice it anymore. This entertaining cadaver is a visual representation that entertains the public going beyond the genre’s boundaries. It has become the unavoidable feature of a dominant narration that shows global tendencies and the ingredient that can be combined with the most diverse materials: the

evening news, a Netflix TV series, an art exhibition on violence against women, or a crime story, of course. Furthermore, it seems to us completely natural and normal that the dead body is examined first by expert doctors, scientists or other professionals. Indeed, it is crucial that they are the first to analyse it, touch it, and take care of it. Medicine now holds the appropriate knowledge and expertise to understand the human body.

This is the core of our thesis: the visualization and domestication of the human body in Italian crime fiction. We study the representation of the crime and the corpse, the driving force of crime fiction, as a key to understanding crime fiction's socio-cultural functions and the reasons underpinning its huge international success.

The figures confirm crime fiction as one of the bestselling fiction genres in international markets, despite the current decline in the global book trade, and thanks to its adaptability to new reading platforms, such as audiobooks and e-books, and to transmediality in general. The crime, mystery and thriller genres accounted for almost 10% of all Amazon sales in Italy in early 2018 (Stinson, 2020, pp. 39-44). According to Istat (2019), 27.8% of the Italian publishing market in 2018 was made up of modern literary fiction books and 6.9% of this consisted of adventure and detective/crime fiction.

Italian critics have only partially taken into consideration the extent to which this success is the result of writing that, describing bodies and crime scenes, incorporates the specific ontological and epistemological paradigms of an era. Some salient questions emerged from our analysis of a corpus consisting mainly of written texts, but also including audio-visual products, chosen as indicative of the trends of contemporary Italian crime fiction. Currently, fiction appears saturated with a medicalized, visualized, reified and domesticated representation of the body. How and why has the corpse become so good (to write about)? What factors helped make this image dominant? To what extent has it contributed to promoting crime literature in cultures around the world?

We have framed the novels we examined within the historical and social context of their origin, identifying the connections with other works published both in Italy and abroad, in particular the *neo-noir* and pulp writings that emerged in Italy in the 1990s.

Our research hypothesis is discussed in four chapters, each of which is divided into sub-chapters offering theoretical and methodological considerations, which are combined with textual analysis.

In **1.1 *Epos of Modernity***, the first part of **Chapter I, The Medical-Semiotic Thread of Crime Fiction**, we consider the reasons for the success that detective fiction has gained from its very beginning, according to the interpretation of such intellectuals as Serghei Eisenstein and Antonio Gramsci, and literary critics such as Giuseppe Petronio, Vittorio Spinazzola and Ernest Mandel. We discuss how the representation of death and the body has been closely linked to an aesthetic and epistemological shift that involved the mystery genre from the start, as well as a series of other manifestations of a common socio-cultural sphere. The representation of the corpse changed from a long era of spectacularization of death to a progressive medicalization, bureaucratization and sanitization of practices, which reified the body and confined the continued voyeurism of the people behind the screens.

Sub-chapter **1.2 The Criminal Body** demonstrates how the democratic reforms of the criminal system in Europe and North America, between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries, put an end to a long tradition of macabre and bloodthirsty punitive spectacles, with the body being their primary target. Beside the new educational intent of the penalties, which focused on the social effects of crime, a new moral and psychiatric attention to the offender also appeared (Foucault, 1975).

In the late 1870s, criminal anthropology and phrenology laid the foundations of racist and eugenicist ideologies, which inspired, in the following decades, the socio-cultural framework within which both the colonial campaigns and those of sterilization and

extermination of groups stereotyped as inferior were conducted. We also note that the scientific value of the measurement of skulls or humeri to identify “the delinquent man” with all his stigmata (Lombroso, 1876), as questionable as it may be from today’s science, has had repercussions in recent years too, defined by a rampant Neo-Darwinism returning to fashion in a new guise. In those years, scientific research on fingerprints developed. Initially used by the British colonial administration and in the main American ports during immigration procedures, they proved to be a formidable tool for classifying and identifying a growing group of potentially dangerous subjects. Dactyloscopy transformed the identity of people into an index anchored to biological data, inserted into a rational and bureaucratic mass system (Cole, 2002, pp. 23-58). It contributed decisively to the idea that the person corresponds to an organic uniqueness, visible and distinguishable from all others.

Today’s technologies have brought the analysis of human identity to increasingly microscopic levels and have further extended the process of biologization and abstraction of identity, especially by making their data available on global networks (Courtine & Vigarello, 2006, pp. 275- 288). More than ever, bodies are now fixed in codes within gigantic and meticulous archives that allow the homogenization and integration of individual data in cumulative systems. People have become describable, analysable objects, potentially always under the constant gaze of a permanent knowledge, a power to record, describe, supervise and control (Foucault, 1975, pp. 197-229).

Sub-chapter **1.3 The Abnormal Body** deals with the exhibition of the savage, the deformities and bodily oddities, which reached its peak in the 1880s and died out in the progressive scientification of the gaze on the body. At its dawn, the mass entertainment industry attracted millions of spectators exploiting some material devices, as it were: the *Grand bazar des monstruosités*, the Freak Shows and Grand Guignol’s magic tricks and optical illusions, the human zoos, the ethnic performances and the anatomical museums.

These procedures and venues didn't just make big profits, they also functioned as a means of controlling the free time of the urban masses, diverting them from more anarchist pastimes and, at the same time, contributing to their education according to the rules of bourgeois capitalist society. To achieve this, they enrolled the body considered as *abnormal* (monstrous, perverted and criminal) into a regime of visibility and spectacularization that materialized racial hierarchies and social norms.

The change in sensitivity toward bodily diversity and the development of modern genetics and teratology marked the transition from entertainment to medical dominance. Curiosity about the anomaly was relegated to the scientific laboratory and, outside of it, reduced or condemned to exhibitionism and a taste for obscenity, i.e., perversion. Later, the advent of cinema, television and all new mass distraction media dematerialized the vision of monsters in cinematographic and cathode images, but also made them more spectacular and gruesome thanks to the possibilities of these new visual devices (Courtin, 2006, pp. 209- 220).

The next sub-chapter, **1.4 The Evidential Paradigm and Anatomic-Clinical Method**, comes to the heart of the matter. Outlining a brief history of the genre, we trace a semiotic medical cognitive paradigm, starting from the deductive/abductive method of the first detectives up to the supremacy of the technicians and forensic investigators in today's internationally successful television series. August Dupin and Sherlock Holmes knew how to see the invisible and reconstruct events from the tiniest clues, with the technological aid of photographs, blood, ash and fingerprints tests. Detective fiction appears as the narrative form of what historian Carlo Ginzburg (1979/1990, p. 117) called the "evidential paradigm", that is, a model of knowledge acquisition based on conjectures. Emerging in the human sciences in the late 19th century, this paradigm is concerned with the ability to read almost imperceptible signs to trace the unknown causes of a phenomenon. Disciplines such as Freudian psychoanalysis, art criticism, jurisprudence and police investigation all have in

common the same method, which is close to that of medical semiotics (to examine the symptoms and read them as signs of the disease). The clinical eye and the investigative eye have the same kind of ability to bring the truth to light by deciphering clues that are imperceptible to amateurs.

However, the gaze on the body is not circumstantial, both in society and in crime fiction. The progressive spread of the clinical method was crucial for the emergence of modern medicine as a most influential system of power and knowledge, but it would not have been enough without the contribution of pathological anatomy to the knowledge of the human body. The more the autopsy practice was encouraged in universities and hospitals, supported by new legislation that made it possible to inspect corpses for scientific purposes, the more the possibility of immediately opening the body after death made the organic origins of disease evident and localized into organs. Foucault (1963/1973, p. 4) named this kind of medical gaze “anatomy-clinical”: desacralized and transformed into a fundamental object for medical practice and studies, the body entered the domain of scientific and technical knowledge and anatomy established itself as a model of learning and thinking.

1.5 The Hard Model’s Crisis traces the historical changes in the crime genre that led, subsequently, to the crisis of the rationalistic model and the onset of the *noir* genre with all its relativistic underpinning. Mystery fiction was revolutionized on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1930s. Its intellectual and aseptic detection gave way to a more realistic and crude vision of society, both in the psychological detective novels written by Georges Simenon, featuring *Commissaire Maigret*, and in the hard-boiled thrillers of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler. These authors, having no faith in the logic and optimistic course of progress, brought the themes of violence and the hunt for justice in a deeply corrupt society to the fore.

As for high culture, avant-garde literature experimented with the structure of detective

fiction to represent the chaos of the world and the crisis of thought. The open and problematic thrillers of writers such as Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Carlo Emilio Gadda, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Marco Denevi left the plot unsolved, or proposed different and all possible solutions, or even decreed the death of mystery fiction. Thus, they expressed the impossibility of finding the truth, the inextricable complexity of a world dominated by chance.

The American “Tough Guys” stories, which came out of pulp magazines, were translated and publicized in Europe under the name of *noir*, a label later assigned to the most ethically and politically committed crime literature, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s especially in France and Italy. In Léo Malet’s *polar* novels, in Milanese hard-boiled thrillers published between 1966 and 1969 by Giorgio Scerbanenco, in Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s and Leonardo Sciascia’s disturbing investigations, the intrigue was an immersion in the darkness of the human soul, in a violent world, populated by marginal characters rebelling against the system, to denounce the social evils that lodge behind the crimes. With these authors, another type of “exquisite cadaver” came to light. It is that filmed by the director Francesco Rosi in his thriller *Cadaveri eccellenti* [Illustrious Corpses] (1976), inspired by Leonardo Sciascia’s crime novel *Il contesto. Una parodia* [translated as Equal Danger] (1971). It is a corpse struggling to find some justice in a deeply rotten society, where the tangle of guilt, motives and corruption behind the crime cannot easily be revealed. No catharsis is offered to the readers since truth is still to be found, outside the text, in the real world.

A revival of this subgenre exploded in the 1980s with the success of James Ellroy’s novels in the United States. The graphic and harsh style of his *neo-noir* works, full of splatter and horror traits, became a preferred model for subsequent writers. Pairs or squads of police officers gained in popularity, investigating with morally questionable methods and uncovering social corruption or the perversion of psychotic criminals. *Neo-noir* emerged almost

immediately as an international phenomenon, with authors from a wide variety of countries exploiting the high readability of crime stories and the public's taste for macabre details. The strengthening of ethical-social demands was closely linked to the brutality of the writing. The value of literature as an instrument of demystification and denunciation of the critical issues of mass society and the brutality of the rising neoliberalism was expressed also, and above all, through the gaudy representation of ruthless violence.

In **1.6 Neo-Positivism** our discourse turns to more recent years, when crime fiction returned to a renewed confidence in the heuristic power of the scientific method, empowered by the technological arsenal, to bring reality back to biophysical and individualizing explanations. Protagonists of the literary scene and, even more so, those of television are teams of experts who solve cases by professionally examining genetic and other biological clues, and comparing them with those put on the internet by gigantic international databases. For this new generation of detective-scientists, police investigation and forensic investigation merge in a discovery process that is not only based on an anatomized, reified and medicalized body, but is also technologically mediated. Their gaze is trained by technology, their work happens in the lab.

This gradual process of reification of the body, both dead and alive, took place along with a medicalization without precedent that affected Western culture and society. Human identity, death, crime, marginality, mental illness and body aberration are just some of the areas that have undergone bio-medicalization. Medicine considers the biophysical dimensions of the body to be the only thing of relevance. Other disciplines have been gradually disqualified, while disease and death have been reduced to facts of nature and, consequently, have been gradually de-socialized and de-politicized. Physical or mental suffering is now conceived of as an individual problem, rooted in the biological being, originating from causes that people cannot see with their own eyes because they need specialist knowledge. Thus, the

individual has been alienated, initially from the social dimension, and then from his or her own body. Furthermore, the biologization of the disease has reduced, if not cancelled, the meaning of rebellion or protest against an oppressive order, which suffering can express (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987).

Moreover, in the name of prevention, medicine has transformed the traditional anatomical knowledge gained from the dead into a virtual exploration of the living. The body's organs and cavities are regularly probed by technologies and surgical interventions that minimize violence which are aided by visual tools, such x-rays, MRIs, scans etc. A medical iconography has monopolized the perception of the body, but this new culture of inquisition and unveiling has a deceptive transparency that does not bring any fixed truth. In fact, its findings are the result of a negotiation of gazes that are anything but neutral and require a specific hermeneutic (Moulin, 2006, pp. 55-71).

Bio-medical technologies are increasingly involved in the modelling and construction of the human being, in a modification that reaches cellular levels and brings the process of objectification and commodification of human materials to new heights. The body is conceived less and less as an organism and more and more in terms of its composite parts, which can be explanted, transplanted and sold. The body can be alienated from the person, while some elements (organs, semen, oocytes, blood, embryos and fragments of DNA) can become objects in themselves, which circulate independently from the subject. It happens, for example, in the case of the "brain death" that was debated and approved in the 1990s in most Western countries, to allow organ transplantation from patients still alive, as well as the illegal trafficking of organs from living donors in disadvantaged countries (Lock, 2002).

The effects of medicalization have also influenced the field of crime, where the offense has been progressively translated into the lexicon of pathology and deviance from a normativity increasingly anchored to biological data. We have gone from the idea of social

control to that of individual responsibility, from a criminal model to a therapeutic ideal not only for crimes, but also for a growing series of marginal conduct (O'Neill, 1985, pp. 127-128). Scientific reductionism has ended up limiting people's freedom and disqualifying everything that is subversive and unconventional in actions.

The more the scientist's eye manages to go deeper, to make visible what is not visible, the more it is believed that it captures what really exists. In Western society the dominant metaphor is to connect knowledge to vision. In recognizing ourselves in this widespread and shared mentality, which praises a science that becomes more credible the more it can describe organic life, we participate in what Gramsci called "cultural hegemony", which legitimizes and naturalizes some forms of knowledge, value judgements and ways of classifying the world. The medical dominance in the areas of both knowledge and representation of the body, together with the prevalent rationalist-scientist ideology, work effectively in both supporting the values of the social order and hiding social, political and economic contradictions and conflicts (Basaglia, 1968/1998, pp. 372-377).

1.7 Criminal Science Investigation investigates the role of the new crime fiction avenger/hero: the coroner (Courtine & Vigarello, 2006, pp. 288-290). Semiotic observation of the crime scene and comparative analysis of traces has become a real cult in fiction, with characters like Herbert Lieberman's anatomist pathologist Paul Konig, Patricia Cornwell's coroner Kay Scarpetta, Michael Connelly's detective Harry Bosch and Kathy Reichs' forensic anthropologist Tempe Brennan. However, the real impact on the public's taste and expectations came with the worldwide successful TV series *CSI*, which began in 2000 and continued with spin-offs and the myriad of programs created in its wake (Weber & Timmermans, 2010, p. 62).

The victim's body is now the fundamental starting point to trace the identity of an initially invisible culprit, who is gradually tracked down, materialized and visualized through

the rigorous analysis of the organic traces that he or she has disseminated. The real crime scene, today, is inside the dead body. Only by opening and reducing it to its parts does the truth come to light. This dissection takes place in the sterile environment of the pathologist's laboratory and appears devoid of violence. It is necessary thanks to the power of science. No matter how much medical detectives get dirty with blood up to their elbows, theirs is a clean fight. The direct and violent confrontation with crime is mediated by scientific distance.

These teams of professionals have replaced the Holmes-Watson couples with a fair representation of gender, colour, age and ability so as not to disappoint the political correctness required by the box office and enforced by the Hollywood studios. Their task is less and less to guess and more and more to analyse and question, not only people but things themselves. Dupin's dazzling intuitions have given way to the microscope. Consequently, the grip on the audience is largely played on a hyper-detailed representation of corpses and live bodies, seen both inside and in their pieces, only illusorily objective, which has revived the voyeurism of the *cabinet des curiosities* and optical illusions of penny shows. Monsters have also returned to the limelight, in the modern guise of the psychopathic serial killers who have invaded crime fiction. The revelation of the perversions of their minds captures the attention of the readers, as in the times when people queued to look at the bodies of the criminals and perverts exposed in the Paris *morgue*.

In today's fiction, crime is almost always shown within a medical-scientific framework. The forensic investigation has largely replaced the political and ethical commitment of *noir* fiction, which aimed to represent criminality in its complexity and ambiguity. The more detailed the representation of the body is, the more transparent the body becomes. The more it attains accessibility to the eye as far as the bowels and bones, fragmented at the microscopic level of the cell, the more it provides the opportunity to find the truth, and the plots of these bestsellers unfailingly confirm the value of such technology.

Chapter II, *Giallo, Noir and the Cannibals*, focuses on the Italian context. **2.1 Italian *Giallo*** opens with a brief outline of the development of detective fiction, also called *giallo* [yellow], after the cover's colour of the label launched by editor Mondadori in 1929. The genre gradually established itself, not only as a popular genre, but also as high literature. In particular, we focus on Scerbanenco's detailed horror descriptions and Sciascia's problematic investigations, in which every possibility of justice is annihilated by the overwhelming power of a mafia-corrupted State. They were both fundamental models for the Italian *neo-noir* of the 1990s.

The wave of *neo-noir* writings is at the centre of the next sub-chapter, **2.2 *Neo-Noir***, which examines the crucial contribution that they brought to the ways of representing the body and violence, in line with the brutal realism already widespread in North American and European literature. Linguistically and geographically spread throughout the peninsula, the authors polarized around some main cities: the *Scuola dei Duri* [Tough Guys School] and the feminist publishing house La Tartaruga in Milan, the *Gruppo 13* [Group 13] in Bologna and the *Factory Neonoir* in Rome. A school of Sardinian crime fiction also flourished, while the popularity of Sicilian Andrea Camilleri's novels began with the Inspector Montalbano series and they continue to stand out in book ratings today.

We attribute to the Roman group some of the more programmatic reflections on the distinctive features of the new Italian *noir*: the preference accorded to the point of view of the murderer, the tendency to mix and cross over genres and to a multimedia approach, the omnipresence of horrifying and excessive violence that is full of heinous details. However, the main characteristic of *neo-noir* is the desire to exploit the narrative fiction to reveal the evils that afflict the country and communicate social dissent and resistance to the established order (Scarponi, 2000, p 18). The structure of the detective genre and its ability to reach a large audience is exploited for a counter-informative

purpose: to present the most salient social and political current issues from a dissident perspective.

During the same period these narrative experiences were intertwined with those of a series of writers who took inspiration from the North American splatter/pulp style. We see this in **2.3 Young Cannibals' Massacres**. Between 1996 and 1997, collections of short stories and novels, containing high levels of violence, animated the publishing scene. The successful label of *Giovani Cannibali* [Young Cannibals] was given to the authors of such publications following the title of the successful collection *Gioventù Cannibale* [Cannibal Youth] edited by Daniele Brolli for the prestigious publishing house Einaudi. These authors' fierce condemnation of the myths of contemporary society and its alienated, commodified inhabitants lost in boredom and rampant nonsense, passes through a detailed and gory representation of violence, sex and death. The irony and detachment that accompanies it, together with a style that enriches and deforms the standard language with raids into television, street slang, cinema and pop music, bring these Cannibals somewhat close to the post-modern pastiche of the members of neo-avant-garde of *Gruppo 63* [Group 63], such as Nanni Balestrini, Renato Barilli and Umberto Eco. A large part of Italian critical literature has condemned the graphic descriptions of brutal violence and accused Cannibals of sensationalism pleasing readers' voyeurism. However, we propose a different critical reading, showing how their attempts at hybrid and disturbing works can be read as counter-narratives to the prevailing socio-cultural order, particularly with their emphasis on the massacred body.

In the final sub-chapter, **2.4 Television Effect**, we consider the profound influence of television on writing. We discuss the global effects of the literature mediatization inducted by visual media (Pischedda, 2008; Eichenbaum, 1927/1980) and we argue that today's crime fiction aims at mass audience through the contemporary version of the *feuilleton*: the TV

series. Television productions have spread cultural trends globally, much more than written narrative.

At the beginning of **Chapter III, 3.1 A Body in Pieces** focuses on Italian *neo-noir* and pulp writing and demonstrates how staged violence and death are meant to warn readers against the homogenization of consciences, the risk of ending up absorbed in mystifying discourses that conceal and naturalize the profound injustices of a hypocritical society. However, the excessive violence in their texts goes beyond mere provocation of the reader and brings attention to the way in which social contradictions and inequities are *incorporated* by people as suffering, madness or violence. We argue that these writers depicted bodies disciplined, despised, marginalized, tortured, violated, torn to pieces and alienated, in order to highlight the extraordinary impact of both social models and relationships on them. At the same time, they used those bodies as a subversive means to criticize the oppressive forms of power and social control. We also argue that this narrative choice was made possible by the fact that the body became the closest and most immediate terrain in which social truths are forged and antinomies are staged.

In **3.2 Commodified Subversive Bodies**, we examine stories of alienation, dismemberment, oppression, abuse and injustice, with the aim of deconstructing the representation of the body at the centre of these texts. We show how the violence is not only a fulcrum of disintegration, but also of negotiation of alternative forms of existence. The inept and ferocious young killers, protagonists of texts by Niccolò Ammaniti, Luisa Brancaccio and Enrico Brizzi, rage against victims who personify despised social stereotypes, in a vain attempt to appease the existential void and disgust towards bourgeois society. Aldo Nove's alienated and semi-illiterate characters embody the grotesque horror of consumerism and its incessant advertising which lacerate bodies with a multitude of contradictory needs and desires. Alda Teodorani's massacred tramps and Nicoletta Vallorani's tortured, raped and cooked children

highlight the rhetoric of social cleansing of big cities, the criminalization of both anti-social behaviour and less than free life choices of the weakest and most marginal subjects. In all these cases, crime, madness and misery are narratively used as weapons to refuse the normalization urged by society and to express a residual freedom. The insistence on ironically writing about horrific dismemberments has emerged as an effective way of showing the extreme objectification, alienation and commodification that bodies, some more than others, undergo. The breaking bodies draw the reader's attention to the violence that has been inscribed on those bodies by the same society that has produced both victims and villains.

Sub-chapter **3.3 The Female Body** focuses on the sexualized feminine body as the preferential object of the characters' fury. By examining descriptions of women slaughtered in several authors' *neo-noir* and Cannibal publications (Ammaniti, Brizzi, Camilleri, Caredda, Fois, Massaron) we discuss how they placed themselves in dissonant and competing terms with respect to the violent male chauvinism that permeates Italy, and perhaps the world. Through their ironic and ruthless depiction of hateful acts, they exposed and criticized the violence of the compliance models towards which society pushes young men and women. However, they did not denaturalize or deconstruct these models.

As we see in **3.4 Sisterhood in Pulp**, female writers of both *neo-noir* and pulp explicitly attacked patriarchal institutions in a more extreme way than their male colleagues. They focused on victims of both social and male violence: women massacred by their husbands or those who bled to death, thrown to the edges of society, forgotten in the morgue because of legislation that fails to guarantee fundamental rights to health (including the reproductive one), economic and family independence, authentic freedom and self-determination. This is the case of Nicoletta Vallorani, Grazia Verasani and Margherita Oggero, among others.

There are also heroines who have redeemed the long tradition of female characters'

social oppression and objectification in crime and pulp fiction, by emasculating, mutilating and killing male victims and enjoying it. In this context, we examine the works by Simona Vinci and Alda Teodorani. These authors have opted for a more radical solution than victimization or the proclamation of rights, in line with the Italian feminist manifestoes of the 1970s. Their protagonists express their commitment to building revolutionary justice, a fairness conceding nothing to rules that support femicides and misogynist sexual crimes and misdemeanours. And this struggle has been embodied in a series of somatic, drastic and joyful practices and performances, with which they heal and free themselves from the phallogentric hegemony's built-in markers.

In **3.5 The Counter-Building of a *Camorrista***, we show that not all the writers participate in brutal and sexist masculinity models. Giuseppe Ferrandino has demonstrated this with his novels, and especially with *Pericle il Nero* [Pericles the Black] (1993/1998). This is a *Bildungsroman* set in the very centre of Camorra culture, a story of redemption from genre and gender clichés. In other words, a counter-education from the male chauvinist principles and practices of violence, which are all focused on the character's body. Indeed, it is his body and its parts, initially docile then progressively more and more rebellious, that challenge the system of power from within.

In sub-chapter **3.6 The Organs' Marketplace**, we discuss the extreme reification of the human body and its components, which in the contemporary world are increasingly modified, recycled, alienated from the person and put into international trading networks. Horror dismemberments and serial killers have become fashionable and commercially profitable in today's crime fiction but in the 1990s, writers such as Ammaniti, Fois, Mozzi, Nove, Teodorani and Vallorani portrayed them with a very different intent than sales of their works. In their texts, they have addressed the paradoxical effects of the commodification and *fetishization* of organs and other human pieces, which travel through the market as goods

made precious by the market-driven ideal of body perfection.

Precisely the abnormal, the monsters and the serial killers who tear bodies apart are the leitmotifs of Carlo Lucarelli's series of crime novels starring Inspector Grazia Negro. We examine them in **3.7 Shape-Shifter Serial Killers**. Showing a diligent documentation in the history of psychiatry and forensic psychiatry, Lucarelli stressed and condemned the excesses and paradoxes of the psychiatrization of non-standard and criminal behaviour. Despite the display of the most modern technologies and medical-scientific theories, his plots are invariably resolved thanks to the inspector's instinctive approach. Both the monsters' and Grazia's bodies play a central role in the development of the multiple and contradictory perspectives outlined by the author. Among these, the reader can choose whether to enjoy the reassuring happy ending, guaranteed by the invincible police team, or rather to take sides with the crazy and fascinating villains.

Much more Manichean is the amateur and schizophrenic investigator, the Gorilla, created by Sandrone Dazieri, whose narrator is always on the side of the losers and the poor people. He opens the last sub-chapter **3.8 Bad or Mad**, cited as an example of a non-medicalized and hilarious point of view on mental disorders. In fact, the Gorilla employs its dissociated identity as a "partner" in investigations, constantly blurring the border between normalcy and madness. In contrast, as we argue in the final part of Chapter III, recent crime fiction has been flooded by bloodthirsty and perverse psychopaths, clearly opposed to the good investigator. The representation of a psychiatric and punitive approach has brought the genre back to a conservative moralism in the vision of crime and deviant behaviour. Indeed, this fiction reflects a pervasive scientific discourse that tends, not only to control, normalize and medicalize madness, but also to reduce it to its biology.

In the final **Chapter IV, Global Trends in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction**, **4.1 Global Noir** deals with crime fiction in present days. The *neo-noir* and Cannibal-pulp

transgressive styles that, in the 1990s, attacked the representative conventions and brought Italian fiction on a par with the European and North American ones, over time have diminished their disruptive effect. The extreme violence that has contributed to their popularity is now eroded, inexorably replaced by a fiction that, in line with international trends, appears saturated with brutalized bodies, dissected corpses and macabre details. Therefore, the impact of this violence as a narrative means of communicating an ethical and subversive content has been diluted by the availability and trivialization of pornography, exhibitionism and voyeurism (of sex and horror). The diffusion and homogenization of the techniques of production and reproduction of images have standardized both the reception and expectations of crime fiction.

Meticulous descriptions of autopsies and crime scenes, scientific analysis and police reports have now become monotonous formulae. In Italy, members of *Gruppo 13*, such as Carlo Lucarelli and Marcello Fois, were the forerunners of a scientifically inspired crime fiction, albeit combined with a critical spirit that, for the most part, is missing today. In **4.2 *Gruppo 13 Crime Scenes*** we perform a close textual analysis of Fois' *Dura madre* [Dura Mater] (2001) to show how the heuristic sequence "corpse-police-forensic-investigation-truth" is not taken for granted but, instead, is questioned. In contrast, in more recent times, the authors of crime novels have exaggerated the contribution of both scientific data and forensic examinations in the discovery of truth, without questioning either the cultural framework in which science is inscribed or the risks of reductionism.

However, it seems that crime fiction is no longer possible without forensics. The popular detective Salvo Montalbano, created by Andrea Camilleri, confirms this trend. As we suggest in sub-chapter **4.3 *Inspector Montalbano***, at the time of the Young Cannibals Camilleri mocked the splatter exaggerations that pleased the public and preferred a softer, although not disengaged, writing. Nevertheless, in both his most recent novels and television

adaptations, violence and science have occupied significantly more space. Montalbano has reluctantly surrendered to the need for his intuitions to be supported by technological apparatus, and his author obliged the market's requirement to offer rawer descriptions to readers.

In so far as the global cultural industry has largely homogenized the mass-production of crime fiction, the body appears more and more standardized by this necro-aesthetic trend in representation. In **4.4 Power of Confirmation**, we examine the visual depiction of the corpse in several heterogeneous TV series, which have become the most effective media for the genre to reach a large public. The medicalization of an overexposed and sexualized body (especially females) is accompanied by the apparently realistic output of the most disparate forensic exams and by a pervasive medical iconography. In this way, viewers have become accustomed to a scientific realism, a representation procedure that uses science to support the authenticity of its portrayal. Of course, it is a sophisticated technique aimed at reassuring the public. Our brief analysis includes the international television productions released in recent years, in particular those available on the Netflix platform, which has profoundly influenced the world television landscape.

This also happened in Italy, as we see in **4.5 The Italian Panorama**. Italian television has been polarized for many years by two producers, the public RAI and the private Mediaset. Recently the scene changed. First, Sky Italia pay-tv entered the market with innovative productions. We discuss in particular the peculiarities of the series *Romanzo criminale* [Criminal Novel] and *Gomorra* [Gomorra] with respect to the representation of criminal violence. Influenced by the great success of these series, even generalist broadcasters, which have always preferred a softer representation of violence and corpses, have updated their style to satisfy the taste of the audience. Secondly, the streaming platform Netflix has started, not only to distribute, but also to produce Italian crime series, giving space to graphic brutality.

Finally, the **Conclusions** retrace the stages of our discussion. We demonstrate how the representation of the dismembered body in crime fiction derived from an aesthetic and cognitive revolution. Our analysis of a corpus of mostly Italian written and audio-visual works focuses on the social-cultural implications of such a representation of the corpse. We argue that 1990s *neo-noir* and pulp Italian writers employed horror-like descriptions of murders and cadavers as a means to a social critique. We discuss the recent shift that has occurred in crime fiction, which has increasingly embedded that subversive voice into a mainstream aligned with the established power.

Chapter I

The Medical-Semiotic Thread of Crime Fiction

Epos of Modernity

Because it sells.

In a literary conversation on crime fiction, in which some Italian authors took part, a provocative question was asked:

Ha scritto Tiziano Scarpa: “Il giallo, il noir è commercialmente al potere, è il genere letterario che vende, che funziona più di tutti (...) Scrivendo di morti e ammazzamenti e investigatori e brividi si piglia più pubblico.” Come commentereste questa affermazione? (Malesi & Infanti, 2011)¹

Tiziano Scarpa wrote: “The *giallo*, the *noir*, is commercially in power, it is the literary genre that sells, that works the best (...) by writing about dead bodies and killings and detectives one reaches more of the public.” How would you comment on this statement?

The writer Gianni Biondillo replied to the words of his colleague, Tiziano Scarpa, bringing attention to the reasons for the extraordinary success of this genre, which for him represents the most effective narrative form today:

Perché? Cioè: perché, oggi, qui e ora, il genere ha vinto? Solo perché “vende”? Vendeva anche prima, quando era solo roba da estrarre dalla tasca dei pantaloni e leggere sul tram, senza perder tempo lungo la strada verso il posto di lavoro. Perché, oggi, c'è un'intera generazione di scrittori in Italia che sente di doversi esprimere attraverso il genere? Questa è la vera domanda da porci. Per me non è, semplicemente, una questione di moda. È che oggi il patto fra il lettore e lo scrittore per la descrizione e la decrittazione del mondo passa per il genere noir. Domani non so. Domani potremmo capire la nostra contemporaneità attraverso altre forme di scrittura (o di media espressivi). Oggi è “l'indagine” sulla realtà (...) che ci descrive, al meglio, il desiderio di realtà, di comprensione della realtà, che viviamo. (Malesi & Infanti, 2011)²

Why? That is: why, today, here and now, has the genre won? Just because it “sells”? It sold even earlier, when it was just stuff to take out of the pants pocket and read on the

¹ The translation of Italian quotes is always mine unless otherwise specified.

² The participating writers were: Sandrone Dazieri, Jacopo De Michelis, Gianni Biondillo, Raul Montanari, Enzo Fileno Carabba, Giancarlo De Cataldo and Antonella Cilento.

tram, without wasting time on the way to the workplace. Why, today, is there an entire generation of writers, in Italy, who feel they have to express themselves through this genre? This is the real question to ask ourselves. For me, it is not simply a question of fashion. It is that, today, the pact between the reader and the writer for the description and decryption of the world goes through the *noir* genre. I don't know about tomorrow. Tomorrow we could understand our contemporaneity through other forms of writing (or expressive media). Today it is the "investigation" of reality (...) that best describes the desire for reality, for understanding the reality in which we live.

A few decades earlier the words of the director and film theorist Serghei Eisenstein were not very different: why do we like the crime genre? Because it is the most effective literary genre. Once engaged, it is impossible to separate oneself from it. It is the most communicative medium among literary genres, articulated with such narrative strategies to anchor the person to reading. It is linked to ancient materials, it acts on an archaic and reduced complex that brings it closer to the mythological epos. And, above all, because it deals with death, the drama of brutal death, the brutal reality of death. A series of thematic moments and representations, indeed, were transposed from myth to popular literature, to which detective fiction belongs. For example, a character like the gentleman-thief Rocambole, created in 1857 by Pierre Alexis Ponson du Terrail, is a positive hero with all the attributes of a divinity: immortal, invisible and unbeatable (1968/2005, pp. 327-330)³.

Even earlier, around 1934, Antonio Gramsci, in his *Quaderno dal carcere 21* [Prison Notebook 21], wondered why detective literature was so widely read, which practical and cultural motivations were behind the mass-commitment to this form of nonartistic literature (1929-35/1992, p. 16). He answered, firstly, that it is better to avoid any reductionism in explaining such a multifaceted and old phenomenon. Then, among other reasons, he suggested the search for escape from the narrow limits of rationalized and coercive existence that increasingly affected the middle and intellectual classes. It is not so much about the decline of the adventure as it is about the excessive precariousness of life, combined with the conviction

³ The essay *The Detective Story* was published posthumously in 1968, in the journal *Voprosy literatury*, and includes excerpts from the courses held by Eisenstein at the Moscow Film Institute in the 1930s and 1940s.

that against this precariousness there is no individual way of avoiding it. This limitation, then, makes one aspire to adventure: a beautiful, interesting and free adventure. On top of this, there is also the reader's desire to educate himself or herself according to a way of life considered superior, to raise his/her personality by proposing ideal models (Gramsci in Soave, 1929-35/2015).

The poet and novelist Umberto Saba, in *Terze scorciatoie* [Third Shortcuts], underlined how much mystery novels "recall the lengthy adventures of wandering knights" (1946/1993, p. 178), but with detectives in place of knights and with new weapons. According to Saba, these new arms, or methods, were the same techniques of psychoanalysis, with which the detective can solve a case by finding a clue in the least expected place (p. 178). He also stressed the British origin of this type of fiction, based on the importance of gathering evidence to prove someone guilty, which was a characteristic of British police and justice. Finally, he declared mystery fiction to be the only contemporary literature that could be called truly popular. Perhaps, as in the past *Orlando Furioso* and *Don Quixote* were born from the tradition of chivalry tales, one day a great writer would create a novel, popular but nevertheless of a good literary style, by using the raw material of the detective stories (pp. 178-179).

A step back.

To understand the success of crime fiction, we follow the advice of Gramsci, Eisenstein and Saba, so we take a step back and look at how its narrative structure has been connected, from its very origins, to the society in which it developed, to the parameters of knowledge and to the political, economic and cultural models it promoted. And how it is still, thus, today.

We also comply with the historiographic approach of Giuseppe Petronio, according to whom a detective novel is essentially a literary artefact. As such, it is endowed with a nature and a structure that precisely derived from the idea that people have about literature and the function they attribute to it, at a certain historical moment, in certain countries, in certain social

and cultural environments (Petronio, 1998, p. 79). This so recent genre, born a century and a half ago, along with the development of mass society, has been enormously vital, dynamic from the beginning, and has continued to capture the interest of the public. In its evolution, it has followed the mechanisms and evolution of both literary genres and mass society. Today the many subgenres we know by this name are no longer Conan Doyle's detective fiction, nor that of the 1930s, yet it contains the traces of them as its necessary precedents. Like all genres, it is sticky: while a new model establishes itself, the old one resists (Petronio, 2000, p. 98). It has changed with unusual speed and diversified into many models - classic, hard-boiled, social, psychological, action, thriller, *noir* - until today, when it has become a constellation of subgenres. To comprehend its success, one must comprehend our understanding of this type of narrative and the process by which we arrived at this representation (pp. 44-45).

The appreciation that crime fiction has gained since the beginning is closely linked to a series of historical events that occurred in the mid-19th century in European and North American society. In those years, the big city was developing, metropolitan police were established, the modern investigation was structured, together with the establishment of the policeman, anthropometric classification techniques were spread, criminal anthropology was born and fingerprints were discovered. Overall, these changes created a specific way of looking at and narrating the world. Together with Edgar Allan Poe, a completely new literary world was born, centred on the scientific prodigy and the deductive logical method, a literature at the same time morbid and lucid (Petronio, 2000, p. 67).

The classic detective novel is also called a *whodunit* because that is precisely the question – “who is the culprit?” – that sets it in motion. This question echoes that which, in Western society, is asked in front of the patient or the corpse: what is his/her illness, or how did he/she die? The representation of the crime as an object of investigation, that immediately

becomes a corpse to be dissected, implies a process of reification of death, of incorporation and biologization of identity, disease, deviance and crime.

Poe-Doyle module.

In 1810 Eugène-François Vidocq, a former thief and swindler, organized the first police investigation facility in Napoleonic Paris, the *Sûreté*. The creation, in big cities, of police forces dedicated to detecting and catching criminals, was opposed by a large part of the population. This perception has been reflected in the invention of the first fictional investigators: outsiders and amateurs who successfully negotiate with the administrative, obtusely bureaucratic, procedures.

August Dupin, inspired by Vidocq, came from the pen of the American Poe (and arrived in Europe through Baudelaire's translation) in the 1841 short story *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. His brilliant, refined and Gothic features drew heavily on the European popular novel. Vidocq was also an influence in the creation of Émile Gaboriau's inspector Monsieur Lecoq, who appeared in *Affaire Lerouge* [The Lerouge Case] in 1866. He is considered, for his bourgeois calibre, an ancestor of both Maigret and the hard-boiled Tough Guys.

Lecoq was called a miserable bungler by Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* from 1887, the first novel by Arthur Conan Doyle on the adventures of the famous investigator, a brilliant and sociopathic dandy. Holmes, along with his right-hand man, Dr Watson, performs the same type of detection as Dupin: he fragments the problems in a series of consequential, simple and evident steps, and solves the most intricate cases with prodigious inferences and thanks to a medical and broad-spectrum scientific knowledge (Oliva, 2003, p. 11-19).

Imaginative gratification.

The enormous success of the Poe-Doyle module occurred in the era of positivist scientism, of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory and of the prestige that logical procedures and methods of natural sciences had acquired in society. It was not so much Darwin who

influenced Poe or Peirce who influenced Doyle, but rather a common cultural sphere, an expression of a particular society, which resulted in many parallel symptomatic manifestations (Petronio, 2000, pp. 84-85).

The plot of detective fiction is structurally similar to that of the fairy tale: it is a movement towards the ideal. It tells of a path of search or liberation of the protagonist, who starts from a situation of initial impoverishment or imprisonment and, through both a series of attempts and obstacles placed by opposing characters and the help of supporting characters, reaches the solution to the initial problem. This quest is temporally cadenced by the mechanism of epic delay or suspense, which distances the achievement of the goal, and moves spatially through two types of environments, which, in opposition, express the semantic contrast between light and dark, known and unknown, good and bad. A dialectic between identity and recognition, truth and mistake, postpones the unveiling of the antagonist through masking and unmasking, disguises, errors, thefts, surprises, enchantments and disenchantments. A sense of the moral order dominates in both the narrative and the hero.

The element that triggers the story is the crime, usually a murder, which leads the detective to investigate and discover, after various vicissitudes, the identity of the offender, and to punish or bring him/her to justice. The reverse narrative is typically set up as a logical-formal structure, crime appears as a scientific problem. Both beginning and ending have a paradigmatic value and reflect a cultural model for which we think according to a deductive or, as we will say later, an abductive cognitive method. The detection acts as the main axis between these two moments and represents the police technique par excellence. The detective's task is to trace the cause by studying the clues and to reconstruct the dynamics of the crime starting from its effect, which is usually a corpse. In the textual space between crime and solution, narrative time is diluted and lengthened by digressions and pauses, techniques of temporary denial of knowledge and omission that stimulate constant inventiveness. Suspense

guarantees the emotional grip on the reader and goes in the opposite direction from cognitive curiosity, in that it presupposes expectations and events that have not yet occurred, until the climax or a final coup de theatre is reached. The ending acts as a pole of attraction for the story and has the function of expressive and ideological centralization, since the narrative climax lies in the final unveiling of the crime mystery (Crotti, 1982, p. 22-48).

The pleasure produced by detective fiction, labelled by the critic Spinazzola as imaginative gratification, is therefore of two types: it is intellectual, because the reader participates in the path that leads to ascertaining the truth of an initially inexplicable crime; it is playful, as it is a savouring of a state of anxious uncertainty, kept alive by the delaying effects and finally appeased in the amazement of the soothing and repairing solution (Spinazzola, 1990, pp. 213-215). The unveiling marks the successful outcome of the detective's mission of truth, but also, and more importantly, the triumph of reason and justice of which he (rarely she) is a champion, in a more pragmatic and professional version than that of the errant knight. The tension towards an absolute narrative truth, therefore, reveals a semiotic structure and a map of expectations in accordance with positivist thinking.

The narrative's engine is the fascination emanating from the death drive, that irrational and unavoidable factor that modern scientific empiricism could not eliminate. To be scripted is the never definitive victory of the rational over the forces of darkness. The investigation is also a path from the unknown, which awaits beyond the end of life, to the known causes of the fatal event. This passage from ignorance to knowledge joins the detective fiction to the tragic genre. The solution to the enigma is necessarily tragic, it is not possible to return from death. Unlike what happens to Sophocles' Oedipus, however, the recognition is not unsustainable and, although the crime is irreversible, the conviction of the culprit ensures a reassuring ending. Social compensation can only take place *post rem*, at the hands of the representative of the institutions in power, who punishes those responsible to safeguard (theoretically) the interests

of the community. The vitality of the order upset by crime is therefore restored, according to established morals. However, the calmness is only temporary since it is always undermined by disturbing factors that predispose crime fiction to seriality: new trials of sagacity await the detective, against enemies beaten one by one but together invincible. The vocation of the genre, realistic and mythic at the same time, is based precisely on the need to balance the dissatisfaction with a deplorable humanity with periodic catharsis (Spinazzola, 1990, pp. 207-217).

Making death speakable, in a society that has increasingly blamed it and treated it as an unnatural and criminal fact to avenge and punish, is among the main reasons for the success of crime fiction (Spinazzola, 1990, pp. 207-213). The Marxist critic Ernest Mandel underlined this function of reconciling bored and anxious members of the bourgeoisie with the inevitability of death, with the psychic shock of the unexpected drama. Reading stories of violence is, then, an innocent form of sublimation and distraction for an audience obsessed with the fear of crime and the integrity of the body, seen as an indispensable tool for work and profit (Mandel, 1984, pp. 68-71).

Male and bourgeois.

Mythological *epos* of the modern era, this genre is also the most explicit form of the bourgeoisie's fundamental slogan on the battle over property, transformed into a battle between order, personified by the detective, and turbulence, the villain (Eisenstein, 1968/2005, p. 327). The more the concern for crime increased, the more the sensationalistic and crime literature sold its stories. Yesterday's good bandit (Robin Hood), who embodied the spirit of popular revolt against the feudal order, became today's professional criminal, while yesterday's villain (the representative of authority) became today's hero. In other words, crime fiction reintroduced the adventure and the drama of the old bandit stories in the bourgeois boring everyday life, within a new system of values distributed among new heroes and new villains.

As a matter of fact, together with the growth of the capitalist economy and unemployment, social roles and power relations between crime and law enforcement agencies changed, while social and economic conflicts were increasingly criminalized (Mandel, 1984, pp. 1-10). Hence, the genre transferred the epic material to the metropolis' underground jungle, transforming to criminality everything that, in medieval and Renaissance society, was adventure (Schulz-Buschhaus, 1999, pp. 78-79).

The rules of detective fiction are rules of order that reflect the struggle of the bourgeoisie for political and social consolidation: order of the text and presumed extra-textual order found cohesion in class expectations. The crime represents an allegorical trap to the values of the rising social class. It would constitute an element of potential social disintegration if it were not diverted, absorbed and deprived of subversive potentiality within a law-abiding narrative mechanism that recomposes the symbolic structure of the dominant culture (Crotti, 1982, p. 101). The transfiguration of fear in the sense of mystery and its unfailing solution were therefore functional to the cultural formation of readers and the stabilization of social relationships. The literary sublimation of crime, in addition to being profitable, acted as a shock absorber of the irrational thrusts of the structural and political disorder. It was the functional unloading machine, compatible with the overall stability of the structure (pp. 13-16).

The alleged social justice that the detective dispenses in the harmonic cosmos of the detective story, however, was markedly class driven and patriarchal. It was the manifestation of a behaviour code of the class and gender in power, that made moral, social and economic values coincide with the interests and privileges gained, that identified the truth with the administrative legality of males and with the triumph of positivist rationalism. Its effect on the reader was not only reassuring, it was also a strong invitation to conformity and solidarity towards those who pursue the status quo, which, at the time, was the constitutional state integrated by private initiative (Hobsbawm, 1961, p. VI). Crime fiction was intrinsically

conservative also from the gender point of view, as it was centred on male models and universes, on conclusions that aimed precisely at preserving the patriarchal hierarchy and ignoring the consequences of existing injustices (Klein, 1988, pp. 220-224). In Chapter III we will see how some female writers exploited and subverted these longstanding narrative conventions to reveal, denounce and transform patriarchal norms and mythologies (Reddy, 1988, p. 10).

The Criminal Body

It is possible to trace a medical and semiotic paradigm that goes all through the history of crime fiction, from the first detectives' techniques to those of today's investigators, whose eclectic methods increasingly favour crime technical-scientific analysis and forensic examinations. Their ability to reveal the hidden truth of the crime, and to solve the enigma by linking all the clues, reflects the specific hermeneutics of Western medicine and the revolutionary affirmation of its gaze, coined "clinical-anatomical" by the philosopher Michel Foucault (1963/1973).

The representation of the body, the corpse and the criminal is the sign of a transition from an era of spectacularization to a progressive medicalization and domestication of death. By the end of the 19th century the body had become the privileged object of study in a series of disciplines, from jurisprudence to criminal anthropology, and from photography to the scientific study of fingerprint patterns, dactyloscopy.

Humanizing the punishment.

Between the mid-17th and mid-19th centuries, in Europe and North America, the body stopped being the main target of criminal repression. The economy of punishment changed along with reform projects illuminated by new theories on law, crime and the right to punish, leading to the abolition of ancient ordinances and customary law, to the drafting of modern penal codes, the establishment of the jury and unified rules of procedure. The penalties were

humanized, *decorporalized* and individualized, aiming now at a corrective, preventive and dissuasive intent. The grim punitive feast and the macabre and sensational ceremony of the sovereign's infinite power of death gradually decreased. Punitive spectacles and executions (public expiation, pillory, forced labour, exposure to the stake and forcing prisoners into chains) were deemed to accustom to, instead of diverting people from, ferocity, of transforming the tortured criminals into an object of piety or admiration (Foucault, 1975, pp. 9-34). Cesare Beccaria wrote, in the famous Enlightenment essay *Dei delitti e delle pene* [Of Crimes and Punishments],

It is better to prevent crimes than to punish them. (...) It is impossible to reduce the turbulent activities of mankind to a geometrical order devoid of irregularity and confusion. (...) *In order that punishment should never be an act of violence committed by one or many against a private citizen, it is essential that it be public, speedy, and necessary, as little as the circumstances will allow, proportionate to the crime, and established by law.* (1764/1996, pp. 112-119)

Thus, punishment became a procedural and administrative act, the most hidden part of the criminal trial. A network of surveillance and a new technology of power, which linked crime to its punishment, replaced the principle of atrocity with that of measurement. Criminal law reform was a crucial strategy in restoring the power to punish, which gradually became more regular, effective, constant and detailed, focusing on the consequences of the crime on the social order. The penalty must be calculated according to the possible repetition of the crime, ensuring that the perpetrator cannot have the desire to start over, nor the possibility of having imitators. Punishing was transformed into an art of its effects that attempts to correct and redeem, while a new army of technicians replaced the hangman. Hence, the body became an instrument to deprive the individual of a freedom considered a right, and at the same time, a good, in line with the fact that the punishment has gone from an art of unbearable sensations to an economy of suspended rights. Even if, to this day, a torturing background has remained in the material aspects of the sentence to imprisonment: sexual deprivation, food rationing, beating, confinement in the cell etc. (Foucault, 1975, pp. 15-21).

The actual substance of the crime also profoundly changed. Today we judge the quality, nature and substance of the crime. Instincts, passions, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, environmental or inheritance effects, aggression and perversions are judged and punished. Both the knowledge about and the appreciation of the criminals are indirectly weighed through the mitigating circumstances and the circumstantial elements of the crime, together with the past of the criminals and with what can be expected from them in the future. For this purpose, all those notions that have circulated between medicine and jurisprudence since the 19th century and that, under the pretext of explaining an act, are actually a way of qualifying an individual, have been brought into play. The punishment has the function of making the offender not only eager, but also able, to live by respecting the law and meeting their own needs. A set of diagnostic, prognostic and normative value judgments, concerning the individual, constitute a truth different from the legal one. The sentence now is not simply a judgment of guilt but also involves an assessment of normality and a technical prescription for a possible normalization, which is submitted to the opinion of the experts as advisers of punishment (Foucault, 1975, pp. 22-28).

The criminal man.

While the punishment on the criminal body was alleviated, this same body became the privileged object of disciplines that proposed new ways of preventing crime by controlling potentially dangerous individuals. Phrenology and criminal anthropology, in the late 1870s, were animated by the desire to understand the various forms of alterity: special and strange races, manifestations of crime and disease in the industrializing Europe. They tried to link the dangerousness of people to their morphology, in search of the biological causes of crime. Influenced by Darwinian evolutionism, scholars such as Cesare Lombroso, Alexandre Lacassagne, Francis Galton and Henry Faulds looked for the physical stigmata inscribed in the born criminal's appearance.

L'uomo delinquente [The Criminal Man] was published in 1876 by Lombroso, who began his career as a military doctor during the Italian campaign against brigandage and was then a mental illness clinic professor in Pavia, director of the asylum in Pesaro and, finally, forensic medicine professor in Turin prison. Over the years, he carried out research on cretinism and pellagra, studied the prisoners and their cadavers, and accumulated data on the mentally ill. In his studies of pathological anthropology, he examined the presumed primitive characteristics of those Italians whom he believed were excluded from the evolutionary process, and measured them: skulls, weight, hair, nails, teeth, ears, penises as well as variations in sensitivity and mobility. He sought the internal causes of delinquency, the hereditary defects that made some individuals fierce, inhuman, teratological, real social anachronisms. By social anachronism, or atavism, he meant a cessation of psychophysical and functional development with the subsequent manifestation of lower stages of behaviour, not adequate to the current time. The criminals were, therefore, close to animals, degenerated, and represented a constant danger because they spread degeneration in society. Their treatment had to follow a criterion of care and not of punishment. They had to be segregated, forced to work, or kept under perpetual medical supervision in criminal asylums and, in extreme cases, eliminated. For each crime, he traced a type, always with a marked physiognomy: born and recidivist offenders, madmen and prostitutes became at first sight the symbol of a recognizable diversity. To this meticulous analysis of the body, however, Lombroso did not match an equally thorough psychological and socio-cultural study and, for this reason, he received much criticism. At the end of the century, the socio-economic causes of crime began to be considered and the need to take care of the suffering, the elderly, the mentally ill and the disadvantaged gained in importance (Rodler, 2000, pp. 113-125).

Lombrosian science became accepted doctrine and was used for practical social proposals. His pupil, Salvatore Ottolenghi, forensic doctor and anthropologist, was the first

scholar of Criminology and Scientific Investigation Techniques. He held the first scientific police course in Rome in 1902 and founded the school. The idea of the born criminal, of the biologically less developed citizen, was legitimized, that is, criminal tendency was considered a hereditary factor rather than caused by poor social conditions. This new ideology influenced criminal jurisprudence and the administration of punishment. Bestiaries of deviant types, classified as plants in botanical treatises, inspired criminal reforms that ideally included individual criminal treatments and modelled medical care, but actually clashed with limited resources and ended up producing cruel separations and hierarchies between the categories of prisoners (Cole, 2002, pp. 23-57).

This eugenics and racist ideology did not just rhetorically justify the ferocious colonization of indigenous peoples by Europe and North America, but was also reflected in campaigns of imprisonment, mass sterilization and preventive extermination of some groups of citizens. In the 1940s, several countries, not only Nazi Germany but also Denmark, Switzerland, Canada and some American states, persecuted the mentally ill, invalids, the deformed, Gypsies, Jews, delinquents, anarchists and immigrants. The joint theories of Italian and German racist anthropologists formed the ideological and pseudo-scientific basis of the Holocaust (Piasere, 2004, p. 58). Lombroso also made a strong contribution to the codification of crimes (or police offenses) of begging and vagrancy which, for a long time, were an effective way for controlling the presence of Roma and Sinti minorities in Italy. The laws, in force until very recently, against the exercise of wandering professions and the professions of charlatan and juggler had also encoded traces of a discriminatory racial practice and culture. Criminal police manuals played a very important role in spreading the stereotype of the criminal gypsy.

Towards the end of the 19th century, the expansion of urban agglomerations and massive migratory flows, both from the countryside to the cities and from the Old Continent and Asia to the Americas, created global modern society, made up on the model of the USA

development of an anonymous mass of people and an urban crowd melting pot. The mobility of vagabonds, walkers, Roma and other non-sedentary groups, as well as that of repeat offenders who leave no traces thanks to fake identities, created suspicion in bourgeois states with their capitalist economies based on waged labour. Crime also changed with the emergence of capitalist production relations and the modern concept of property. The class-fight and workers' oppositions were criminalized, punishable offenses continued to rise, and a prison system based on long detention was established, producing new crime and increasing the number of recidivists as a result.

Identification systems.

The anthropological gaze at its dawn saw its own savages in criminals and helped to build a new way of viewing crime. The criminal body, perceived as dangerous because it could host different identities, offered the solution to the problem of controlling the political body: it was transformed into an index to register and identify who committed a crime (Cole, 2002, pp. 57-58). From 1880 on, different identification systems were proposed, in competition with each other with the aim of nailing the repeat offender to a single identity. With the photograph and the study of the length of bone and of the crests on the fingertips, the proven criminal was identified, and his criminal history made visible to the State. Instead of the *ancien régime* marks and mutilations, police records and huge criminal archives were created, based on signs of recognition that were no longer bloody, but nonetheless indelible.

The anthropometric measurement system called *Bertillonage* or *portrait parlé* [spoken portrait] took its name from its inventor. In 1879 Alphonse Bertillon, son of a physical anthropologist and statistician, was employed in the archives of the Paris Police Prefecture. His method was based on the meticulous measurement of less variable parts of the body (such as osseous length), which were then recorded on an individual card. This was supplemented by the *spoken portrait*, an analytical verbal description of the separate features, such as nose, eyes,

mouth and ears, along with peculiar marks such as scars and tattoos. The records also featured two photographs, one full face and one profile as in today's mug shots and used a particular language: a morphological vocabulary for each aspect of the human face and a system of standardized abbreviations and symbols (called "abridged writing"). The system discarded by a mechanism of elimination those who clearly did not fit the profile, it was inefficient and easily susceptible to errors, but it had the great advantage of allowing transmission by telegraph. The body, indeed, was transformed into a code that could travel in space and time, be read, transcribed and reconstructed in different cities, and was more useful than a photo that portrays the offender crystallized over time. The system was successful, translated into many languages, and for twenty years was adopted by police and criminal institutions all around the world to identify repeat offenders, terrorists and anarchists (Cole, 2002, pp. 37-49).

During those same years, in England, Charles Darwin's eclectic scientist cousin, Francis Galton, invented *composite portraiture* [composite photographs] as part of his research on eugenics and heredity: photographs of the same details taken from different subjects were combined into a single image in order to make visible the physiognomy of the various types of offenders. It was a kind of prototype of the *Photo Fit* identification system that was invented in 1969 by the photographer Jacques Perry and was able to assemble 15 billion variants of a human face to find matches between identikits and real faces. Galton, however, was mainly responsible for the scientific study of fingerprints. Although he had searched vainly in them for the markers of ethnicity, race and heredity, his division into three models (arch, loop and whorl) remained the basis of subsequent classifications.

Fingerprints.

At the end of the 19th century fingerprints were not new. Anatomy professor and father of microscopic observation, Marcello Malpighi, had studied them in 1686 without understanding their value in personal identification. In 1823 the Czech anatomist Jan

Evangelista Purkinje published a research study on the subject. As an identification method, it had been introduced in 1858 in the Hooghly district by William James Herschel, an officer of the British public administration stationed in India. The governors of the British colonies needed effective identification tools to control the indigenous people, who appeared, to the European administrative staff, to both look similar to each other and be universally hostile. Thus, they appropriated the ancient knowledge of Bengali, who used to imprint the fingertip dipped in ink or pitch on documents and letters, and used it to expose pension fraud, in legal disputes and as a form of social control and identification of people considered inferior (Cole, 2002, pp. 63-65).

The use of fingerprints in the criminal and judicial settings was suggested by the Scottish doctor and missionary, Henry Faulds. He sought the support of Charles Darwin, who declined the invitation to collaborate directly but involved his cousin Sir Francis Galton. In 1888, Galton brought the subject to the attention of the Anthropological Society of London. His research was combined with that carried out by Sir Edward Henry, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis in London and, later, Inspector-General of Police of Bengal between 1891 and 1901. Together, they set up the scientific study of fingerprints and their legal applications: they developed the Galton-Henry classification system which, by incorporating filing and comparison, favoured the effective adoption in the courtroom of dactyloscopy instead of the biometric system. This method spread throughout the world and, by the end of the century, was adopted in the British Raj, by Scotland Yard and in the English courts: the colonial mentality of monitoring and identifying people was imported into Europe and applied to the citizens who needed to be kept under control (Cole, 2002, pp. 73-89)

In 1850, across the ocean, fingerprints were used by policeman John Maloy in Albany, New York State, to identify a burglar. In 1877 an article by scientist Thomas Taylor supported the importance of fingerprints in investigating and identifying criminals, especially murderers.

The first government agency to put them into practice, however, was the U.S. Customs Service, in charge of regulating the immigration of Chinese people to Pacific ports. Perhaps the idea of using the thumbprint was inspired by observing how Chinese prostitutes signed employment contracts. From 1885 thumbprints began to be photographed. Not only in San Francisco, but also in the port of Buenos Aires, fingerprints turned out to be an economic and effective method of supervising immigrants who arrived *en masse* from Italy and Spain, all looking the same to the eye of a public and a State obsessed with potential crime (Cole, 2002, pp. 119-127).

In 1891, after studying and finding the Bertillon and Galton systems inadequate, the Argentinean of Croatian origin, Juan Vucetich, head of the La Plata Police Office of Identification, invented a criminal identification system classified by fingerprints to which he gave the Greek-derived name *icnofalangometrica* (finger signs measurement) with 101 different fingerprint patterns. In 1893 the government ordered him to return to the anthropometric system, preferred because it was considered scientifically more credible, but he did not lose heart. Three years later, he proposed a new revolutionary classification, changing the name to *dactyloscopy* (the science of looking at fingers) and reducing classification to four basic patterns (arch, two types of loops and whorl). Quantitative measurements were abandoned in favour of a qualitative visual technique. In 1903 it was adopted by the police and spread throughout South America and Spain. In short, the globe split between the Galton-Henry dactyloscopy system in the English-speaking countries, and Vucetich's in the Spanish-speaking world with other countries free to choose between the two (Cole, 2002, pp. 128-134).

The expanding young American nations and the migratory waves of the 19th century had formed a society of strangers, of mixed races and of newly created identities. Nevertheless, in 1902, the use of fingerprints in the United States was limited to tax fraud and civil identification, although it was soon adopted by the army to identify deserters and deceased,

and later by police to register marginalized, equivocal or immigrant groups, such as Chinese, Negroes or women and all those who appeared less accessible or suitable for biometric measurements. Then it was the turn of habitual petty offenders: vagrants, violent alcoholics, jostlers, mashers, degenerates, the riotous, beggars, *born treds*, perverts, professional thieves, feeble-minded prostitutes, drunkards, the unemployable etc. In the second decade of the 20th century, fingerprints had become the best way to distinguish repeat offenders from uncensored ones and they contributed to establish penal recidivism⁴ as the fulcrum of the criminal justice system, in particular at the level of criminal judgment (Cole, 2002, pp. 135-159).

Coded identity.

For a while, anthropometry and dactyloscopy were competing models of identification and social construction of racial identity. The spoken portrait enjoyed greater prestige but was more expensive and dependent on the precision of the operators. In the end, identification through fingerprints won over anthropometry because the mechanical, objective gaze was less at risk of interpretative differences and more suited to the technology and production efficiency rhetoric of modern society. Fingerprints became the foundation of a rational and bureaucratic mass system that ended up involving the whole population in a universal language.

The systematic forensic use of fingerprints came only after it became possible to match the fingerprints detected at the crime scene with those of a specific individual and it was certain that every fingerprint, even partial, corresponded to only one individual in the whole world. Then, the power of dactyloscopy to find the truth profoundly influenced the legal system. Dactyloscopy experts were now able to interpret, not only the ink prints, but also the latent ones mistakenly left on surfaces, the unclear, partial, mixed, incomplete, distorted and double ones. In the 1930s and 1940s a corporation of professional technicians was formed, who

⁴ It is an aggravating circumstance in criminal law which entails an increase in the penalty for those who, after being convicted of one crime, commit another.

standardized techniques (Cole, 2002, pp. 165-171). Fingerprints became one of the strongest and most accredited forensic evidence techniques in criminal hearings and remained so until the 1990s when DNA appeared in the courts.

When the identity of people became fluid within the nascent metropolis and in the mass-movement of large populations, the body began to be deconstructed, visualized and biologized, divided into organic and individual pieces. The pioneers of identification made an extraordinary connection creating an unassailable link between the individual body and the state documentation. Dactyloscopy impressed on our culture the belief that persons are anchored to their biology and that our uniqueness is organic before all. People have acquired a certain, stable and lasting individuality that can be translated into visual, abstract and codifiable images. Conversely, from minimal traces, one can reconstruct the global perception of an individual (Courtine & Vigarello, 2006, pp. 275-288). Today's technologies of retinal scanning, voice spectrometry, facial recognition and DNA detection have brought images to increasingly microscopic levels, fragmenting the body into anatomical traces that are used, not only by the criminal justice system, but also, increasingly, by civil society (Balsamo, 1996, pp. 5-6). The cultural construction of identity goes towards an increasingly extensive biologization.

The Abnormal Body

Freaks.

The identification of criminals was only one of the applications of anthropometry and psychometry, but the exhibitions of the different, exotic, seemingly inferior races were much more famous at the time. In Europe and the United States, between the 1870s and the end of the century, popular entertainment based on living phenomena and the performances of the extraordinary reached its peak, attracting millions of people.

The range of human evolution was shown *in vivo* in Parisian *Grand Bazars des monstruosités*, in periodic fairs in metropolises such as London, in the itinerant American

penny and freak shows, in human zoos and in recreated indigenous villages at universal and anthro-zoological exhibitions. The exploitation of the monstrous, of the deformities and bodily oddities, however, was not limited to fairs and shows, where unusual morphologies and savage rituals were seen, or one could be enchanted by the tricks and optical illusions of speaking decapitated individuals or spider women. In museums, the ethnological and teratological sections showed the proximity between the wild and the monstrous. Pathological catastrophes and sexual diseases were exhibited in the collections of anatomical waxes, where the casts of skulls devastated by syphilis aroused horror towards sexual promiscuity. Furthermore, the physical and moral degeneration of the species appeared in the portrait of the criminal who filled the pages of the judicial chronicles fuelling social fears. Behind the window of the morgue, people lined up on Sunday to contemplate the corpses of the delinquents and of their victims (Courtine, 2006, pp. 209-220).

The exhibition of the abnormal was the central element of a set of material devices of the mass entertainment industry in its infancy. They enrolled the monstrous body (sick, mutilated and deformed) in a particular regime of visibility and spectacularization within the European and North American urban space. Crowds were shown the frontier of the civilized world and taught to see what was beyond as barbaric, grotesque, animalistic, cruel and tribal. These devices made visible the natural hierarchy of races, necessary for any colonialist ideology, and taught civilization through the perceptual shock aroused by its inverse and extreme image. The monster taught normality, the mad mental health, the savage civilization, the criminal honesty and the sick the practice of hygiene and the virtue of prophylaxis. The curious who flocked to experience the abnormal saw an inventory of the radical disorder and the transgression of the laws of nature: confused sexes, racial mix, mergers of species. All this was considered biological exception, instability of the vital process, gestational failure, fragility of development and precariousness of the physical structure. The anguish generated by the

macabre and perverted spectacles of the *Grand Guignol*, famous throughout Europe, was dissipated in laughter as soon as the bodies pretended to be beheaded, halved, castrated then returned whole. This Parisian theatre, active between 1897 and 1963, was renowned for special effects and macabre and perverse representations. Grand Guignol's style reached its peak in London in the 1920s and was also exported to Italy. It was in fashion until horror cinema, especially in its splatter subgenre, and other forms of television abjections decreed its end.

By distracting and captivating the public, the mass entertainment industry contributed to the cultural construction of the monstrous body and traded it for big profits. The first reason for this market, which filled the free time and governed the moral and playful behaviour of the new working classes, was, unsurprisingly, profit. The second aim was to control by entertaining, by keeping people busy observing freakish bodies, thus removing the need for the State to observe them as closely, and diverting the people from more anarchic, vicious or noisy distractions. The ancient tradition of marvels and prodigies, of the extraordinary and the unusual that breaks into everyday life entered a visual culture that transformed it into a mass trivialized and commercialized voyeurism. The body of the citizens increasingly appeared normalized in contrast to the abnormal body on which they gazed (Courtine, 2006, pp. 220-239).

Medicalizing the gaze.

During the last twenty years of the 1800s, there was a profound change in sensitivity towards people considered abnormal, with the emergence of the concepts of infirmity and handicap, and the divorce between science and entertainment. For a while, impresarios of freaks and doctors of the sick competed in exploiting monsters to satisfy two types of curiosities and two different kinds of profit. Eventually, the authority of medicine imposed itself and drove the deformed and deviant away from these theatres of oddity to relocate them to hospitals, making them the object of clinical observation. The definitive break was marked by the

invention of scientific teratology, based on the progress of embryogenesis and comparative anatomy, which discovered that monstrosity was not a diabolical manifestation or an aberration resulting from incestuous relationships between woman and beast, but simply derived from a normal conception that has been diverted.

Early in the century, in the 1830-1840s, the studies of Étienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and his son Isidore resulted in the invention of teratology as a scientific discipline of monstrosity. They recognized a ground common to all living things, including the monster, and identified in the principle of analogy the key element to follow an organ and a being in their different conformations, metamorphoses and functions (Mazzocut-Mis, 2013, pp. 105-161). The difference between normal and abnormal was no longer so clear. Later, genetics and experimental teratology investigated the possibilities of producing the monstrosity in the laboratory, linking congenital and pathological anomalies. A new feeling of compassion arose at the idea of the monster's closeness to the human and, gradually, from radical exclusion it passed to legal inclusion and was given a legal personality, even if the possibility that the monster had to live or die was entirely in the hands of medical knowledge and power.

On screen and paper.

Literature played an essential role in this ethical evolution by creating characters such as Quasimodo the hunchback and Frankenstein the monster: the readers participated in their sentimental suffering and misery, in the torments of love and the harassment they endured.

At the same time, the performances of living phenomena were gradually banned, considered obscene and repugnant, along with the moralization of popular forms of entertainment by the administrative authorities, who were concerned about urban order and work assiduousness. The spectacle of the deformed body, previously considered banal, was removed from the eyes of the public. The legitimate right to look at the abnormal body became the exclusive prerogative of medical doctors. As a consequence, curiosity for the anatomical

oddities outside the permitted medical gaze ended up being ultimately considered as perversion. Deviant bodies became the object of both medical concern and the social and cultural will to repair and re-educate (Courtine, 2006, pp. 239-244). By the last decades of the 19th and the first of the 20th centuries, disability was being invented.

The abandonment of the traditional devices for exhibiting the abnormal, however, did not mean the end of the *different*, since the spectacle of monstrosities rests on a deeply-rooted anthropological basis and responds to psychological needs that are too profound to easily disappear. Changes in taste, coupled with the economic growth of a new mass entertainment industry have only moved the monsters to a different stage. Teratological curiosity has yielded to attraction for the optical illusion, prolonged and perfected in cinema. The bodies and torments dematerialized in the images of a realistic and, at the same time, distant representation of old and new terrors. This is illustrated in movies like *Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari* [The Cabinet of Dr Caligari] directed by Robert Wiene in 1920, *Nosferatus, eine Symphonie des Grauens* [Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror] directed by Friedrich Murnau in 1922 and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and *Freaks* (1932), with their monsters endlessly returning in an infinite flow of horror and science fiction (Courtine, 2006, pp. 253-261). Thus, freaks and body oddities disappeared from the stage and invaded the space of fictional movies. The spectacle of the corpse did not just become an image on a screen but also spread in narrative. The influence of horror movies and the never-ending taste for extraordinary monsters influenced crime fiction, both in the representation of the bodies of the victims and in the portrayal of the villains. However, in this genre, the monstrosity is not personified as much by giant creatures, charming vampires or the feral werewolves – even if they appear from time to time – as in the characters of the corrupted and greedy criminal, the paedophile rapist, the sadistic and twisted serial killer etc. It became a matter of inner abomination, in line with the evolution of psychiatry, in the second half of the 19th century, and the progressive replacement of the

physical monster with the perverted, the criminal, the moral monster, as Foucault outlined in his course on the *Anormaux* [Abnormal], held in 1974-75 at Collège de France (1999/2003). We will return to this point in Chapter III.

The grim depictions of ripped bodies, which is always appreciated by the morbid curiosity of the public, have strengthened the link between science and admissible necro-voyeurism that was established in the 1880s. Science became the only legitimate observation of the corpse. The current trend of medical observation of the body, which opens every other piece of detective fiction, allows the voyeuristic drives by framing them in a scientific, legitimate and thus acceptable context. Science sanitizes voyeurism into a sort of *clean* voyeurism. One can safely watch corpses on television, as long as it is in *CSI*, and a doctor, or some kind of expert, is in charge. Thus, all crime fiction tends to become forensic crime fiction.

The Evidential Paradigm and Anatomo-Clinical Method

Clinical eye and scalpel.

The display of the corpse, at the core of crime fiction, is closely related to the history of the medicalization of Western society and its representation of death, which would not have been possible without the advent of a true revolution in the paradigms of thinking and body vision.

At the end of the 17th century, the birth of modern medicine as a clinical science and anatomical discipline marked the emergence of one of the most prestigious and authoritative regimes of power and knowledge in Western society (Foucault, 1963/1973). The new clinical-anatomical method of doctors consisted of a specific way of looking at and describing the body, based on a practical art of healing by interpreting signs and symptoms (clinical science) and on the knowledge of cadavers (pathological anatomy). A new gaze was born, capable of discovering the truth.

The clinical eye, the result of initiation into medical practice, is indirect. Based on rigorous conjectures applied to a domain of events, it works through unknown-to-known inductions and explorations of the body's interior (Foucault, 1963/1973, pp. 91-104). The "sensorial triangulation" formed by ear, touch and sight defined a perceptual conceptualization in which the disease, in itself inaccessible, was recognized through its signs, measured in depth, brought to the surface and virtually projected onto the organs (p. 164).

More than the clinical, however, it was the lesson of pathological anatomy that contributed definitively to the success of the new medical model of learning and thinking over ancient botanical medicine. Autopsy practices were increasingly encouraged in universities and hospitals, supported by new legislation that made the use of only some corpses for scientific purposes lawful thus preventing the need for them to be stolen or otherwise obtained illegally. Science finally superseded the criminal practices of retrieving and selling corpses and anatomists could perform their job more easily. The growing demand for bodies for dissection could be met outside the very black market of fresh organs and corpses, fed by the infamous gangs of "body-snatchers" and dealers in human remains. The 1832 Anatomy Act, voted in by the British Parliament, provided the basis of modern law on this matter, recommending the confiscation of the bodies of the poor rather than those of murderers sentenced in the gallows as had occurred previously (Courtine, 2015, pp. 4-5).

Thus, the possibility of immediately opening the body, of looking at and describing what had remained below the threshold of the visible and the expressible for centuries, brought to light the organic causes of the disease. There was a structural change in the relationship between visible and invisible. The truth, which for centuries had resided in the solid, dark and dense opacity of bodies, emerged thanks to the gesture that violates the corpse with the autopsy scalpel (Foucault, 1963/1973, pp. IX-XIII). A new anatomical order of the disease emerged, becoming localized in the organs (pp. 3-4). The medicine of symptoms receded until finally

disappearing, replaced by a nosology of organs, sites and causes, and substituted by a clinical science entirely compliant with pathological anatomy (p. 122).

The line between life and death stopped being the process of putrefaction. In the physiology laboratories, the irreversible loss of heart pulse and respiration began to be measured systematically. A precise biological moment was chosen to mark the dissolution of the organism (Lock, 2002, pp. 70-71). Until the 18th century, the examination of the traces of the disease in the corpse was still disorganized, the signs were confused in an often-indecipherable disorder, as in the rest of the morbid phenomena, and it was not possible to distinguish with certainty what belonged to life and what to death. Anatomical pathology replaced this ambiguity in the clinical experience of death with a rigorous body regime. Immediately examining the corpse reduced the latency period and helped to understand which phenomena were caused by the disease and which resulted in death. The last phase of the pathological time and the first phase of the cadaveric time now almost coincided, and the effects of decomposition were minimized. Death became a fine line and doctors projected the gaze practiced on the dead onto the living: the knowledge of pathological degeneration illuminated the knowledge of the composition of life (Foucault, 1963/1973, pp. 144-146).

Anatomy became crucial for the advancement of science, the body as a unique and irreplaceable object. The perceptual and epistemological structure of clinical-anatomical medicine is one of the most visible testimonies of the changes in the foundations of experience that have been fundamental to positivist philosophy and modern thinking. We learned to read the truth deposited in the bodies, we learned a knowledge and a visual and conjectural language whose logical order is that of the phenomena themselves (Foucault, 1963/1973, p. 199).

The evidential paradigm.

Why is the affirmation of a clinical and anatomical medicine so crucial for crime fiction and why does it help to understand its evolution? The reason is that, as historian Carlo Ginzburg

argued, the clinical eye and the investigative eye are the result of the same “evidential paradigm” (also called *venatic*, divinatory, conjectural or semiotic) that established itself in the humanities in the decade 1870-80, after remaining implicit for centuries, crushed by the prestigious model of Platonic knowledge (1979/1990, pp. 96-118). It is a hermeneutic model based on the deciphering of traces/symptoms/clues that are almost imperceptible, an interpretative method based on discarded information, on marginal, trivial or minor facts out of control, but considered significant as revealing of a deeper, otherwise unknowable, reality. “Though reality may seem to be opaque, there are privileged zones – signs, clues – which allow us to penetrate it” (p. 123).

The roots of this presumptive paradigm are very ancient and date back to the hunting and divinatory knowledge of earliest humans which, throughout history, has been turned towards the past, present or future oriented disciplines such as divination, diagnostic and prognostic semiotics and jurisprudence. Ginzburg takes, as an example, the method used by different but famous characters active in the same period. The first is the art critic Giovanni Morelli, who distinguished original paintings from fakes by observing specific pictorial marks, such as noses and ears. The second is Sigmund Freud, who was aware of Morelli’s discoveries and, in a similar way, gave importance to the unconscious gestures, to details normally considered of little importance and out of the individual’s control. *Die Traumdeutung* [The Interpretation of Dreams], in 1900, marked the inception of psychoanalysis. Finally, at about the same time, Sherlock Holmes became famous for discovering criminals using the most incredible, imperceptible clues.

What is the connection here between Morelli, Freud and Conan Doyle, the inventor of Holmes? All three were doctors, including Conan Doyle who, before becoming a writer, had been an aspiring doctor and pupil of the Scottish surgeon Joseph Bell, famous for his epiphanic diagnoses. In all three cases, we see at work the model of medical semiotics, the discipline that

allows diagnosis of diseases that are inaccessible to direct observation by interpretation of superficial symptoms (Ginzburg, 1979/1990, pp. 97-102). The illustrious professor of medicine, Augusto Murri (1905-07/1973, pp. 180-181), also affirmed this at the beginning of the 20th century: the doctor, observing a detail, knows how to make a reverse plot narrative thanks to his conjectural gaze.

The conjectural method employs a type of knowledge derived by imponderable intellectual acts, such as insight, instinct and intuition, which allow one to pass, through clues, from the known to the unknown (Ginzburg, 1979/1990, p. 125).

The detection process.

The word “detection” comes from the Latin *detegere*, which means to discover, uncover, reveal. The classic detective story is a challenge between different intellects, that of the writer, who already knows the outcome but hides the tracks, and that of detective and reader who must be able to grasp the design embedded in the scattered clues. It is the literary form of the evidential paradigm.

In the general scheme of Conan Doyle’s short stories traced by Victor Šklovskij in *O teoriji prozy* [Theory of Prose] (1925/1991, p. 115), the most important clues are presented as secondary facts, together with the material for the false resolution, in such a way that the reader does not notice them. “Elementary, my dear Watson”, says Holmes to his friend who, in his role as no more than a useful idiot, represents the profane gaze and invariably misinterprets the clues. Then, after a crucial examination of the crime scene to collect evidence, Holmes, or someone else, gives a first resolution, which proves to be incorrect. Only at the end, after a pause during which he smokes a pipe or listens to music to let his mind work better, the pieces find the right order in the puzzle.

There are many points of similarity between detective fiction and the working method of physicists. It is not so important that scientific methods are described in the narrative or that

a large part involves medicine, chemistry or mechanics. Of greater importance is the fact that science influences how crime writers conceive this genre (Brecht, 1967, pp. 93-102). The conjectures of August Dupin and Sherlock Holmes are not only logical, they are also creative, random and exposed to falsification as happens with scientific discoveries. Their interpretation of phenomena, in the end, is the most efficient among all those possible and proves correct, also thanks to a vast and well-catalogued knowledge of the world.

Rather than deductions, then, it would be more accurate to speak of abductive reasoning, as suggested by the semiologist Peirce who called abduction the logical form of the intellectual act of guessing. Abduction, or hypothesis or retro-deduction, is one of the three types of inference possible for the human mind, analogous to deduction and induction since it is an explanation that draws a conclusion from two premises. It consists of inferring backwards the antecedent (rule/cause) from the consequent (result/effect), in imagining the hypothetical state of things that would explain observed facts that seem surprising (Sebeok & Umiker-Sebeok, 1979). It is a rational and creative procedure that generates new ideas and allows the progress of knowledge, starting from anomalous or inexplicable events that are linked to the theoretical knowledge available (Paavola, 2004, pp. 248-262). Always at risk, plausible but not infallible, it requires subsequent inductive verification and deductive legitimacy of its conjectures. Scientific research advances thanks to the heuristic power of abductive leaps, which relate phenomena for the first time and build new general principles on the observed data (Tschaeppe, 2014, pp. 116- 130).

The Hard Model's Crisis

Revolution across the ocean.

The success of the Sherlock Holmes model produced infinite imitations, plagiarisms and parodies. The drawing room mysteries era flourished with characters such as Arsène Lupin, Fantômas, Father Brown, the Americans Philo Vance and Ellery Queen. During the golden age

of detective fiction, new characters strayed from the prototype, like those created by Agatha Christie. Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are great listeners of stories and cynical observers of the human soul, at the centre of perfect narrative devices (Oliva, 2003, pp. 43-60). Clues become secondary to words and to the truth hidden under appearances.

Then in the 1930s, the genre was revolutionized on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean by Georges Simenon, father of *Commissaire Maigret* and master of psychological crime fiction, and by American action-thrillers. For Maigret, a petty-bourgeois policeman generally operating in Paris, the truth comes from the analysis of the psychological elements present in the crime, from an investigation full of intuition, knowledge of the human soul and a sense of justice. In contrast, the Californian and New Yorker hard-boiled Tough Guys, Sam Spade by Dashiell Hammett (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1929) and Philip Marlowe by Raymond Chandler (*The Big Sleep*, 1939), are private eyes (detectives) who are not so busy on finding out who is the offender, but rather on catching them using violent methods such as those used by the criminals themselves.

All the most important hard-boiled writers were published on *Black Mask*, the longest running and most important of the pulp magazines, which, during the years of the Depression, offered mass entertainment at a reduced price. They were heirs of the dime novels, the low-cost novels of mystery and adventure, published in episodes for a young and popular audience, full of vulgarity and sensationalism, and distributed during the late 1800s and early 1900s (Sanavio, 2000, pp. 10-14). These magazines were printed on cheap paper (hence the name pulp, as in paper pulp), in small format and with brightly coloured covers with captivating images of violence (Penzler, 2006, p. XIII). On their pages, a revolution in crime fiction took place: the crime was removed from cerebral detection and returned to the underworld (Oliva, 2003, p. 71), thrown into the tentacular American cities marked by organized crime and political corruption (Galli, 1990, p. XI). The narration is very rapid, all action and dialogue,

full of gritty and everyday realism unlike more highbrow literature, and harshly critical of the prohibition and gangster society. Protagonists are fearless, pitiless, remorseless and angry crime fighters, devoted to the fight against criminals in a black and white world where good always triumphs (Penzler, 2006, p. XIV). With the spread of organized crime, the lucrative trafficking of capitalism and the loss of trust in the institutions of justice, the function of social integration of the police turned into a function of disintegration and disregard for bourgeois values. The mildness of the detective story and its individualistic motives gave way to hand-to-hand violence with crime (Mandel, 1984, pp. 31-35).

The hard-boiled novels were translated in France after the war and distributed by Gallimard's *Série Noire*, with its characteristic black cover. Thus, the so-called *noir* fashion exploded in Europe and became an international phenomenon.

A messy turmoil.

Several open-ended and other problematic investigative novels, published between the post-war period and the end of the 1950s, contributed to denying the rationalist paradigm of detective fiction. Among them are: *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* [Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi] (1942) by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares; *La muerte y la brújula* [Death and the Compass] (1942) by Jorge Luis Borges; *Les gommes* [The Erasers] (1953) by Alain Robbe-Grillet; *Der Richter und sein Henker* [The Judge and His Hangman] (1952) and *Das Versprechen: Ein Requiem für den Kriminalroman* [The Pledge: Requiem for the Detective Novel] (1957) by Friedrich Dürrenmatt; *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana* [That Awful Mess on Via Merulana] (1957) by Carlo Emilio Gadda and *Rosaura a las diez* [Rosa at Ten O'clock] (1958) by Marco Denevi. Mystery fiction rules, extrapolated from their field, became the fermenting agent of anti-normative processes (Crotti, 1982, p. 5).

These texts are marked by a structural, ideological and stylistic complication that reflects a changed knowledge model, a paradigm that no longer coincides with the logical and

consequential paths, although tortuous, of a finished labyrinth. On the contrary, it has the form of an incessant coming and going in a labyrinth with no exits. From such a block you do not work it out, there is no rebalancing or definitive restoration of order (Pietropaoli, 1986, pp. 43-44). Chaos and chance nullify the results of the rigorous search for truth. Reading the clues is not univocal, the solution is ambiguous, multiple, or does not exist, even if the crime is revealed, it goes unpunished. The awareness of the immensity of evil and its banality are accompanied by the uselessness of a justice that heals nothing and does not reassure. The problem of knowledge, at the basis of detection, is enlarged from the mechanics of crime to a wider and more dynamic reality: explaining the crime at the end would imply an understanding of its context, an understanding of the knot of the innumerable threads and of the facts that led to the crime. But reality is a network of superficial truths, lies, reticence and false normality that conceals the underground of the probable (p. 74).

In this messy turmoil, too many things are simultaneously possible, and it is difficult to trace the flow of meanings and causes. Officer Ingravallo, protagonist of Gadda's detective novel, in his peculiar wisdom, enunciated some theoretical ideas. For example,

He sustained, among other things, that unforeseen catastrophes are never the consequence or the effect, if you prefer, of a single motive, of a cause singular; but they are rather like a whirlpool, a cyclonic point of depression in the consciousness of the world, towards which a whole multitude of converging causes have contributed. He also used words like knot or tangle, or muddle, or *gnommero*, which in Roman dialect means skein. But the legal term, "the motive, the motives," escaped his lips by preference, though as if against his will. The opinion that we must "reform within ourselves the meaning of the category of cause," as handed down by the philosophers Aristotele to Immanuel Kant, and replace cause with causes (...) If they call *me*, you can be sure that there's trouble: some mess, some *gliuommero* to untangle," (...) The apparent motive, the principal motive was, of course, single. But the crime was the effect of a whole list of motives which had blown on it in a whirlwind (...) and had ended by pressing into the vortex of the crime the enfeebled "reason of the world." Like wringing the neck of a chicken. (Gadda, 1957/1984, pp. 4-6)

The narration is played on the interpretative deconstruction of the multiple angles of truth and morality. In Sherlock Holmes' strong thinking, the fragment of the crime was integrated into a compact and transparent totality, but now the capability to experience the

world has become weak because everyone is part of the maze, only you can orient yourself step by step and with a short-sighted, local, look among a thousand points of view. Postmodern conjectures no longer refer to an all-encompassing and teleological, strong scheme, but navigate the dispersed, the disaggregated, the weak, the unstructured, the discontinuous (Bauman, 2000). A paralogical dissent is expressed towards the performative logic of post-industrial capitalist efficiency and scientific reductionism (Pietropaoli, 1986, pp. 168-170).

New air.

The wave of youth, student and feminist protests of the 1960s and 1970s ushered in a new air that circulated in the genre, bringing to the fore the burning ideological issues. Especially in France and Italy, a politically committed crime fiction emerged with authors such as the *néopolar* forerunner Léo Malet, Giorgio Scerbanenco and Leonardo Sciascia. We will discuss Scerbanenco and Sciascia in Chapter II, while among the writers of the French *néopolar* we remember Jean-Patrick Manchette, who called for awareness and political militancy, and Didier Daeninckx, whose novels rediscovered French historical and post-colonial memory along with current problems such as the *banlieue* (Caldiron, 2011, pp. 15-16). In this type of *noir*, intrigue and suspense are an excuse to immerse in a tough and gloomy universe, populated by marginal, outcast characters, often in open revolt against the system. Social violence, racism, unemployment, exclusion and segregation are among the most salient issues. The criticism of bourgeois society is a constant that is harsh and pessimistic about the possibilities of real change.

The publication of James Ellroy's works, in the 1980s, marked a revival of *noir* in the United States and then all over the world (Oliva, 2003, pp. 118-120). *The Black Dahlia* (1987) is the first of the tetralogy set in Los Angeles, defined by youth protests and countercultures, African American riots in the ghettos and repression. In this novel, a brutal news episode occurred after the Second World War. The corpse of an alleged prostitute, Elizabeth Ann Short,

known as the Black Dahlia, had been found abandoned in a neighbourhood of Los Angeles, on 89th Street. The body was naked, torn in two parts at the waist, mutilated and with visible signs of torture; her hair was dyed red and her blood had been thoroughly washed away. The face had been opened with a deep cut from ear to ear. This murder remained an unsolved case. In the novel, the investigation is entrusted to Dwight “Bucky” Bleichert and Lee Blanchard, two policemen with a past as boxers who move in the corrupt and hostile underbelly of Hollywood. In Ellroy’s writings, the style of pulp magazines lives again: dry, essential and brilliant language and, above all, a pervasive, crude, detailed violence, well-toned with ruthless characters. This style is also very influenced by the splatter genre, with displays of the bloodiest aspects of body brutality. Crisis and pessimism are manifested in a triumph of torn flesh and madness.

Under the influence of Ellroy, the North American *neo-noir* of the 1980s and 1990s transformed the crime vision of both classic detective fiction and hard-boiled. The motives of the psychotic offender, the macabre description and the demystification of police procedures became increasingly widespread. The horror trend pointed towards the grotesque, towards the spectacular representation of a world of hopeless nightmare and perversion. From Stephen King to Thomas Harris, the formulae were standardized in works designed for both literary and cinematographic mass consumption (Oliva, 2003, pp. 168-173).

Investigators were no longer defenders of the law/repressive agents, nor hunters of criminals, but were concerned with the socio-economic conditions in which crimes are committed, they had a critical eye on society and politics (Macleod, 2014, p. 516). The *noir* trend in crime fiction was closely bound to the ascent, then the dominance and brutality of neoliberalism. Playing with fictional crimes, it investigated the broader social and economic forces at stake in society, the hidden nature of social order and disorder.

International *neo-noir*.

This new *noir* current immediately appeared as an international phenomenon, with authors from all over the globe: North Americans, such as Dennis Lehane, James Lee Burke and Michael Connelly; Mexicans, such as Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Élmér Mendoza; and Cubans, such as Leonardo Padura Fuentes. Ian Rankin from Scotland, Graham Hurley from Britain, José Javier Abasolo from Spain, Deon Meyer from South Africa and Arnaldur Indridason from Iceland also deserve mention. Furthermore, after years of Anglo-Saxon and French dominance, two new geographic-cultural areas emerged for the quality of the works and editorial fortune: the Mediterranean and the Scandinavian *noir*.

The first one includes, from France, Jean-Claude Izzo, from Spain, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, from Greece, Petros Markaris, from Morocco, Driss Chraïbi, and the Italian Andrea Camilleri. Ex-cop Fabio Montale, private detective Pepe Carvalho, inspector Alì and commissioners Kostas Charitos and Salvo Montalbano emerged as the Mediterranean versions of Poe's detective, Dupin, working as lonely rangers at the edges of the law (Parke, 2007, p. 18). Living as nonconformist escapees from contemporary society, they show a disenchanted and pessimistic eccentricity that maintains their moral and intellectual distance from the rest of humanity. Also like Van Dine's Philo Vance, their weaknesses for food and wine humanizes them and flaunt traits of the classy detective (Sanavio, 2000, p. 11). Nevertheless, despite their snobbery and sociopathy, their greatest disgust is towards indifference and cowardice, so they always choose to "get involved" (Izzo, 2006/2011, p. 369). Through these characters, their authors strongly denounced a society that was criminal by constitution and tightly linked to the rise of deregulation, i.e., absence or erasure of rules, in the economy as much as in crime. Indeed, the ruthless and unpredictable new world of crime (and crime fiction) echoed the lawlessness and brutality of neo-liberal capitalism. In contrast, they portrayed an ideal of

commitment, multicultural coexistence, solidarity among the marginalized and defence of the historical memory.

Between 1965 and 1975, Maj Sjöwall and Per Wahlöö, with their world-famous series featuring commissioner Martin Beck, were pioneers of the Scandinavian *noir*. The *Polar Nordique* School continued with Henning Mankell, who debuted in 1991 with *Mördare Utan Ansikte* [Faceless Killers], and with cult writer Stieg Larsson, who made Nordic *noir* a global publishing phenomenon. These authors overturned the traditional image of the Scandinavian social-democratic paradise: society appears to be dominated by individualism and hyper-capitalism, by exclusion, impoverishment, corruption, youth marginality, extreme right-wing neo-racism and the removal and concealment of the inconvenient past. The family is portrayed as an inevitable place of abuse, the police are violent or without means, and the justice system is ineffective (Caldiron, 2011, pp. 17-19). These dark and engaged *noir* stories are among the most widely read contemporary novels and have also become TV series that are seen all over Europe. For example: the Swedish *Wallander* created by Mankell (2005-2013, but there is also the BBC version, 2008-2016); the Finnish *Karppi* [Deadwind] (2018-2020); the Swedish *Den döende detektiven* [The Dying Detective] (2018); the Denmark & Sweden co-production *Bron/Broen* [The Bridge] (2011-2018); the Danish *Borgen* (2010-2013); and *Forbrydelsen* [The Killing] (2007-2012).

Wave of *neo-noir*.

The new wave of *noir* challenged the moral certainties and the syntax of crime fiction, questioning the previously positive role of a police force that collaborates with society and provides reassurance. Detectives became lonely and disobedient heroes whose sense of justice and disgust stand out against the abuse of power by the prevaricating and manipulating authorities. They investigate in cities far from the centres of power because, with the social and political transformations that happened after the end of the Cold War and globalization, the

locale came to the surface again. As the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2015) pointed out, in today's world crime is everywhere and all places are affected by global forces and react in local ways.

The *noir* novel is subversive, inviting the reader to question the structures of the established order and its morally questionable ideologies. Investigations lead to the truth, but one is never fully sure of it, the meaning of the final revelations often remains ambiguous. An epistemological scepticism dominates, combined with the desire to understand the context from which the crime originates, to understand it more than reveal it (Macleod, 2014, pp. 518-521).

Heroes are often outlaws, not only cops with anarchist drifts and amateur or professional private investigators, but also criminals and victims. Sometimes, indeed, it is the war between criminals played directly within the circle of delinquency, the battle between those who still respect a code and those for which only the most savage bullying counts (Spinazzola, 1995, pp. 219-220). The outlaw heroes of the decaying capitalism crime stories returned to the 1930s American hard-boiled thrillers' scepticism about justice, order and the state, with even more cynicism and pessimism. In this sense, they also represent a return to the model of the hero-bandit who challenged the feudal system. But this return is only formal, because these new noble bandits are rebels with no cause, disillusioned and individualistic (Mandel, 1984, pp. 132-133). The geniuses of crime, such as Holmes and his nemesis Moriarty, are long gone and a world of sub-heroes now populates the stories of sub-crimes.

The investigations do not follow the structure of classical detection and the perspective is split into many points of view, which complicate the search for truth and subvert the moral outcomes typical of the genre. The readers are projected from the perspective of the protagonists, whether they are bad or good, and are led to understand, sympathize, participate or simply witness the crimes.

In only some cases is the failure of the moral order, manifested in the crime, restored by that reassuring solution of the capture/punishment of the guilty who, in the classic detective

fiction, was also an invitation to conformism and solidarity for those who embodied the social order (Hobsbawm, 1961, p. VI). As the crime writer Laura Grimaldi argued, in *neo-noir* fiction the responsibilities at the centre of the stories are much more collective than those of Conan Doyle's stories. The criminal act arises from the absence of civil society or from corruption, it is an act of self-defence or despair committed by men made monsters by their very existence (Galli, 1990, pp. XIX- XX). The fault is social, the violence is political. For this reason, the perspective from the slums is privileged, the action takes place on the margins of society, among drug traffickers, prostitution pimps and the Mafia. The preferred characters are the abnormal, the undisciplined, the furious madmen, the illegal immigrants.

The works are, indeed, moved by a real cult of monsters, by an attraction for the gruesome story, by the fascination for insanity, for the abnormal and for the criminal's mind. The narration likes to explore this mind, sometimes through the point of view of the detective who is good at penetrating madness, while at other times criminals are given a voice directly. The taste for the irrational and the darkness, which characterized the crime genre in its origins, as in in Edgar Allan Poe's thrilling mysteries, was rediscovered (Cremante & Rambelli, 1980, pp. 230-236).

Some non-literary sources, such as cinema and comics, influenced the ways of representing violence and the choice of the authors to portray the murderer as protagonist, as often happens. Models of reference were the 1930s Hollywood *noir* films, inspired by hard-boiled stories, such as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932), which were among the first to give the main role to a murderer, but also French *noir* movies like *Quai des brumes* [Port of Shadows] (1938) directed by Marcel Carné, which follows the vicissitudes of a fugitive deserter. The 1960s stylish American horror – *The Exorcist* by Fiedkin (1956); *Psycho* by Hitchcock (1960); *Rosemary's Baby* by Polansky (1968); Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) – along with the Asian, Argentine and Mexican ones and the 1990s American pulp

directed by Quentin Tarantino (*Pulp Fiction*, 1994) and Oliver Stone (*Natural Born Killers*, 1994) also had a profound effect.

Extreme violence is staged, shown in all its forms and often seen through the hallucinating eyes of those who performed it or the terrified eyes of those who suffered it. The horrifying fury is rampant in the plot, weakening the classic detection scheme which would have preferred an initial crime and a little less blood on the scene. It multiplies the murders at regular intervals, slows down during meticulous descriptions of every brutality, gives way to pure lunacy and explodes in the end with shocking cruelty. More than misleading, these works aim to emotionally engage the reader, to ignite dramatic foci (Novelli, 2018, pp. 22-24).

As we will see in Chapter III, the vivid representation of the more gory aspects was the method chosen by the *neo-noir* authors who wanted to criticize the status quo. And this is precisely because it was the result of the extensive medicalization of contemporary society. The staging of the horror in the 1980s and 1990s *noir* novels testified to and denounced a society that persecuted minor offenders to hide the most heinous crimes, the deepest injustices. The thanatological fury on mangled, tortured and torn to pieces bodies did not aim so much (or not only) to exploit a pornographic voyeurism of death, as to express the anguish and disgust for an era marked by economic precariousness, ideological emptiness, criminalization of anti-social conduct and psychiatrization of deviance. This representative insistence on violence and corpses was located in the very centre of the discursive and poietic regime of power. From within this discourse, and with its own pieces, it became a point of resistance and counter-narration, since it invited the reader to assume a critical attitude towards the normalization models inherent in a system that was the primary cause of the annihilation and dismemberment of the victims.

Neo-Positivism

The renowned critic Remo Ceserani wondered if the reason for the decline of the classic detective story could be attributed to the exhaustion of the cultural and epistemological paradigm on which modernity was founded. According to Ceserani, we are living today in a new era in which logic, linearity and consequentiality have been replaced by the complexity, simultaneity and relativity of experience, which we find well represented by writers of high stylistic and narrative commitment such as Gadda, but also by those more recent like Antonio Tabucchi, Manuel Vásquez Montalbán and Don DeLillo. In postmodern times, the enigma no longer resides in the chain of causes and effects, in the totality and in the fragmented clues. The question is no longer “whodunit?”, but is “who are we?”. The typical, modern and bourgeois readers enjoyed a faster and more pleasant journey from Milan to Rome (as a famous ad by the Mondadori *giallo* claimed) by reading an intrigue novel and competing with the detective to solve the riddle. They also did a real cognitive exercise, by practising their self-training and presumptive skills. Today the reader is called to interpret, to ask himself in what world we live and what that world is (Ceserani, 2000, pp. 4-5). Literature simulates, through irony and intertextual parody, the shocking communicative situations of advanced capitalist societies in the era of globalization, the complexity of networks and the speed and simultaneity of events and perceptions. It has a cognitive function that is no longer that of its origins, when the hunt for man was the hunt for truth (Pietropaoli, 1986, p. 191).

With the period of the modernist and post-modern avant-garde closed and the ethical and political aspiration of *noir* fiction exhausted, second millennium crime fiction appears instead to have returned to a neo-positivist and technocratic paradigm of knowledge. A moralistic and biologizing neo-conservatism is traceable in the vision of deviance, abnormality and crime, behind the obligatory political correctness, together with a new narrative naturalism and the illusion of the super power of science.

The story of a reversal.

Heir of post-Enlightenment positivism and 19th century enthusiasm for scientific discoveries, the deductive investigation did not die in the 1930s, but entered into a sort of catalepsy from which it has only recently awakened. Taking advantage of all the changes that have moved the action from the drawing room to the violent hard-boiled streets, the genre has returned to a renewed attitude of trust towards science and a preference for scenes set in laboratories, hospitals and morgues. Yet a progressive shift of importance, from the figure of the guessing investigator to that of the scientist, occurred parallel to the emergence of an increasingly less clinical and more anatomical hermeneutic paradigm, which aspires to a systematic knowledge of reality (Ginzburg, 1979/1990, pp. 118). If intuition won over science, in Poe's stories, now it is just the opposite (Parke, 2007, p. 20).

It is the story of a reversal. There are no more decadent geniuses who, with a single glance, assured intuition at first sight where others could not see but, instead, a triumph of hyper professional doctors. These doctors ceased to be useful idiots or amateurs on the crime scene, as Doctor Watson was represented. Instead, their medical gaze, together with their scientific and experimental expertise, are now seen as very useful indeed. Thus, the individual investigator as a loner has been more and more replaced by the detective surrounded by technicians or by the team of specialists with different competencies, which also symbolizes the importance of the division of labour in today's society and its gender effects (the coupling of the male detective with the female forensic expert being one of them).

The popularity of professional teams of detectives and the progressive visualization of the dissection of the corpse in crime fiction and TV series emerged together with the success, in the 1990s, of the parallel genre of the medical TV *ER* type series, full of surgery and emergency rooms. In fact, there is a common visual culture between the two trends, each one reinforcing the other: medical TV series show the body sick or in pain, while crime visual

dramas display the corpse. Not only do both genres belong to a common visual medical culture and help disseminate it, but they also tend to be mixed up at some point: there are plenty of doctors in crime fiction, but the well-known Dr House has definitely a detective side to his medical activities.

Eventually, in perfect coherence with Ginzburg's evidential paradigm, the detective became a doctor and the doctor a detective. The reasons for this mutation in fiction are to be found, again, in the wider changes occurring in social and cultural mind-sets.

Transparent body.

The philosopher Walter Benjamin found that there was a chronological correspondence between the dawn of photography and that of the detective story, and he saw in both a mechanism of composition and logical-analytical decomposition (Mandel, 1984, p. 18). During the 19th century the painted canvas and the sculpted figure were slowly replaced by the images produced by a modern means of reproduction: created by Louis Daguerre, the daguerreotype guaranteed the reproducibility of the art work. The artistic subjectivity was replaced by an apparent adherence to natural phenomena, presented with absolute, but illusory, objectivity (Rodler, 2000, p. 110). This presumption of realism was further accentuated with the development of photography, and even more with cinema and television.

In the meantime, some chemical and physical innovations applied to the medical field revolutionized the way of perceiving and treating the body, basing its perception on visual media. Medicine, after a short period dominated by the supremacy of the naked gaze, returned from the second half of the 19th century to technically extend its power through the use of the microscope, chemical analyses and all the experimental apparatus. The diagonal and circumstantial gaze of the clinic increasingly became the direct gaze of pathological anatomy. The perceptual and epistemological structure that orders clinical anatomy, and all the medical knowledge deriving from it, is based on the idea of an invisible visibility, of a transparent veil

(Foucault, 1963/1973, p. 166). In the name of prevention, today's medicine has transformed the ancient anatomical knowledge exercised on the dead into a virtual exploration of the living. Both the clinician's glance and hands, which guess and touch the opaque mass of the body, have been enhanced today, when bodies are explored and checked regularly with technologies and surgical interventions that minimize invasive violence.

Made possible by the discovery of radioactive isotopes by Marie Curie in 1895, radiography is still an essential support for orthopaedics and surgery. Together with the scintigraphy, it allowed us to reach places inaccessible to the clinical examination. The opaque radiographic body has become even more visible and painlessly and harmlessly examined thanks to ultrasounds. Magnetic resonance imaging for diagnostic use (MRI), computerized axial tomography (CT), densitometry tome (TDM), medical micro-exploration, laparoscopic and endoscopic surgery and the development of other photographic, cinematographic and IT devices of internal exploration have allowed the visualization of aspects of the body never before seen on a screen. The images of moving and real-time organs have inaugurated the era of virtual management of a progressively transparent body, the inside of which appears visible without compromising survival (Michaud, 2006, pp. 431-436). Even the nervous system and the brain chemical-physical functioning gradually become discoverable: neuroscience aspires to see thought and emotions. The public has become familiar with this illusorily faithful medical-technological representation, which both satisfies the need for panoptic control over body parts and for global reassurance on health and changes the self-image. However, the increasing number of systematic explorations and examinations hides how much ambiguity there is in the perception of bodily normativity, how unrealistic the expectations are towards a perfect health.

Technocratic medicine.

While the body has become more and more transparent, like an anatomical living map, the medicalization of Western post-industrial societies that began at the end of the 18th century has reached new levels. A technocratic, bureaucratic and clean medicine regulates every stage of life and socialization, strongly impacting the development of human beings, in moments of passage such as birth, initiation into adulthood, illness and death. In exchange for expert health management, people entrust professional care centres with every stage of the life cycle and the management of their body, which is increasingly de-personalized and de-contextualized (O'Neill, 1985, pp. 119-123). Medicine is used, not only to treat diseases, but also as a guide to existence and behaviour, concurrent with traditional forms of knowledge and para-medical habits. And in a time of pandemic, it may even become the ultimate power, dictating its will to obedient political authorities.

This domination is justified by the extraordinary progress that medical science has brought in the knowledge of the functioning of the organism, in the eradication of diseases that have decimated the population and in the extension of life. From 1895 epidemic mortality declined in Europe thanks to new vaccines against rabies and poliomyelitis, to streptomycin for the treatment of tuberculosis and to serotherapy for diphtheria. There was also a general increase in the level of hygiene as a consequence of the distribution of drinking water, improvements to the sewage systems, nutrition and artificial feeding. The advances in pharmacology also alleviated suffering, bringing anaesthesia to surgical interventions, ensuring the survival of chronic patients and easing the agony of terminally ill patients. The discovery of AB0 blood groups and the Rh factor made transfusions possible, while the replacement of isolated body functions with automata resolved reversible respiratory and heart failure and immunology paved the way for organ transplants. Aesthetic surgery was developed to change the appearance of the face, transform the sexual organs and adapt the body image to that

imagined (Moulin, 2006, pp. 15-47). Finally, the contribution of medicine in the care of soldiers and veterans of the first and second world wars marked a definitive change in the public attitude towards it.

After gaining almost undisputed faith, biomedical technologies, today, intervene more and more effectively in the processes of modelling and construction of the human being: artificial fertilization, uterine control, abortion, childbirth, transplants, prosthetic implants, organs and artificial limbs, mechanical extensions of the cardiac, circulatory and renal systems and genetic engineering. The concepts of nature, person and body have been redesigned in the direction of an increasingly fragmented vision of the pieces that make up the body (organs, oocytes, seed, and DNA sequences) as objects capable of existing and circulating independently from the subjects (O'Neill, 1985, pp. 124-130). In intensive care units, the body is resurrected, monitored, penetrated into every orifice and translated into a medical narrative made up of graphs and traces (Lock, 2002, p. 63). The potential of biomedical engineering and genetics to remodel the body, at both an individual and collective level, has raised some of the most complex ethical and political questions in modern society. The legal personality of the foetus, the possibility of organ and tissue preservation, the cadaver status as public good or a public thing (a *res publica*) or person and the legalization of euthanasia are widely discussed. Medicine, science and psychiatry have all developed discursive strategies with which they manage social problems at a collective and individual level. Everything ends up in procedures regulated by expert advice: health, sexuality, ways of being and living, learning, creativity, curiosity, pleasure and relaxation (O'Neill, 1985, pp. 136-138).

Clean death.

Compared to the 19th century, the perception of death as an event that requires authority and medical knowledge to be ascertained and managed has become more prevalent. The public rituals and funeral practices that helped to process the mourning have collectively declined,

while the idea of death as a failure, a catastrophe, has emerged. Its boundaries, which are ambiguous because they are not always evident, are culturally elaborated in the light of the notions of health and disease (Dacome, 2005, p. 418). Through the main tool of the autopsy, but increasingly more often with new technologies, medicine is in charge of dissecting and interrogating the patient or corpse to make sense of the end of existence. In a world obsessed with the integrity of the body and fearful of the possible threats to it (violence, mutilation, murder, rape and torture), the inevitability of death is denied and traced back to organic causes: you always die of something (Favole & Ligi, 2004, p. 5).

Organs, tissues and all parts of human beings are medicalized and reified and become the subject of an investigation anchored to the analysis by material elements, aimed at explaining the disintegration of an existence and an identity understood in an increasingly biological sense. In the contemporary horizon, dominated by physical appearance and the nightmare of misery, the mournful experience was transfigured by the desire for a beautiful death and for dying well, which took the place of the ideal of a morally and spiritually worthy death (Beneduce, 2004, p. 95).

The elective *locus* of death and the liminal space of the corpse is the medical one: it is a clean, aseptic world, illuminated with white and cold light, tidy. The doctor's know-how on the body represents the cultural and ritual action with which, today, irreversible processes of death and putrefaction of corpses are controlled, oriented and mastered, while, at the same time, meaning is assigned to death (Remotti, 2004, pp. 20-25). Biological death is now recognized by Western society and the law according to medical and scientific standards that have established a consensus on what exactly is meant and how it is related to the end of the person (Lock, 2002, p. 32). The vision of decomposition has become obscene, lascivious and disturbing as once was that of conception and birth. On the other hand, the ubiquitous media

representation of violent, real or fictitious death invites the public to a voyeuristic and screen-filtered participation that took the place of the macabre pillory spectacles.

Bio-politics.

The practices and contexts of death are also political fields, spaces where power relations are expressed. The effects of the medicalization of Western society have influenced the field of crime and, in concert, that of its representation.

In the era of bio-politics, the fear of death has become an instrument of the securitarian and alarmist discourse of power, which aims to control the population, while a compassionate ethos stands in defence of “bare life”. This compassionate norm of life devotes extreme attention to suffering, listening and humanitarian empathy towards the most disadvantaged, perpetually in tension with the tendency to stigmatize them in deviance (Fassin, 2006, p. 94) or to abandon them in an indifferent exclusion (Comaroff, 2006, p. 60). Bare life, existence increasingly understood in bio-medical terms and isolated from the spheres of value and ethics, becomes a suffering body to be saved, a mere biological existence. Often the only form of citizenship available for those who were not born in the rich industrialized democracies of the world is mediated by a biological condition (Nguyen, 2006, p. 89).

For example, residence and refugee visas are issued for serious medical reasons, while the economic or political-social reasons that push people looking for tolerable or simply dignified living conditions are carefully regulated and often criminalized. The recently earned right to voluntary termination of pregnancy is questioned but the daily violence perpetrated inside the refugee reception centres, within the walls of civilized European and North American cities, is accepted. The progressively more restrictive migration policies of *Fortress Europe*, not unlike those of the United States, conceal the price required by the worry for security and invasion anxiety, the horror suffered by migrants who remain trapped in transit countries, drowning off Mediterranean shores or as a consequence of forced returns. On the other hand,

public opinion feeds on catastrophic statistics on crimes committed by foreigners, the crime caused by the criminal's irresponsibility and immorality is spectacularized and low-profile deviance is punished. The tactics of resistance and evasion of the established order are expensive.

The great hunt for beggars, vagabonds, idlers and libertines that began in the mid-17th century has found, in modern medicine and psychiatry, a new apparatus of knowledge and power that has taken on the deviations, anomalies and syndromes by pathologizing the illicit, eccentricities and forms of rebellion with respect to normal development (Foucault, 1999/2003, pp. 47-50). As a discipline for the scientific protection of society and science of biological protection of the species, medicine today has stabilized as a power, with the psychiatric hospital as a sanction (p. 153). However, this neo-positivist drift revived discrimination against the degenerate, the dangerous and the incurable, now seen perhaps as not so different from the abnormal in historical bazaars and human zoos. The alterations of standard behaviour have been translated also by sociology and psychology into problems of personality, socialization or education, but beneath scientific jargon, one can easily see the political-moral concern with establishing the boundary between what is socially licit and what is not. Since normality, nevertheless, remained something that social theory has always presupposed without clarifying, knowledge of abnormality and explanation of the transgressions were pursued in its place. Thus, power ended up producing deviance itself and confirming it.

After the 1960s and 1970s enlightened time of radical penal and psychiatric reforms, such as Franco Basaglia's Law 180, which led to the closure of asylums in Italy, the restoration of a conformist social science and a punitive vision of crime followed, in line with the existing neoliberal ideology of the world. For this reason, the public order codes have reoriented in an exclusively criminal sense, creating a regression to a 19th century culture that criminalizes what are, in large part, the social effects of liberalism and the deterioration of the social state, and

increasingly reducing the right to non-compliant behaviour, to different forms of sociality (Dal Lago, 2000, pp. 14-25). Demonstrations of authoritarian severity, criminal populism and selective intolerance are more profitable than social justice. Thus, repression extends, and sanctions worsen (Fassin, 2018, pp. 14-16).

Crime fiction has mirrored this renewed worry about crime, urban disorder and the containment of dangerous classes. National and international security issues have occupied an important place in popular culture since the 19th century but, since the September 11 attacks in 2001, they have come back to the fore with new emphasis. However, the impact of technological and scientific discoveries on people's lives, on the social prestige of scientists and forensic sciences (Cole & Dioso-Villa, 2009, p. 1357) has been the main influence of the genre. Not only has the popularity of the subgenre of medical and forensic fiction exploded, as we have mentioned, but a medicalized, reified and domesticated representation of the body and death now seems essential in any crime story, written or filmed.

Criminal Science Investigation

Let's start from the real world of crime, which has always been reflected in fiction. The approach to the crime scene has been revolutionized by the absolute belief that it contains all the data useful for the solution of the case and by the flourishing of disciplines capable of interpreting them and presenting them as evidence before the judges (McDermid, 2016, p. IX).

Forensics.

In 1910 Edmund Locard founded the first crime laboratory in Lyon and established the so-called Locard principle, according to which, when one comes into contact with an object or another person, one leaves traces of oneself and takes away traces of the other. Collecting, documenting and recognizing these traces allows one to connect victim and criminal, to put them at a scene and to understand how they interacted (Picozzi, 2006, p. 92).

According to the *American Academy of Forensic Sciences*, forensic sciences are the disciplines that study the applications of science for the purposes provided for by law. They include forensic medicine, toxicology, psychology, anthropology, criminology, ballistics, and analysis of bloodstain pattern, ear print, voice, hair, handwriting, document, arson, fabric fibres, streaks on bullets, bite marks, fingerprints and DNA. They assume that everything in the universe is unique and that, in nature, there are no two exactly equal similar elements (Picozzi, 2006, p. 91). Often the term overlaps with that of “criminalistics”, a profession that applies science to criminal and civil laws by recognizing, identifying, individualizing and evaluating physical/biological evidence. From the second half of the 1900s, investigative techniques and forensic evidence came to have an increasing weight in the courtrooms with experts increasingly called to testify, even if, in many cases, the methods used, or their interpretations, were more subjective than scientific (Greenwood, 2016, pp. 28-29).

The victim’s corpse and the crime scene are the primary sources of the search for truth. Starting from the traces and marks left on the body, a backward path is taken to reconstruct the dynamics of the crime and the identity of the murderer, as if the victim themselves is speaking to the specialist who is handling them (Moscati, 2006, p. 95). The signs at the scene, the traces left by the criminal on the skin and inside or around the body, are examined by the pathologist and lab technicians. The results of scientific analyses lead to investigative hypotheses and help to reconstruct the identity, not only of the victim (often known), but also of the murderer (often absent and unknown). The work of forensic investigators begins precisely from the link that is created between the criminal and the victim: they analyse the unknown elements on the crime scene and compare them with those known to capture similarities and diversity (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 20-21).

When the victim’s name is not known, all the ante-mortem elements must be compared with the post-mortem findings, gathering all possible information from the circumstantial data

(clothing, personal effects), from the external examination of the body (physiognomic features, tattoos, scars, fingerprints), from the autopsy and from the results of laboratory tests and dental impressions. In order to obtain feedback on fingerprints, it is not only necessary that the fingertips be in good condition, but also that the individual has been previously filed and that their data has been entered in the *AFIS*, a database now spread all over the world. In the case of human remains that have been seriously altered by putrefactive phenomena, by fire or by an attempt to dismember them, dactyloscopic, anthropological and odontological investigations are conducted. The anthropologist does the coroner's job on skeletons to understand how they died: they look for traces on the bones and inside them and reconstruct the face, starting from the skull that shapes the covering tissues (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 65-69).

Autopsy.

The most well-known examination in the history of crime, however, is the autopsy, which aims to find out the cause of death and its dynamics. In the case of a murder, it can deliver certain proof of the crime or a clue that guides the investigation. Each passage is documented with photographs taken of the body in a prone, supine and lateral position, with full-length shots and then in detail. The shots fix the progressive removal of clothes. The state of conservation of the body may change the procedure, but generally the standard sequence starts with a general inspection, then proceeds with tests on the organs and, finally, collects the samples for toxicological and histological investigations.

It begins from the external surface and evaluates the wounds that may have caused the death, looking for less clear signs that suggest violent action. Hair and nails can reveal traces of drugs and poisons and the residue under the nails can contain fragments of biological material of the aggressor, sufficient for DNA examination. Samples are taken from the mouth, from the genitals and from the anus for evidence of any sexual intercourse, a cast is made of the marks left by bites or ropes and x-rays and CT are used if particular internal injuries are

suspected. Then it is time for the dissection, starting from the thoracic cavity with the famous Y-thoracoabdominal incision, which removes the sternum to open access to the internal cavities of the body and organs. Heart, lungs, trachea and oesophagus are inspected and sectioned, and bowels and abdominals are extracted. From each organ, weighed and examined, a sample is taken for microscopic and toxicological analyses, which is added to the samples of liquids such as bile, urine, blood and gastric content. Finally, the scalp is removed to expose the cranial surface. With a circular cut, the cap is removed, and the brain is extracted, then weighed, sectioned and observed under a microscope (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 201-202).

Sci-Fi marvels.

The scientific discoveries and technological innovation that had an impact on the prosecution of crime are many and varied: from early toxicology research on arsenic to entomology, from the discovery of blood groups to the use of paraffin gloves to detect the residue from gunpowder, from the analysis of larvae to estimate the time of death to the luminol test to detect the presence of blood and other bodily fluids (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 203-209). A turning point was the advent of the scanning electron microscope, or SEM, thanks to which it became possible to perform the morphological analysis of micron-dimension objects. Then, by combining the X-ray fluorescence technique with the microscope, one can identify the individual elements of the matter. The technique of sampling has improved with the *stub*, a type of swab, while the *IBIS* system (*Integrated Ballistics Identification System*) made progress in ballistics and in the search for feedback on the casings and exploded bullets (pp. 101-102).

More recently the analysis of bacterial footprints left at the scene to establish the time of death has been developed, together with 3D reconstructions with laser scanners, which allow latent fingerprints to be detected with new precision, while the use of CT to perform virtual autopsies identifies signs of murder not detectable with conventional tests (Greenwood, 2016,

p. 28). The increasing computerization of classifications and international databases for the comparison of traces have enabled increasingly faster remote identifications (Courtine & Vigarello, 2006, p. 288).

DNA.

The fight against crime has produced a technological arsenal that Galton couldn't even have dreamed of, but the most important discovery for the identification of criminals, after fingerprints, came from genetics. In 1984 the first DNA fingerprint was created, which launched the era of genetics at the crime scene (Cole, 2002, pp. 291-292). Detection of DNA in the United States began with sexual offence and murder convicted, then gradually extended to civilians generally. So, after the FBI had activated the *AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System)* for fingerprints in 1975, it was the turn of *CODIS (Combined DNA Identification System)* and *NDIS (National DNA Index System)*. In 1996 mitochondrial DNA was admitted as evidence in an American court.

However, the objectivity of the genetic traces left on the crime scene incurs various risks. The evidence can be compromised by the contamination of the sample along the way from the crime scene to the laboratory, by the incompetence of those who perform the analyses and by the inconsistency of the trace taken (Greenwood, 2016, pp. 25-45). Not even DNA phenotyping offers certainty: it is a technique that allows one to reconstruct backwards the possible features of a person (geographic ancestry, eye and hair colour, face shape), by the conversion of genetic evidence into a code to trace to the somatic characteristics. The resulting identikits are, therefore, not as precise as photographs and have limited usefulness: they cannot be used to identify a particular suspect, but can be used to exclude those who are dissimilar. The biggest risk lies in the use of genetics to scapegoat people and control their movements.

DNA represented a further step in the association of identity with a single organic body, which begins with birth and ends with death. Far from being a universal or static notion, this

equivalence is the product of twentieth century Western culture that spread globally (Cole, 2002, p. 311). Faulds and Galton searched in fingerprints for traces of evolution and a code that determined genealogy, ethnicity, character, intelligence, propensity to disease and crime. In order to build itself as a credible authority in courtrooms, dactyloscopy had to dissociate itself from these eugenicist speculations on the past of humanity and the future of born offenders. It became neutral, factual and impartial knowledge (pp. 98-103). Those who today seek the genetic heritage of the delinquent person fall into a rampant post-Darwinian determinism (Courtine & Vigarello, 2006, pp. 288-290). Not dissimilarly, medicine, when it looks for the predisposition to pathologies in hereditary markers, returns to a divination vocation that the anatomical habit had made us forget. In the past, those who believed someone guilty or innocent based their opinions on alleged offenders' facial expressions and attitudes. Today, they debate on fingerprints and genetics. Instead of flat skulls and protruding jaws, we want to find the crime gene. Actually, physiognomic deciphering is still in vogue in popular fiction, if we consider the success of TV series such as *Lie to Me* (2009-2011) or the brand-new *Criminal* (2019), an anthology of four miniseries produced by the Netflix platform and set in four different European countries. In the former, the dazzling readings of body language by an odd scientist are put in the service of justice; in the latter, attention is entirely focused on the techniques with which a police team leads interrogations and, by listening to and observing the suspects, resolves cases.

Detecting doctors.

The body has always played a central role in crime fiction, as has the idea of using science as an aid to police investigations. In Conan Doyle's and Poe's stories the detectives examined corpses, human blood, ash, hair etc. In recent years, however, there has been a veritable explosion of the popularity of the subgenre that more explicitly stages the ability of

the forensic investigator or pathologist to read and interpret the body's organic traces (Palmer, 2001, p. 54).

In today's forensic-medical mystery – *Body of Proof* (2011-2013) serves as an example of the subgenre – investigators no longer just act like a doctor, they are doctors. Fingerprints and genetics have entered the category of pop icons of an era obsessed with technological accuracy. Writing unfolds around the representation of bodies, increasingly fetishized and reified by the scientific instruments that fragment and classify them: they have become the focal point of stories (Palmer, 2001, p. 54). Criminal mysteries are inevitably brought back to the aseptic space of hospitals, laboratories and morgues where the evidence is analysed. Novels and detective scripts show an in-depth knowledge of the procedures of the police, pathologists and forensic technicians of all kinds. The documentary style is obtained by inserting archive finds, either true or (more often) fictional, such as interrogation reports, letters, description sheets, police reports, procedural documents etc. (Padovani, 1989, p. 17). The prose used for representing the crime, the corpse and the investigation is graphic and mimetic of the scientific and police lexicon. It is also characterized by cinematographic techniques that emphasize the visual dimension (Moscati, 2006, pp. 94-95).

Doctor and writer, Robin Crook was among the first to introduce medical terminology into crime fiction, with meticulous descriptions of medical practices. He achieved worldwide success thanks to Michael Crichton's film version of *Coma* (1978), taken from the novel of the same name (1977). The best-known name, however, is that of Patricia Cornwell, with her coroner Kay Scarpetta, who appeared in the debut novel, *Postmortem* (1990), fighting against the archenemy serial killer Temple Gault. The protagonist has become the female archetype of forensic fiction. The scenario is now a classic: icy morgue room where the corpse of the daily victim lies cold and inert on the coroner's table. The coroner, investigator of the case, must carry out a reverse process to reconstruct the traces and signs that the victim's body shows.

The context, widely borrowed from cinema and television, bases the investigation mechanism on medical-scientific discoveries and on technological inventions, often lavish with truculent details. Forensic writer and anthropologist, Kathy Reichs also a consultant in criminal trials, narrates, with an abundance of medical details, the deeds of the heroine Tempe Brennan, who does the same job as the author but in a more adventurous way. She made her debut with *Déjà Dead* (1997). Born from the pen of Jeffery Deaver is the detective Lincoln Rhyme of the scientific police of New York, who specializes in forensic medicine. Paralyzed because of an accident, he investigates, together with the young Amelia Sachs, from an ultra-technological apartment in Manhattan and coordinates the forensics experts. The cycle of stories began with *The Bone Collector* (1997), from which Phillip Noyce made the film of the same name in 2000. To be mentioned also are Herbert Lieberman's anatomist pathologist, Paul Konig (*City of the Dead*, 1976), and Harry Bosch, a veteran police homicide detective with the Los Angeles Police Department, featured in the best-selling police procedurals series by Michael Connelly, starting with *The Black Echo* (1992).

All these writers belong to a new generation of crime fiction writers who base their works on a medicalized and brutalized body with anatomical expertise, and on realistic and explicit forensic investigations. The protagonists employ science, firstly, to reconstruct the identity of the corpses and decipher crime marks, then secondly, to bring criminals under the magnifying glass through the fragments and organic remains that they have left behind. The discovery process is technologically mediated and centred on a problem of vision: the culprit must be made visible and materialized under the disciplinary gaze of the forensic detective (Palmer, 2001, p. 54). Science and technology are not only fundamental to scrutinizing the evidence for the truth, but also to extending and reinforcing the authority of the detective, deliverer of the famous clinical/investigative eye. In sharp contrast with yesteryear's Tough Guys, the millennial detective is, again, a representative of the law as much as of science.

CSI.

More than books, it was the many television serials dedicated to the work of the scientific police that brought back trust in deduction and the evidence, with the solid certainties of DNA, fingerprints, luminol and ballistics.

The undisputed superstars of the TV series have been, for years, the protagonists of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* with four million Italian viewers per episode and ten times as many in the United States⁵. Its detailed close-ups show scientific police's investigation methods, driving the viewers over the yellow tapes, into the crime scenes and into the bodies of the victims, defiling death in prime time. Death, thanks to ever popular special effects and soundtrack, was staged at the centre of flawless directions and scripts, shiny photography and perfect plots (Marsico, 2006, pp. 96-98).

CSI was an innovative American-Canadian television serial, which appeared in prime time on CBS on October 6th, 2000, and was the most loved ever, thanks also to the actors starring in the three main editions – *Las Vegas* (2000-2015), *Miami* (2002-2012) and *NY* (2004-2013) – and the characters they played. There has also been a more recent spin-off, *CSI: Cyber* (2015-2016).

The original model is that of the TV *noir* procedural, which also contains other genres' themes. The setting in the desert border city of perdition (Las Vegas) is typical of the Western movies. Inside, as in an oasis of justice, we find the classic team: a micro-community led by an older male member, but balanced by tough, intelligent and sexy women. However, it is not detectives or police officers but scientists who investigate the crimes committed in the dark side of the city. The crime motives are the classic and individualistic ones of the hard-boiled, even if the characters give and take only a little beating. The heroes are not super geniuses, but

⁵ *CSI* was the most watched TV series in the United States in 2002-2003 and the most viewed for five consecutive seasons from 2002 to 2007 (Weber & Timmermans, 2010, p. 62).

they expertly apply a specific investigative method and procedure to solve intricate cases, often based on current news events.

The solution to the mysteries is found in the laboratory. Everything is based, as a matter of fact, on the analysis of the crime scene and on the deciphering of the forensic evidence collected, of the murderer's modus operandi and of the victim's type. The main idea is summarized in the sentence "evidence doesn't lie". If it is sufficient, with the right inferences and the best technologies, it will certainly lead to the truth. A clear and detached eye dominates the most macabre aberrations, lightened by the ironic tone of the characters, who investigate fruitlessly pretending to exclude emotions, personal judgments, moralism and intuition.

Scientific data are narratively structured into a convincing and accurate report of who did what to whom. Their readability is assured thanks to some cinematographic techniques and post-production effects. In key moments, flashbacks are used to reconstruct hypothetical criminal scenarios, especially when there is a multiplicity of evidence, but it is not clear of what. As in the classic detective novel scheme, a false track is initially followed due to an incorrect interpretation, since each track can have multiple explanations, and then one has to do the work again (Knight & McKnight, 2008, pp. 161-171). The *CSI* typical way of reading the evidence and of formulating theories is the same method as that of Auguste Dupin: they both examine details with an expert and skilful gaze. They classify, compare and connect the clues then formulate a hypothesis based on them. In the TV series, the readability of physical evidence is stressed by using cinematography and post-production techniques, such as flashback, microphotography and computer-generated images, which became visual markers of the fetishized program. The super zoomed close-ups show reality through the eyes of forensic professionals and the point of view of various types of microscope. The imaging illustrates how traumas affect the inside of the body, similar to an endoscopic image but with a completely extradiegetic artistic quality and audio accompaniment. Thus, what is seen is

immediately identifiable and the effect of unpleasant disorientation normally generated by medical images is avoided. Auguste Dupin's and Sherlock Holmes's perspective has been expanded and enhanced by technology, but it is still the same type of detection that, in *CSI*, has reached a new level. The ability to use the body as a source of forensic evidence results in extremely visualized, reified and fetishized data (Parke, 2007, pp. 20-36).

CSI Effect.

Its extraordinary success, a true rating smash, made this series omnipresent in television programming, not only with reruns and the franchise, but also with countless imitations, such as *Body of Proof*, *Bones*, *Criminal Minds*, *Crossing Jordan*, *Forensic Files*, *Law and Order*, *Naval Criminal Investigative Service*, *NCIS*, *Numb3ers*, *The Closer*, *The Evidence* and *Without a Trace*. Forensic documentaries and reality programs such as *Anatomy of a Crime*, *Autopsy*, *Medical Detectives*, *The New Detectives* and *Dr G Medical Examiner* must also be considered. Their media coverage has shaped the public's perception, showing sharp and charming forensic investigators, who employ glamourized forensic procedures and the latest scientific gadgets in order to solve violent crimes (Weber & Timmermans, 2010, p. 62).

They appear not only realistic and credible, but also intriguing and endowed with inexhaustible heuristic power. The expression "*CSI Effect*" suggests precisely the cumulative effect of this TV drama that exaggeratedly glorifies the forensic sciences and creates disproportionate expectations regarding their real ability and reliability. Not only do viewers end up believing that police labs can do everything that happens on television, but there have also been consequences for justice, for acceptable evidence standards in the courts and for victim perception (Schweitzer & Saks, 2007, pp. 357-359). The term appeared in English vocabulary in 2002 in *Time* magazine and, shortly thereafter, exploded in a multi-media loop, a series of back-and-forth interactions between media and reality (Cole & Dioso-Villa, 2009, p. 1339).

In a broad sense, it is also used to refer to the necro-aesthetic shift that has gradually pushed and fetishized the visual boundaries to represent the cadaver (Weber & Timmermans, 2010, p. 63). “*CSI* made the dead cool and pretty” (p. 64). It has been suggested that it is, actually, a tech-effect based on real technical developments and advances in the capabilities of the forensic sciences, which are shown by television programs, but also experienced in daily life. In it resounds the prestige and authority that science has over society today, the positive values such as certainty, well-being, enlightenment and progress that it is associated with (Cole & Dioso-Villa, 2009, pp. 1337-1373).

Moreover, this trend in crime fiction also rests on the tons of visual medical culture that have invaded the television landscape in the last decades: medical shows, such as *ER*, *Scrubs*, *House*, *M. D.*, *Grey’s Anatomy* etc., providing this or that type of counselling, the constant presence of medical images in the news, a tsunami of medical images in the recurring circumstances of pandemics. The power of these images comes from the fact that they stem from the experience of each of us when dragged to any emergency room or hospital facility; our feeling of weakness and impotence there; the perception of our life and fate being entirely in the hand of the good doctors; and the faith in their technique. It is not just television culture, but common experience as well.

The medical visual culture is larger and more universal than just the part shown in detective fiction. It is part of that medicalization of the gaze – the medical gaze as the only legitimate one, and medical knowledge and culture as a major tool of power – highlighted by Foucault. Crime fiction appropriated medical-scientific techniques and technologies of observation and description in its attempt to narratively solve, again, the most frightening enigma of all. Since death today is as material as it was a hundred years ago, questions no longer sound like the classic *whodunit* (who has done it), but rather as “whose body?” or “how is it done?” (how did he/she die).

The observation of external clues on the surface of the body has given space to the visualization of internal bodily evidence. We went from what the eye could seize at a glance to what is invisible to the naked eye and can only be observed through visual prostheses. The search for truth is no longer just circumstantial, as happened in the detective novel that deciphered traces and interrogated people. Nor is it just a violent fight with criminals, as in hard-boiled. Because the truth is, so to speak, incorporated, then its research will consist in opening, dissecting, dismembering and then reassembling, not only the bodies of human beings, but also of things, down to the single hyper-visible elements of matter.

Thus, for example, the success of the corpse in the trunk recurring topic, in which both the body of the dead and the body of the car have to be submitted to the same techniques. The autopsy paradigm has been extended beyond the corpses to material things: the car being dissected, disassembled, observed with the same optical prosthesis as the cadaver itself. And even if the corpse itself is gone, has been dumped somewhere in a ditch, the traces of its presence are still around, which science will be able to spot. In a way, the corpse cannot leave the trunk, as eternal coffin.

Corpses and things tell a true story that one must know how to listen to in order to dispel the mystery and calm the anguish generated by the crime. They are at the same time objects to be interrogated and subjects of a discursive production crucial to the resolution of the story. On top of which, science has become a quieting, stable presence and a guarantee of truth in the turmoil of this brutal and opaque global world.

Chapter II

Giallo, Noir and the Cannibals

Italian Giallo

In the last hundred years, in Italy, crime fiction has been labelled in many ways and some of these terms have become literary labels. The most common is *giallo*, a designation that is not immediately transparent outside the national territory, but which refers, in general, to the genre dedicated to crime and, in particular, to police investigation stories.

The name derived from an editorial operation started in 1929 by the Arnoldo Mondadori publishing house, which launched on the Italian market a series of detective books called *I libri gialli* [The Yellow Books], characterized by their yellow cover, and imported classic authors, such as S.S. Van Dine, who was chosen for the first publication. The series marked the genesis of the made-in-Italy crime fiction, precisely defined as *giallo* since then.

A new appetite for this type of literature began to grow, while the local production of stories was also encouraged by the *MinCultPop*⁶, which imposed a minimum 20% of Italian writers, to be found by trawling among translators, playwrights, essayists and poets (Bordoni & Fossati, 1985, pp. 59-61). The first truly Italian detective, the police commissioner Ascanio Bonichi, came from the pen of Alessandro Varaldo in *Settebello* [The Seven of Diamonds] (1931). Bonichi was soon followed by others, among which a prominent place belongs to the melancholic and perceptive De Vincenzi, head of the *Squadra Mobile* [Flying Squad] of Milan, created by Augusto De Angelis. An anti-fascist writer, De Angelis attributed dignity to the genre and opposed the attack that, shortly thereafter, the Mussolini government launched on

⁶ The Ministry of Popular Culture of the Fascist period operating between 1937 and 1944. Other rules imposed on crime fiction included that the murderer could not be Italian, could not escape justice or commit suicide.

crime fiction, because it was considered to be an instigator of undesirable behaviours (Crovi, 2000, p. 15). In the 1930s the detective genre became a profitable and composite product. The materials of adventure novels, chivalric series, fairy tales and heroic sagas came together in this genre, which, with its own stylistic means, exalted the intellectual thrill and enjoyed mass production (Scarponi, 2000, p. 2). Although it had a reputation as a form of lowbrow, popular and escapist literature, positive criticisms also appeared by prestigious intellectuals and writers, such as Antonio Gramsci, Carlo Emilio Gadda and Umberto Saba, as we have seen in Chapter I. In 1941, however, the thrillers were banned and withdrawn from the market as anti-educational and morally damaging and, shortly thereafter, the Mondadori series shut down until after the war, when the genre would flourish again.

In the period of Americanization of the world that followed the Second World War, the so-called *giallo-spaghetti* novels were successful. They were crime stories set abroad, written by Italian authors hiding behind Anglicized pen names, which sold a lot but innovated little, when compared to the inspiring British and North American models. Yet it was the readers, rather than the authors, who were xenophile. They rediscovered the detection classics by Agatha Christie and Edgar Wallace, but also enjoyed the new hard-boiled thrillers, such as those of Mickey Spillane, Raymond Chandler and Erle Stanley Gardner. There was no shortage of Italian writers, like Franco Enna, Sergio Donati and Giuseppe Ciabattini, but they were not particularly appreciated by the public when they used their real names (Padovani, 1989, p. 8).

That awful mess.

High literature, on the other hand, participated in crime fiction with *Awful Mess* by Gadda, an avant-garde text that appeared as a without-solution, chaotic detective novel, enacting the crisis of modern thinking. This unfinished work, by such a recognized writer as Gadda, which was initially published in the prestigious magazine *Letteratura* in 1946-47 and then republished in 1957, had a decisive relevance for the literary legitimacy of the genre. It

tasted of anti-conformist challenge and gained great critical and editorial success, in addition to public's approval. Later, a similar outcome was enjoyed by the detective novels by Fruttero-Lucentini and Umberto Eco (Spinazzola, 2010, pp. 8-9).

The structure of Gadda's *Awful Mess* overlaps two distinct but contiguous crimes, a shady murder and a brave robbery, which urges the expectation of a double final revelation. Instead, the solution is missing, and the mess remains tangled. Environmental descriptivism and psychosocial analysis prevail over the investigative plot, which dramatizes the author's oedipal obsession: the crime is a kind of matricide with lesbian-erotic implications. The stylistic prestige and complexity of Gadda's writing did not discourage readers. On the contrary, it started a large number of emulations (Spinazzola, 2010, pp. 10-31), while the incompleteness of the work was enhanced as a mockery of the typical soothing conclusion of the mystery story (p. 85). The motive for the murder is closer to a psychoanalytic vision of guilt than to causes, *concauses* and philosophical reasons (Pietropaoli, 1986, p. 71). Besides this, however, there is the effort of constant interpretive deconstruction, the permanent instigation to break any normalization and trivialization of the world (pp. 76-77).

Gadda saw the world as a system of systems, in which each individual system conditions the others and is conditioned by them. Throughout all his life, he tried to represent this concept without mitigating its complexity, i.e., the simultaneous presence of the most heterogeneous elements that contribute to determining an event. Each object stays at the centre of a network of relationships that the narrator must follow, while the details multiply with infinite descriptions and digressions. From any starting point, the discussion broadens to include growing vastness. Using the grotesque as a powerful tool, Gadda narratively asserted the principle according to which observation always changes the observed phenomenon: knowing deforms reality (Calvino, 1988/1993, pp. 106-108).

The *Milano Quartet*.

Between 1966 and 1969 the situation changed with the publication of Giorgio Scerbanenco's highly successful thrillers. The *Milano Quartet* is set in a chilled, sadistic and filthy Milan, where heinous crimes are continually committed and described with unusual attention to disturbing corporeal and sexual details. Scerbanenco wrote, in the incipit of *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* [The Milanese Kill on Saturday]:

Con la civiltà di massa oggi viene fuori anche la criminalità di massa. Oggi (...) si pesca in questo lutulento mare del crimine e della sozzeria e vengono fuori repellenti pesci piccoli e grossi, e così si fa pulizia. (1969/1994, p. 7)

Today, with mass civilization, mass crime also emerges. Today (...) you fish in this muddy sea of crime and filth, and small and big repellent fish come out, and in this way, you clean up.

The classic detective story procedures were mixed with those of the hard-boiled and sentimental romance, of which the writer was an expert. The protagonist is Duca Lamberti, a doctor released fresh from prison, where he served a three-year sentence for practising euthanasia on a terminally ill elderly woman. In his hunting-man investigations, he demonstrates intelligence, perspicacity and, above all, fury against the criminals who are agents of the crime, produced by a rotten society and deserving violent and exemplary punishments. For Lamberti, crime is merchandise, something that is bought and sold. To face it, one must speak its own language (Doninelli, 1998, p. V).

Like De Angelis before him, Scerbanenco followed the example of Simenon and Chandler: he broke the crystal sphere of the detective story, with its stereotyped characters reduced to functions and who never got stained with blood, and put his investigator on the street, among real people, letting him get involved personally in the adventures. Duca immerses himself in the most turbid Milanese environments and studies the deviant consciences of the guilty, in order to expose and bring them to justice. His moral rules are Manichaeian, responding to the requests for law and order from the majority of 1960s petty-bourgeois readers, but

Scerbanenco also gave space to the contrasting point of view of socially marginal figures, and this is exactly how he reaches a large audience.

The world of Scerbanenco is dark and static: the horrible reality is always the same (Doninelli, 1998, p. III). His novels are serial, with a strong structural recursion. Therefore, the plot develops by aligning, more or less in the same order, the same functions: discovery of a particularly sadistic crime, the hunt for the guilty with the intent of inflicting an avenging punishment, cruel criminal reaction, and violent counter reaction of the detective. The solution is only temporary, since new crimes replace the old ones, in a vicious and perverse circle. The mechanisms of identification and distancing solicited in the reader are manifested in a privileged way when the body is revealed, which has a central role in the narration.

The horrific description is detailed, hyper-realistic (in the sense of photographic hyperrealism), but always accompanied by commiseration towards innocent victims, expressed in a redundant and sentimentalist language (Canova, 1985, pp. 150-157). We will return to this point in Chapter III. Scerbanenco's success – he has been translated abroad, inspired several films and won the *Gran Prix de la Littérature Policière* award – encouraged new experiments among Italian writers. He is recently experiencing a happy season of posthumous popularity, thanks to both the constant re-editions and the tributes from the *neo-noir* writers. In 2018, for example, the unpublished *L'isola degli idealisti* [The Island of Idealists], a story half-sentimental and half *noir*, was published, with a preface by his daughter, Cecilia.

Disturbing crime novels.

In the same period, the 1960s, the first crime novels by Sicilian Leonardo Sciascia were published, and defined as “disturbing” by Ulrich Schulz-Buschhaus (1984, p. 289) for the original use of the narrative structure of the detective fiction and for their political and social commitment. The transformation of the detective story from reassuring to disturbing began

with plots that refer to the structure of progressive American thrillers, such as those of Chandler and Ross Macdonald, but differ from them. The novels without a happy ending by Sciascia finish without the capture of the culprit, not because of a hermeneutic impossibility, as happens in Gadda, but because of the interference of a greater power that suffocates the investigations. So, they invite the reader to the extra textual deepening, to extend the investigation beyond fiction, in reality, and verify narrative data. In the model illustrated by Sciascia, literature promises to be projected beyond the text, into a space where literature and politics come together, and crime fiction takes on the social role to activate consciences. For this reason, crime fiction mixes with other genres, such as the pamphlet and the judicial chronicle, with the joint aims of making the narrative truth stronger and of widening the detective field (Crotti, 1982, p. 148-151).

Sciascia's political mysteries analysed and denounced a particular environment, that of the Mafia, which is capable of covering up, tainting or destroying an otherwise successful investigation. In *Il giorno della civetta* [The Day of the Owl] (1961), for example, the Mafia covers up the results of Inspector Bellodi's investigation and destroys what he had been able to reconstruct. Reticence, a typical slowdown mechanism used in investigative fiction to create suspense and delay a solution, is brought to the fore, jams and breaks the detective's inferential thinking and neutralizes him by any means, including death (Pietropaoli, 1986, p. 39). The surprise, whereby the culprit turns out to be the most unlikely person, overturns the expectations of the reader, who wonders if the crime is of a mafia or passionate type. In Sciascia, the real crime is that which, in relation to the leading plot, is the less likely of the two types: the historically specific one and not the one committed out of jealousy. The motif "politics has nothing to do with it" is reversed, with the consequent renunciation of the happy conclusion and the triumph of the immoral power. The investigator's desperate clarification work is neither tolerated, nor rewarded, but is eliminated as interference in business (Schulz-

Buschhaus, 1984). The value of the text, therefore, no longer resides in the unveiling of the mystery or in the punishment of the guilty – the identity of the crime perpetrators is not important, and the instigators remain untouchable. Instead, the value is in the ethical and political unravelling of the bad conscience of power and in putting the reader's desire for truth in motion (Pietropaoli, 1986, p. 82).

1970s and 1980s.

In the following decade, the 1970s, detective fiction saw a new boom, which also attracted another wave of critical interventions, such as those by Leonardo Sciascia, Raffaele Crovi, Loris Rambelli, Renzo Cremante, Umberto Eco and Vittorio Spinazzola.

1972 was the year of *La donna della domenica* [The Sunday Woman] by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, a complex and multi-faceted *giallo di costume* [detective novel of manners], which mixed different genres with the police mystery and gave an original and ironic insight into the upper middle-class society of Turin (Manai, 2008; Spinazzola, 2010). This novel became a film in 1976. In 1973 the series of novels *Qui Squadra Mobile* [Flying Squad Here] by Massimo Felisatti and Fabio Pittorru began. This series, screen written by the same authors, became the first crime TV series to be set in Italy, produced and broadcast by Rai (1973-1976). The Bolognese Lorian Macchiavelli, in 1974, created the popular and long-lived brigadier Sarti Antonio and became known for his penchant for grotesque deformation of reality and for his political and ideological commitment (Manai, 2002). Enzo Russo, Antonio Perria, Luciano Anselmi and Attilio Veraldi should also be named with him. The student, worker and feminist protests that raged in those years of radicalization of political dedication were mirrored in fiction, so that hot political topics entered more and more often into the stories, together with a modernization of the language that was affected by the influence of the *Nouvelle Vague*. Crime fiction adopted a direct and rapid language, in which different narrative codes

converged, such as those of television and cinema, the breezy rhythm of journalistic prose and magazine slang (Padovani, 1989, p. 40).

While the historical avant-garde had gone in the direction of the progressive aphasia announced by the “interdiction of representation” theorized by Adorno, the postmodern avant-garde showed, in contrast, a reconversion to readability and a rapprochement to literary genres. They were recovered, mixed, recombined and recreated by dissolving, not only the frontiers among levels of style, but also those between the sectors of production and reception. The genres, indeed, had never disappeared, but had merely withdrawn into the entertainment literature, fortifying and multiplying themselves in various models of extreme readability. Thus, they returned being the main means of communication between authors and readers. With this recovery of genres, however, the legitimacy of the continuum, of the series and, therefore, of all those literary institutions of modern publishing, was restored (Schulz-Buschhaus, 1999, p. 58).

In the 1980s Renato Olivieri, Corrado Augias, Luciano Secchi and Laura Grimaldi continued the Italian crime fiction genre. Grimaldi, in particular, was one of the few female crime fiction writers and critics of that time. She was editor-in-chief of the *Mondadori Gialli* series and founder of the Interno Giallo publishing house. We owe the fame of Dashiell Hammett in Italy to her translation. She published several essays on crime fiction writing and a fiction trilogy.

Over the years, wide dispersion, both geographic-linguistic and narrative, has taken place in the genre. The authors set their stories in every part of the peninsula, in a process of localization of the global dynamics of an international crime that was born from the very mechanisms of late capitalist societies. At the same time, crime fiction split into a large number of subgenres, trying to revive modules that had been exploited for decades, and hybridized with

science fiction, history, romance, horror etc. A taste for the gruesome macabre *feuilleton* sensationalism also emerged in this period (Padovani 1989, p. 59).

A separate literary case was *Il nome della rosa* [The Name of the Rose] (1980) by the semiologist Umberto Eco, who challenged himself in the mystery fiction genre in order to defend its literary status and successfully produced a culturally full and complex novel. The detective structure is an excuse to keep alive the curiosity of the reader, while themes of history, theology and philosophy occupy the pages. The experiment resulted in a massive worldwide success (Spinazzola, 2010), with millions of copies sold, a film adaptation (1986) and a TV series, the latter produced in 2019.

Italian *Neo-Noir*

As we saw in Chapter I, the classic detective novel was revolutionized by the hard-boiled writers, who were later translated into French by the Gallimard series, which spread the term *noir* through Europe.

The revival of the genre in the 1980s, with Ellroy's works and the global circulation of *neo-noir*, came to the Italian peninsula after some delay. Only in the mid-90s, in fact, did crime fiction reach a new and unprecedented popularity (it was already popular in the 1930s), particularly the *noir* subgenre. A number of authors, many of them young and debuting, came to the forefront of the publishing market, capturing an increasing number of readers and the attention of critics, including non-Italians.

The first name to mention is undoubtedly that of Andrea Camilleri, who, between 1996 and 1997, suddenly reached the top of book rankings with his first novel in the Inspector Montalbano series, which remains very popular today. His traditional police investigations belong to the Mediterranean *noir* for the characterization of the protagonist, for the setting of the stories in a southern European place like Sicily, and for the issues addressed. Although the

themes are generally less violent and disturbing than those of Izzo or Montalbàn, and his detective less socially cast off, the spirit is similar. Montalbano, known by millions of Italians and then translated all over the world thanks to the success of the television adaptations, quickly became a serial and popular character, living an independent existence from his literary origin.

Camilleri was a literary phenomenon but was not alone in this. In fact, the new millennium opened with the editorial and public triumph of *noir* fiction by both Camilleri and other authors, which gained a central position in Italian literature (Mondello, 2010, p. 23). A multitude of narrative subgenres ended up under the generic definition of *noir*, such as neo-Gothic, pulp, *neo-noir*, horror, splatter-punk, thriller etc. The popularity with readers created a loop process, producing a series of modifications both in the market and in the editorial system. The *noir* series flourished, and they are now included in many publishing catalogues. There was the emergence of small dedicated publishing houses and of countless webzines, free-writing blogs, authors' websites and web contests (Mondello, 2004b, pp. 185-186). The word "black" (*nero* and *noir*) began to circulate within the crime fiction genre: between the end of 1990 and 2005 it appeared in novels, anthologies, comic magazines, festivals and awards, dispersing it through the narrative panorama. The success of the genre brought about changes, not only in consumption, in the attitude of purchase and in the perception of the public, but also in the authors' production of narratives that increasingly exploited the *noir* style.

This narrative phenomenon appeared with an almost contemporary wave of writings, grouped around three geographical and stylistic areas: the *Scuola dei Duri* [Tough Guys School] in Milan, the *Gruppo 13* [Group 13] in Bologna and the *Factory Neonoir* in Rome. The convergence of groups promoted solidarity and collaboration between authors, who developed a new Italian crime fiction.

Group 13.

The tradition of Emilia-Romagna as a genre editorial hotbed was fortunate for *Gruppo 13*, whose name paid homage to the neo-avant-garde of *Gruppo 63* [Group 63]. The group was initially established by Lorian Macchiavelli, Carlo Lucarelli, Marcello Fois and Alda Teodorani and included both writers and illustrators. It acted as an umbrella for the crime writers operating around Bologna. They appeared on the market with anthologies appreciated by the public. The writer, screenwriter and cartoonist Luigi Bernardi, through the small publishing houses Granata Press and Metrolibri, launched writers linked to the Bologna area and, in some cases, to *Gruppo 13*, including the now famous Carlo Lucarelli.

Head of the association of writers, Lucarelli made his debut in 1990 with *Carta bianca* [translated as *Carte Blanche*], a mystery set in the time of Fascism. He was also editor of the periodical *Delitti di carta*, dedicated to the crime genre, together with Bernardi, of the Einaudi *Stile Libero noir* series. Later, Lucarelli became one of the most successful Italian *neo-noir* authors, thanks to his awareness of the mechanisms of mass communication and his ability to meet the public's expectations. Especially for his planning and direction of television programs such as *Blu Notte* [Blue Night] (1998-2012), in which he analyses unresolved crimes and mysteries, he managed to appear as an up-to-date expert in crime and crime techniques (Somigli, 2011, p. 80). He created both Inspector Coliandro, a character who moves between *noir* stories, comics and TV series, and the tough Inspector Grazia Negro, protagonist of a series of novels, including the 1999 bestseller *Almost Blue*.

Other names came out of the shadows and, leaving Bologna, moved to different cities. Marcello Fois became one of the exponents of the Sardinian mystery. The comic illustrator Giuseppe Ferrandino moved to crime fiction, following in the footsteps of Attilio Veraldi and setting his very original *noir* novels in Naples. Alda Teodorani, writer, translator and comic screenwriter, made her narrative debut in 1990 and also published in the magazines *Splatter*

and *Monsters*. From Bologna, she soon went to live in Rome, the city in which she set a large number of her stories. Teodorani preferred not to be restricted by the parameters of specific literary groups and genres. Instead, she specialized in a hybrid genre, which merges splatter, horror and erotica, while incorporating the language of other media. Her bloodthirsty heroines draw heavily on the aesthetics of the Italian *fumetti neri* [black comics]. She has participated in artistic, musical projects and written lyrics for songs, eBooks, short films and blogs⁷. Finally, we cannot fail to mention Eraldo Baldini, whose *Gotico rurale* [Rural Gothic] (2000) tends towards horror, and Valerio Evangelisti, writer and editor of the online literary magazine *Carmilla*.

Milan's Tough Guys.

The *Scuola dei Duri* [Tough Guys School] was born in Milan from an idea of the writer Andrea G. Pinketts, well-known for the grotesque and surreal tone of his splatter-comic tales and the pyrotechnic rhetorical figures with which he drowns readers in rivers of words (Crovi, 2000, p. 16). The name echoed that of the famous hard-boiled school. The writers who revolved around it – Gianni Biondillo, Sandrone Dazieri, Andrea Cippi, Gaetano Cappelli, Raoul Montanari, Carlo Oliva, Sandro Ossola, Nicoletta Vallorani and others – chose a metropolis and its suburbs in which to make their more-or-less amateur detectives fight and get beaten up. They also fiercely criticized the so-called *Milano da bere*⁸, presented as corrupt, social climbing, hypocritical and unjust. The manifesto-anthology came out in 1995, edited by the bookseller, publisher and writer Tecla Dozio who, ten years before, had opened the bookshop

⁷ See Rubenis (2012), who explored Alda Teodorani's female, post-modern and multimedia writing.

⁸ *Milano da bere* is a journalistic expression born after an advertising campaign of Amaro Ramazzotti and refers to the lively and wealthy social circles of the city in the 1980s, years of widespread well-being (among the rich), of the economic hegemony of the Lombard capital and social climbing. The slogan accompanied the images of the Milanese day in a city that was always active, positive, efficient and full of experiences to live. That era ended in the early 1990s with the *Tangentopoli* political scandal and legal investigations.

Libreria del Giallo, also called *Libreria Scherlockiana*, which became another gathering point for the Milanese writers.

The dark Milan (*nera*, indeed) that they portrayed appeared as the mirror of the whole country, starting with the political scandal of the legal investigations of *Tangentopoli*. In the 1990s, these inquests exposed the corruption of the government and caused, due to the media impact and indignation of public opinion, the end of the First Republic and the subsequent takeover by the entrepreneur Silvio Berlusconi, along with other newly formed parties. In Biondillo's degraded suburbs of Quarto Oggiaro, in Vallorani's colourful streets characterized by both crime and solidarity, and in Dazieri's squats, the legacy of the Milanese crime stories of such writers as Scerbanenco, the ex-journalist Antonio Perria, and Renato Olivieri, with his inspector Ambrosio, emerged (Pieri, 2011, pp. 134-136; Pezzotti, 2014, pp. 126/127).

The Roman *Factory*.

Alda Teodorani was also among the founders of the third group, the *Factory Neonoir* of Rome, which made the term *neo-noir* popular in Italy. It was the self-attributed name of the Roman group, born in 1994, although it was pre-existent. The *Factory* included writers, theatrical and film directors, screenwriters and critics who used to meet in the area of Trastevere. They found their poetics in the director Dario Argento's cinematographic style, characterized by graphic atmospheres and a preference for the so-called "Cain's point of view", or rather the perspective of the murderer. Their stories, set in a nightmare city, explicitly referred to horror cinema, not only those of Argento, but also those of Mario Bava and Lucio Fulci, the b-movies and the cyberpunk cult film *Blade Runner*. As Teodorani pointed out in an interview (Mercadante, 2001, p. 40),

Voglio che non si mettano in discussione la bontà o la crudeltà dei protagonisti, e che il lettore sia un semplice osservatore degli avvenimenti, che li veda con gli occhi dell'assassino – gli occhi di Caino – e che quando finisce di leggere si senta le mani sporche di sangue. E a questo punto la trama non importa più.

I want the goodness or cruelty of the protagonists not to be questioned, and the reader to be a simple observer of the events, seeing them through the eyes of the murderer – the eyes of Cain – and when he finishes reading, he feels the blood-soaked hands. And, at this point, the plot no longer matters.

The group's first productions were a radio broadcast, a theatrical performance based on the confessions of a serial killer and a series of anthologies.

Neo-noir by the book.

The *neo-noir* writers and critics Fabio Giovannini and Antonio Tentori listed the indispensable and programmatic elements for this genre. According to them, it has to be imaginal, extremist and ironic, but without indulging in provocative and disrespectful exploits as an end in themselves (1994, p. 6). Among its characteristics, we can find the assassin as the narrative subject (a monster, but not too far from us); the multimedia rewriting of genres; the overlap between crime news and fiction; and ubiquitous violence in interpersonal relationships. The classic police investigation, with its primary focus on the detective, is abandoned in the attempt to renew crime literature by looking straight into extreme situations, absolutely contrary to accepted social mores, and into the darkest areas of reality (pp. 5-9). For the Roman authors, as well as for those of the other *neo-noir* groups, the idea is that the genre should work as a picklock to lift seductive facades and discover social plagues (Mercadante, 2001, p. 38).

The writers themselves were personally involved in the debate regarding name, characteristics, poetics and ethics of the *neo-noir*, not only in the anthologies' prefaces and afterwords, but also, and more than ever, on the pages of newspapers, webzines, fanzines, websites and blogs, as well as on television and during the many literary festivals and awards.

Approximately ten years after the publication of the Giovannini and Tentori anthology, Giancarlo De Cataldo, another Roman *neo-noir* writer who became famous with his novel *Romanzo criminale* [Crime Novel] (2002), edited the anthology *Crimini* [Crimes] and, in the

introduction (2005, p. VI-VII), tried to take stock of the genre. The expression “Italian *noir*”, he argued, was by then familiar to a large community of readers. It referred to a group of authors who, through a minority genre, in a few years had conceived and imposed an original way of telling myths, rituals, the splendours (few) and the miseries (many) of contemporary Italy. In doing so, they had produced a frightful portrait of the country, with thin hopes and no certainty. Among the most debated topics were patrimonial and moral corruption, anxiety towards immigrants, and obsession with success.

De Cataldo also described the *neo-noir* as the story that describes evil. Today, he wrote, the *noir* is a linguistic norm to designate a narrative manner that gravitates around the centrality of evil and, under this label, the most varied and heterogeneous writings converge, united by the mirroring of contemporary violence and fears. The immediate usability of the characters, the situations and the narrative modules, which have been extensively metabolized by the public, guarantee a harmony between readers and authors (2006, pp. 10-11).

Andrea G. Pinketts, who loved word puns, claimed to prefer *noir* over the Italian word *nero* and tried to define it by saying that it is the usually dirty conscience that comes out of a well. A bottomless well, but full of narrative backgrounds and backdrops. To write *noir*, you have to be sub-normal, he ironically stated, referring to the moral ambiguity of the stories, which not only indulge in heinous madness, but also endorse a point of view inherent in monsters and deviants (2006, p. 8).

The new *engagée* writers.

The term *neo-noir*, therefore, went far beyond the Roman group that had developed it, and defined the wave of *noir* stories published in Italy between 1990 and the early 2000s. This new generation of writers, considered by many to be the up and coming politically *engagée* ones, created an alternative type of social novel, which was extremely local and linked to the

Italian historical social context, and further differentiated by geographic and linguistic factors. Italian *neo-noir* became the genre that most directly portrayed the ideologies and the cultural and political climate of the Second Republic (Pieri, 2007a, pp. 193-194)⁹. It became the bearer of a fragmentary and fragmented commitment (Pieri, 2007b, p. 253).

Thus, the most exploited way in Italian crime fiction, for about twenty years, was the one indicated by Sciascia and enriched by the suggestions of the French *néopolar* and the Milanese Scerbanenco's thrillers (Novelli, 2018, p. 22). In their bloody stories, the *neo-noir* writers denounced the marginalization of minorities, violence, racism, the crisis of values and the ambiguity of the relationships between political and institutional forces of their time (Carloni, 1994, pp. 177- 179). They unmasked reality and targeted, on a broad spectrum, everything that was wrong in Italy, giving voice to the profound unease of a generation marked by emptiness and a collective loss of orientation. The banality of evil emerged as a narrative force that merged with the realism that is represented.

The settings favoured the metropolis, seen as a place of social conflict and alienated solitude, but there was no lack of macabre countryside and degraded provinces. Crime and investigation often did not revolve around a detective, but around characters who were captured by events, by chance or by some machination, and driven to discover the truth, to hunt serial killers, to unmask deceptions and corruption. The structure of the detective story, as seen in international *neo-noir*, functioned as a means to involve a large audience on the major current issues. It became a metaphor to investigate the world in search of culprits, to lay bare the dirty conscience of a society, to identify the victims of post-industrial civilization and a sinking economic system. The rationalistic and positivistic model of the mystery novel, emptied of credibility by the modernist and post-modern avant-gardes, still offered the cognitive power of

⁹ On *Giallo* and *Impegno* see also Pezzotti (2016).

the investigation, increasingly entrusted directly to the reader, who was invited to play an active and critical role. The genre, therefore, used the pleasure of storytelling and its structural ability to involve the public to send messages, teach the need to reflect, intervene in urgent social issues, and solicit a moral and political regeneration through literature (Manai, 2002, pp. 275-276).

Neo-noir aimed at the cognitive and informative (or counter-informative) value of writing and it put on the mass consumption market narratives set as social and moral investigations, focused on both individual and collective guilt or on psycho-social analysis. In doing so, it acted as the moralistic-realistic literature of the contemporary age (Crovi, 1977, p. 281). According to Lucarelli, crime fiction has been one of the few literary forms capable of addressing the reality, the facts, the scandals and everything behind them, which is a task that both serious literature and journalism have often renounced. Crime fiction, thus, has been a useful and effective tool for discussing the most pressing themes, while keeping the reader attentive, thanks to the narrative structure based on speed and suspense (Crovi, 2000, p. 17). Massimo Carlotto also described *noir* and crime fiction as extraordinary means of reading about the reality that surrounds us, i.e., Italy and the criminal society in which we live and which produces crime in an endless spiral (Scarponi, 2000, p. 17). His detective, called *Alligatore* [Alligator], operates in the Italian Northeast, dominated by economic development and wealth, but closely linked to illegality, new slavery and money laundering.

New Italian Epic.

The push for commitment and investigation led the *neo-noir* texts towards a mixture of languages, genre hybridity and trans-media flexibility. The writers experimented with heterogeneous sources, producing entertaining works that also referenced specific and well-localized crimes.

According to the writers Wu Ming, it is precisely these characteristics – the use of any material, the transmediality and the ethical responsibility towards the events narrated – that defined the so-called *NIE: New Italian Epic*. The term was coined in 2009 to refer to a nebula of works released after 1993 and marked by some key moments in the perception of the relationship between literature and society, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, the Italian politics dominated by Berlusconi and the police violence at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2008. All these works show a network of shared references and affinities. They broke with the literary tradition, because they were not easily identifiable in a specific genre (often not even in the novel form), and the story often continued beyond the book's narration on the internet, at the cinema and on television (Wu Ming, 2009, pp. VIII-45). For this reason, they have also been called *UNO: Unidentified Narrative Object* (p. 12). Wu Ming claimed that traumatic events, such as the new terrorism and the events in Genoa, revived the conscience of the writers after the end of the most disillusioned, megalomaniac, self-indulgent and baroque decade (the 1990s). This period was lost in the celebration of the Western lifestyle and in an orgy of quotes, winks, parodies, *pastiches*, ironic remakes and revivals, and trashy and indifferent postmodernisms (pp. 6-7). In contrast, *NIE* texts drew from a deposit of shared images and references (p. 9) – that deposit called encyclopaedia of reality by Italo Calvino (1988/1993, p. 124) – with a different intent. They recovered literary genres (especially crime, fantasy and horror fiction), then hybridized and mixed them to involve the reader in wide-ranging, almost epic narratives (Wu Ming, 2009, pp. 20-27).

A mix of sources.

With *neo-noir*, the frightening descriptions of the most sordid urban neighbourhoods, full of misery, vice and human degradation, that populated the stories by Carolina Invernizio came back into vogue. Furthermore, the passionate and truculent style of her popular novels, such as *Il bacio d'una morta* [The Kiss of a Dead Woman] (1886) and *La sepolta viva* [The

Woman Buried Alive] (1896), often inspired by crime news or judicial chronicles, also returned to vogue (Bordoni & Fossati, 1985, pp. 21-35).

Among other sources of inspiration for the Italian *neo-noir*, was the cinema, not only American but also Italian: the already mentioned horror films by Argento (*Profondo rosso*) [Deep Red] (1975) and Bava (*Cani arrabbiati*) [Rabid Dogs] (1974), the more recent *Nirvana* by Gabriele Salvatores (1997), Sergio Leone's *spaghetti-westerns*, the post-war neorealist *noir* cinema and the b-movies.

Italian avant-garde comics were also of great influence. Both in magazines like *Alter*, *Il Male*, *Cannibale* and *Frigidaire* and in artists, such as Paziienza, Tamburini, Liberatore and Scozzari, the Italian literary language was exposed to processes of metamorphosis and hybridization that had almost no comparison in the official literature of the period (Gadducci & Tavosanis, 2010, pp. 208-209). The 1960s *fumetti neri* expressed a strong criticism of the middle-class' hypocritical and conformist myths, taboos and values. The first was *Diabolik*, by the Giussani sisters, in 1962, which mixed elements of French *noir* with those of both detective and sentimental fiction, in order to ensure the identification of the reader with the criminal, violent and vindictive hero. The later ones, such as *Kriminal* and *Satanik*, were extreme and introduced shocking elements, such as an expressionistic style of drawing with strong and provocative close-ups, rapid narration and a delirious style of graphics, together with dry, vulgar and truculent dialogues and a new erotic and sadistic content. They reflected the preference of the audience, changed over the years, who particularly appreciated the pornographic line, where all the most sensational perversions of body and desire were found (Manai, 2000).

Young Cannibals' Massacres

The *neo-noir* experiences, which renewed the Italian narrative panorama in the 1990s, were intertwined with another group of young authors, marked by the pulp brutality of their writing and by a creative use of the language, even closer to that of the neo-avant-garde (Castaldi, 2007, p. 368).

Within a few months, in 1996, both the anthology *Un trapano nel cervello. Dieci racconti splatterpunk italiani* [A Drill in the Brain: Ten Italian Splatterpunk Tales], edited by Massimo Perissinotto and Matt Fucile, and *Gioventù Cannibale. La prima antologia italiana dell'orrore estremo* [Cannibal Youth: The First Italian Anthology of Extreme Horror], edited by Daniele Brolli, appeared. Also published, independently and by publishers of a different calibre, were: *Occhi sulla graticola* [Eyes on the Grill] by Tiziano Scarpa; *Fango* [Mud] by Niccolò Ammaniti; *Fonderia Italghisa* [Italghisa Foundry] by Giuseppe Caliceti; *Woobinda e altre storie senza lieto fine* [Woobinda and Other Stories without a Happy Ending] by Aldo Nove; *Destroy* by Isabella Santacroce; and *Bastogne* by Enrico Brizzi.

The following year, 1997, Simona Vinci made her debut with *Dei bambini non si sa niente* [What We Don't Know about Children] and two other anthologies were released: *Anticorpi. Racconti e forme di esperienza inquieta* [Antibodies: Tales and Forms of Restless Experience], edited by Franco Bernini, and *Cuore di pulp. Antologia di racconti italiani* [Pulp Heart: Anthology of Italian Short Stories], edited by Fabio Giovannini and Antonio Tentori.

In 1998 Elena Stancantelli published *Benzina* [Gasoline], followed by Rossana Campo's *Mentre la mia bella dorme* [While My Beauty Sleeps] in 1999. Other authors ascribable to this group had already made their debut, such as Silvia Ballestra, Giuseppe Culicchia, Luisa Brancaccio and Michele Serio.

Many of these writers came from the experience of *Ricerzare: Laboratorio di nuove scritture* [Researching: Laboratory of New Writings], an annual event that was held for the first time in 1993 in Reggio Emilia for the thirty years' anniversary of Italian neo-avant-garde's inception. Indeed, members of *Gruppo 63* [Group 63], such as Nanni Balestrini and Renato Barilli, took part in it, searching for new talent in the narrative zone. Another promotional attempt was the magazine *La Bestia* [The Beast], edited by Balestrini and Barilli, however only the first issue, *Narrative Invaders* (1997), was published (Mondello, 2004a, pp. 12-26).

The media success was almost immediate and literary critics grouped together these pulp writers who, although not making a proper literary cohort, nevertheless shared a commonality of poetics (Lucamante, 2006, p. 696). They were categorized in many ways: *orroristi* [horror], *cannibali* [cannibals], *splatter-punk*, *horror-splatter*, *cattivisti* [bad guys], *Avant-pop*, *narrative invaders*, *terza ondata* [third wave], *tondelliani* [followers of Tondelli], *scrittori dell'eccesso* [excessive writers], *neo-neo-avant-garde*, *narrativa nuova-nuova* [new-new narrative], *pulp*, *pulpisti* [Pulpers], *spaghetti-splatter*, etc. In the end, the common denominator was found with the highly successful, although frequently criticized, label of Young Cannibals, which was an idea of the editors of the newly created Einaudi *Stile Libero*¹⁰. In the following years, many publishers followed the example of Einaudi by filling the catalogues with splatter and pulp stories and novels.

Pulpers or Cannibals?

The fact that they shared common traits did not prevent inner controversies, especially between those who identified themselves in poetics closer to the *neo-noir* – the self-named

¹⁰ Originally, the title for the Einaudi collection was meant to be *Spaghetti-Splatter*. As for the name *Cannibali*, it was also inspired by the magazine, *Cannibale*, a humorous and satirical Italian comic founded by Stefano Tamburini and published in Rome between June 1977 and July 1979.

“Pulpers”¹¹ (Giovannini & Tentori, 1997, pp. 8-9) – and the Young Cannibals. Several short stories, included in the pulp anthologies, were actually signed by *neo-noir* writers, such as Giovannini, Lucarelli, Perissinotto and Teodorani. On the other hand, some Young Cannibals published in detective fiction and *neo-noir* collections. About twenty years later, if we consider the short life and mutual osmosis that the groupings had, Cannibals, Pulpers and *neo-noir* writers no longer appear so different from each other. They eventually either merged into a generically *noir* and mainstream editorial plethora or emerged as individual signatures.

“Il pulp: storie esasperate e atroci, di brividi e di emozioni. Se ne parla molto, da qualche tempo” [Pulp: exasperated and atrocious stories, full of thrills and emotions. A lot has been said about it for some time] (Giovannini & Tentori, 1997, p. 3). The introduction to *Cuore di pulp* [Pulp Heart] dedicates several pages to highlighting the difference between true and fake Italian pulp, between authentic *cattivisti* [Bad Guys, transgressive writers], standing in opposition to both *buonisti* [Good Guys, conventional writers] such as Tamaro, De Carlo, Lodoli and Onofri, and the trendy fake *cattivisti*, who were frequent guests of TV broadcasts. Only the former would have been able to produce a pulp that is truly such, a punch in the stomach that brings to the extreme the violent, gloomy and desperate reality in which we all live (p. 8). On the contrary,

I finti cattivisti di oggi, invece, sanno che va di moda l’umorismo ultraviolento lanciato da Quentin Tarantino, ed ecco affollarsi giovani scrittori italiani che fanno a gara per épater le bourgeois – come si diceva una volta – con schizzi di sangue (finto), estremizzazioni simulate e via dicendo. Insomma, hanno scoperto che fa audience simulare i successi altrui, magari con atteggiamenti da “maledetti” utili per allettare il conformismo guardone delle tv o dei rotocalchi berlusconiani. (pp. 8-9)

Today’s fake *cattivisti*, instead, know that ultraviolent humor launched by Quentin Tarantino is in fashion, and here young Italian writers flock to compete in shocking the bourgeois – as they once said – with splatters of blood (fake), simulated exaggerations and so on. In short, they discovered that it increases the readership by reproducing the

¹¹ To avoid confusion, it is better to clarify that, in the definition of Giovannini and Tentori, the term “Pulpers” refers to a group of pulp authors opposed to that of the so-called Young Cannibals, but in general Pulpers and Cannibals are used interchangeably.

successes of others, perhaps with “damned-writers” attitudes, useful to entice the voyeuristic conformism of Berlusconi’s TV and magazines.

The Pulpers close to the *neo-noir* genre did not appreciate the mixing of savagery and ironic indifference that was typical of Young Cannibals. They considered these characteristics to be masks to hide their sycophantic stance toward critics, journalists and intellectuals – at least toward those, like Renato Barilli¹², who had seen in them a kind of third wave, of neo-neo-avant-garde – and accepted social behaviour. On the contrary, they claimed to take horror, splatter and *noir* seriously and to not distance themselves with sarcasm and humour, since violence had to be written seriously. The difference, then, was between a tough literature that opens the eyes to reality and probes the deepest anxieties of people on the one hand, and the adolescent sensationalism and passive imitation of the American models, on the other hand. Or, rather, the difference between a true pulp and a fake, idiotic and ultimately comforting pulp (Giovannini & Tentori, 1997, pp. 9-10).

However, the story that opened the collection *Cuore di pulp* is *Sottoterra* [Underground] (1997) by Alda Teodorani, who is both a *neo-noir* and a horror-pulp author, and present among Brolli’s Young Cannibals. Similarly, the protagonist in Tentori’s *Il grande orrore* [The Great Horror] is a young and paranoid serial killer of prostitutes who shows precisely that sadistic and ironic savagery typical of Young Cannibals, despite the distancing from the Cannibals claimed by this writer in the preface of the collection. He perceives his crimes as a mission of justice and meticulously lists them together with the most random murder weapon, such as knife, gun, fan, steel wire etc. (1997, pp. 35-45).

¹² First wave refers to the historical avant-garde and the second wave to the neo-avant-garde (Castaldi, 2007, p. 370).

Self-criticism.

Often appreciation and criticism mingled in the same authors, who did not know whether to despise or experiment with this new irreverent and extreme literary fashion, nor did they lack opportunities for self-irony.

Andrea Camilleri expressed some sharp words, as we will see in Chapter IV, when he made fun of the Cannibals' taste for the macabre and the grotesque in the short story *Montalbano si rifiuta* [Montalbano Refuses] (1999). However, in the following years, he conformed to a necro-aesthetics and to a cruder and grittier representation of the violence. Nicoletta Vallorani put invective and counter-invective of the splatter-pulp genre in the mouth of her detective Zoe Libra in *Visto dal cielo* [Seen from the Sky] (2004, p. 258). Carlo Lucarelli admitted, on several occasions, that his comedy-*noir* *Laura di Rimini* [Laura from Rimini] (2001) was his personal tribute to pulp.

Aldo Nove, in 1998, made fun of himself by claiming that he was paid a hundred thousand lire per page for writing stories every bit as absurd as the experimental novels of the 1960s by Nanni Balestrini but, if read slowly, more easily understood than Balestrini's novels (1998, p. 143). Twenty years later, in *Anteprima mondiale* [World Premiere] (2016, p. 43), Nove himself decreed the end of the Cannibals:

quelli là, com'è che si chiamavano? I Cannibali. No, dico: i Cannibali. Tutta fuffa. Tutta pseudo-letteratura. Tutta un'operazione di marketing. (...) Chi cazzo se li ricorda oggi i Cannibali?

those over there, what were they called? Cannibals. No, I say: Cannibals. All the hustle and bustle. All pseudo-literature. A whole marketing operation. (...) Who the fuck remembers Cannibals today?

Alda Teodorani dedicated several ironic and self-ironic pages to the reflection on a writing specializing in killings, monsters and perversions:

Ho fatto un po' di strada innanzitutto perché sono una donna. E una donna che racconta di crimine e sesso è eccezionale. (...) E poi sono unica (...) ho eliminato il plot. (...) Se una volta era necessario, per andare avanti nel racconto, tenere il lettore con il fiato

sospeso perché non riusciva a capire chi cazzo fosse l'assassino, oggi non lo è più, specialmente se la violenza e il sesso regnano ovunque sovrani. (...) Ma la parola più importante è "ho ucciso". Già, tutto parte proprio dall'omicidio. Che per essere ben raccontato va prima ben sperimentato. (...) Ecco, mi piace uccidere. E fare sesso. (...) E direi che, se di successo mio si può parlare, l'ho senz'altro raggiunto quando avevo quasi smesso del tutto di ammazzare. Quel che ho fatto, però, mi è sicuramente servito per raccontare con cognizione di causa la morte e il sesso in maniera, direi quasi, unica. (1994, pp. 5-19)

I had a bit of success firstly because I am a woman. And a woman who talks about crime and sex is exceptional. (...) And then I'm unique (...) I eliminated the plot. (...) If once it was necessary, to go ahead in the story, to keep the reader in suspense because he could not understand who the fuck the killer was, today it is no longer, especially if violence and sex reign everywhere. (...) But the most important word is "I killed". Yes, everything starts from the murder. Which to be told well must first be experienced. (...) That is, I like to kill. And have sex. (...) And I would say that, if you can talk about my success, I certainly reached it when I had almost completely stopped killing. What I did, however, certainly helped me to tell death and sex with a full knowledge that, in a way, I would say is almost unique.

The pure products go crazy.

What is certain is that the appearance of the Cannibals created a fracture with contemporary literature, which was unused to writing about the present, except for *Gruppo 63* and writers such as Pier Vittorio Tondelli and Massimo Canalini, who promoted new talents in their *Under 25* anthologies (Nove, 2016, p. 187-189). This new generation of writers had clearly grown up in the Italy of consumerism and idolatry of goods, of *neo-television* and of landscapes devastated by the rush to cement, by plastic and by the tyranny of the image (Lucamante, 2006, p. 703). It was also a generation marked by a sense of void and cynicism (Cherchi, 1994, p. 7). These authors were aware of being the offspring of this very society, but at the same time keen to clash hard against it. For this reason, they staged scenarios and characters that mirrored the commodification and alienation of contemporary Italian society.

Their style is characterized by the mixing of genres, languages and media. Ads, songs, television series, shows and quizzes, films and comics are used. Products and brands, extrapolated from the world of consumerism, marked their belonging to a globalized era and their literary education as post-modern avant-garde heirs. Cannibals' original and subversive

works critiqued the alienation and the normativity implicated in that mass culture (Lucamante, 2001b, p. 22). They embraced the dry and full of twists American pulp, but also the sensationalism and the lavish and horrid iconography of the *Grand Guignol*. They were inspired by the super-violent and cynical humour launched by Tarantino in *Pulp Fiction*, by his blood splatters, as well as by the splatter-punk style, in which the invasion of the tortured body, disintegrated by monsters and serial killers, represented a revolt against late 1980s sentimental novels (Mollo, 2004, p. 95).

Most of the critics did not appreciate this stylistic experimentalism and, above all, the rampant horror in their stories, nor did they consider particularly original their fury against media and advertising brainwashing, unbridled individualism and precariousness of existences of contemporary society. The artifice was worn out. The parodic use of texts, not according to the conventions of the genre, but, rather, in opposition to them, had already been brought to excellent results by the disquieting thrillers of Gadda and Sciascia (Crotti, 1982, p. 80). Samuel Beckett's theatre had already introduced the concept of the absurd, characters empty of emotional and psychological connotations and the grotesque deformation of reality. Borges' labyrinths had lost the reader in the chaos that darkens the processes of readability and cognition of the world and its multiple levels of truth. Authors such as Malerba, Fruttero and Lucentini amused the readers and fought the monotony of standard language by subverting clichés and creating linguistic *pastiche*, which blended highbrow, everyday and idiomatic expressions with foreignisms and advertising slogans. Nor was there a lack of taste for the monstrous, Gothic, obscene and artificial in their peculiar detective novels. The neo-avant-garde of Sanguineti, Malerba, Balestrini, Eco and others had already exploited narrative techniques such as the rediscovery of genres that brought the literary heritage into the present with the aim of making the texts understandable by the common reader, and also the intertextual game, the habit of quoting, rewriting and sacking reused material (Pietropaoli, 1986, pp. 172-

177). On the other hand, the Cannibals themselves were aware of not being original. As the Cannibal Tiziano Scarpa recalled, the *Gruppo 63* and the postmodernists had already unveiled the mechanisms of commodification and of an image-based society, which elevated self-reference and narcissism as essential elements of a renewed and increasingly overwhelming consumer ethics (Lucamante, 2006, p. 691-703).

Excessive writers.

The narrative of the 1990s is generally quick, easy to read and prefers the mimetic approach, direct speech and short story (Castaldi, 2007, p. 369). The desire for realism brought the language of Pulpers closer to spoken informal Italian, called neo-standard by the linguist Gaetano Berruto (1987), which, during the 1980s, had taken the place of dialect. Dialect, in turn, found new vitality in the stylistic experimentation of these authors, who mixed it with regional and popular Italian, with youth jargons, new media codes and music. most of the time their prose is incohesive, paratactic, made up of short sentences with few connective words and very little punctuation, at times ungrammatical but elegantly so. It is full of neologisms, Anglicisms and repetitions and it favours first-person narration and internal monologue (Della Valle, 2004, pp. 39-63). These “excessive writers”, as Severino Cesari called them in *La Bestia* [The Beast] (1997, p. 30), were characterized by a lively lexicon, little syntax, explicit intertextuality and, above all, the obsession with the body. The language seems to have recovered from continuous immersions in a sort of gigantic universal-global blob (Crovi, 2000, p. 16), from which it emerges stealing images, expressions, mechanisms, narrative rules and characters from comics, cinema, television, video clips and video games, with the intent of hitting and capturing the reader as an advertisement would. There is a constant dominance of the self-diegetic first or third-person narrator and, on the other hand, rare introspection and psychological analysis of the characters, whose body and relationship with goods and objects are put in the foreground. In this mass-media frenzy, deformed by a fluid and slang voice, the

comic register often, but not always, goes with the splatter and pornographic representation of death, violence and sex.

The mix of horror, eroticism and comedy characterizes many of the terrifying descriptions retraceable in pulp texts: acts of cannibalism and incongruous matings, blood and viscera everywhere, interpersonal relationships devastated by the senselessness of the world. The narrators of Cannibals' stories express their antagonism and disgust towards society both through the violent or irreverent gesture and in the form of sublime stupidity or cathodic passivity. They are true children of the system, fascinated by the trash that submerges everything. The television schedule marks their memories and all the crucial passages of their life, such as birth, love and death. The reader is asked to decrypt their hybridized media universe, contaminated by both high literature and extra-literary data (Mondello, 2004a, pp. 27-31). Everything, however, is represented in order to ironically demystify the system itself.

Bricks of indiscipline.

As Renello argued, the Young Cannibals were criticized at length for being too obscene, vulgar, artificial, young, mean, pop and banal, and for using too much unjustified horror and consumerism (2001, pp. 138-140). They were accused of being bad imitations of American pulp with the sole purpose of titillating public's voyeurism, and of exploiting their synergic use of different media solely to promote themselves. Their style was described as a superficial and sensationalistic trend, a second-hand reality, a parody made up of mixed quotes. In particular, critics mostly reduced their pulp and raw representation of death and violence to a marketing strategy that was unable to communicate any pain or piety (La Forgia, 2003, pp. 339-345). Their violence appeared motiveless, wild and undisciplined (Trevi, 1996, p. 205), and emptied of the subversive intent of the avant-garde. Unlike the avant-garde, they failed in their attempted protest against the institutions (Antonello, 2001, pp. 44-50). Their horror did not seem to come from the literary tradition of monsters, freaks and splatter, such as Calvino's *La*

giornata d'uno scrutatore [translated as *The Watcher*] (1963) and Tommaso Landolfi's novels, but rather from television. Moreover (and possibly for this very reason) it was not particularly shocking (La Porta, 2001, p. 58).

On the contrary, we would suggest that these authors are inevitably the product, not only of the globalized world at the end of the millennium, but also of the literature that preceded them. In their style there is everything they had absorbed by reading novels, comics, watching television, buying goods and devouring, as it were, advertisements, songs and films. Their composite materiality and intertextuality are what Michel De Certeau called the "prose of the world", a feature of postmodern society, characterized by the intertwining of many languages. Even within a context of apparent total passivity, such as that of television viewers, there is always the possibility of exercising a furtive, surreptitious creativity, trapped in the languages received and subjected to prescribed syntax. It is precisely through the cultural appropriation and reuse of show-products and the manipulation of the elements made available by the system, that it becomes possible to create original bricolages which, in turn, become plots of antidiscipline (1980/1984, pp. XII-42).

With their communication building blocks (consumer products, TV shows, songs, films, comics, books, poems, corpses), Pulpers constructed their own narratives while, simultaneously, subverting the accepted scripts in order to draw attention to the horror of the world, the existential void and the unstoppable invasion of *clichés*. Their gritty, gross and ironic hyper-realism in representing violence, bodies and people (who are mainly reduced to their bodies) is the very core of a disillusioned and ruthless condemnation of contemporary Italian society. Their disturbing and continual disarticulation of bodies is their way of creating a counter-narration. Their writings are a weapon against homogeneity, assimilation, exhaustion of vitality, advertising and television impoverishment.

Television Effect

Feuilleton and TV series.

The Italian *romanzo d'appendice* emerged in the wake of the success of the French *feuilleton*, which resulted from a mix of literature and journalism and represented the greatest success of popular fiction at the beginning of the 19th century, as well as the first case of entertainment literature. Indeed, it promoted reading to a mass audience, even for those with limited economic resources, by bringing the book, split into instalments, outside traditional reading environments such as bookstores and libraries.

On these sheets, sold as a supplement to newspapers and dedicated solely to episode narration, the way of writing changed. Possibly endless plots, interspersed with secondary plots that multiplied the number of characters and their adventures, were much enjoyed. Along with splitting and complication, sensationalism and drama also became functional elements to arouse the interest of readers and encourage them to purchase the following episode. The anxiety and curiosity were kept alive and renewed at each episode. The ending was consoling and untied all knots, dispensing rewards and punishments and fulfilling the purpose of escape literature, with a message of pacification and stabilization of social contrasts (Bordoni & Fossati, 1985, pp. 21-38).

The repetitiveness and seriality of the popular series showed how literature could use the cultural industry to reach a wider audience. Today's literature has resisted competition from television and other audio-visual media precisely by embracing a visual culture, made of images, and by thinning and blurring the border between high and low-brow literature. Today's crime fiction reaches the mass public through the contemporary version of the *feuilleton*: the television series.

In the 1970s the police series *Qui Squadra Mobile* [Flying Squad Here], for the first time in Italy, focalized on a team, instead of a single hero, dealing with cases inspired by the

news, located in a specific city and depicted with no sparing of personal and family implications (Felisatti, 1998, p. 102-104). Between the 1980s and the early 1990s Italian TV, as was the case throughout Europe, was invaded by ready-to-use North American fiction, while the audiovisual industry organized itself to respond to a growing demand through both public channels and private and commercial competitors (Scarpetti & Strano, 2004, pp. 14-22). Between 1996 and the 2000s Italian fiction, not just crime fiction, became an essential genre with a prominent position on the generalist television scene, attracting investments and state incentives.

Television fiction became an arena for experimentation and innovation. Especially in the detective genre, long series inspired by the United States and divided over several seasons appeared, together with miniseries and short series (Barra & Scaglioni, 2015, p. 66). Since national and commercial television has shown great interest in the crime genre, an ever-wider range of series has been produced and broadcast. Adaptations of successful crime and *noir* novels, such as *Romanzo criminale* [Crime Novel], *Gomorra* [Gomorra], *Almost Blue*, *Il commissario Montalbano* [Inspector Montalbano] series and the anthology *Crimini* [Crimes], gained the favour of readers and viewers and encouraged new fiction works. Consequently, there has been a further increase in the number of consumers, thanks to the spread of the genre in translations and film and television productions, including outside of Italy. Contemporary crime fiction has become a pivot of today's television entertainment and a tool that shapes the way most of the public perceives some aspects of reality (Macleod, 2014, p. 527).

Show, don't tell!

When the cameras start to film you, then you are a writer, wrote Aldo Nove in a story included in *Superwoobinda* (1998, pp. 138-139). However, it is not just about the television presence of the authors, some of whom, such as Camilleri and Lucarelli, became true VIPs, but also about the language used in today's crime fiction.

Most of the TV series' ideas and scripts have come from crime fiction writers, who find in the television market a source of income and notoriety that narrative does not guarantee. On the one hand, books are increasingly translated into films while, on the other hand, Italian literary production is affected by the tendency to transpose cinematographic techniques into the novel, influencing the narrative and stylistic choices of the novelists to such an extent that we could say we see a film by reading a book (Jacoponi, 2010, pp. 254-255). The writers prefer a direct and rapid language, in which the narrative codes of the television and cinema converge, and favour the brisk rhythm of journalistic prose and the jargon of the magazine (Padovani, 1989, p. 40).

This phenomenon is common to the whole global market and it encourages the writers themselves to become active protagonists of this narrative evolution. They produce stories that are potentially ready for transposition on the screen, sometimes almost scripts, and that get involved in the television writing and take advantage of an increased notoriety, which is obtained by their own stories told by different media than the one in which they were originally born. As seen in Chapter I, the success of North American authors Patricia Cornwell and Kathy Reichs has been closely linked to the media popularity of medical and forensic mystery TV series, such as *Bones* and *CSI*, regardless of whether they were inspired by their novels or not.

The authors to be examined in Chapters III and IV, such as Ammaniti, Camilleri and Lucarelli, participated in the adaptations of their texts, and wrote and edited screenplays for cinema and TV. At other times, as in the case of Teodorani, they collaborated with theatre, comics and musical projects. Moreover, in many cases, films for cinema or television were drawn from their texts, which were already suitable for this translation. The description of the murders, of the crime scenes, of the corpse – the aspects that interest us most – are full of visual details, as if the reader is watching what is happening and listening to the dialogue. Only from time to time, does the narration pause in psychological or philosophical digressions. The

detailed and brutal representation of extreme violence followed in the footsteps of the pulp stories, with their low brow, dry and harsh style. The hard-boiled authors, not unlike now, tried to transform their texts into pre-scripts, filling them with action and plot twists, to see them translated into films (Sanavio, 2000, pp. 10-14).

Mediatization.

The Russian formalist Boris Èjchenbaum distinguished two types of widespread narratives in literary prose: the narrative and the “scenic” narrative. The second is very similar to the dramatic form because it highlights the dialogues and replaces the figurative principle with the narrative one, so that everything is perceived, not as told, but as if it occurred before the eyes, on the scene. The dialogues are filled with elements of the spoken language which, rather than portraying the characters, often constitute the real elements of the plot. The novel becomes a combination of scenic dialogue and stage directions, interpreting the set design, gestures and intonation. The narrator almost disappears, in pages full of dialogue between characters, and the reader is lost in a scenic illusion. The authors (we are in the silent cinema years) were well aware of this and made their writing as close as possible to a cinematographic script, ready for a much-welcomed translation into the (audio)-visual language (1927/1980, pp. 233-239). A century later, *mutatis mutandis*, the same can be said.

Bruno Pischedda (2008, pp. 233-235) claimed that a global phenomenon of mediatization is taking place in the novel, leading to a writing in images induced by the visual media civilization, with a revolutionary effect similar to the mid-18th century novelization of the narrative genres pointed out by Bakhtin. Today, the novel is influenced by other dynamic expressive codes and begins to receive more suggestions and models from the outside than it conveys. Eventually, the civilization of the image won and made the novel enter a multimedia system, from which the writers cannot help taking techniques and ideas.

The culture of the technically reproduced image has changed literature in many ways. For example, the action takes place while reading, in an absolute and spectacular present time, which makes the existence of character and reader coincide. The micro-fragmentation of the narrative units reproduces the pressing timing of the film and television medium: the chapters seem as frames or sequences; the style is dominated by nominal syntax, brachylogy and short dialogues. Narrative is, above all, eidetic, made up of actions, descriptions and dialogues at the expense of reasoning and conceptualizations. This became the universal way of narrating reality, performing a harmony between seeing, understanding and representing. Finally, the psychological deepening of the characters is translated into action and words, according to the rule of showing and not explaining. Action wins over thinking (Pischedda, 2008, pp. 235-237). And all of this is reinforced by what is taught along those lines in academic creative writing programs.

In the predilection for short sentences and parataxis, in the multiplication of points of view, in the exhibited detached description of the most macabre and horrifying scenes, there is the attempt to obtain a sort of model of reality, or rather of the cumulative and fragmented perception of the real that belongs to our time. The rapid succession of different fragments, the overlapping of scenes whose subjects vary from horrid to sentimental, from family daily life to overwhelming passion, narratively reproduces the bundling and intertwined technique of the video clips. This procedure, in turn, comes from television editing, which has become the dominant way of perceiving and knowing the world.

Italo Calvino spoke of the “mental cinema of imagination” (1988/1993, p. 83), while discussing the development of the imagination of an era in which literature no longer refers back to an authority or a tradition, but points to novelty and originality, and the priority is that of the visual image over verbal expression. “Where do they come from, these images that rain down into the fantasy?” (p. 87) – he wondered. According to him, today, when we create a

story, we start from an image, which presents itself as full of meaning, and then the story develops around it, at that point not only visual but also discursive or conceptual. But what is the future of the individual imagination in the civilization of the image? The fantastic gulf of the *indirect imaginary*, made up of images provided by mass culture or other traditional forms, is inundated with such a quantity of prefabricated images that we can no longer distinguish direct experience from what we have seen on television. The post-modern response was the ironic recycling of the mass-media imaginary, the introduction of the wonderful into alienating narrative mechanisms, while an author like Samuel Beckett had made the void to start from scratch, minimizing visual elements and language as in a post-apocalyptic world (pp. 86-98). Calvino's conclusion was that each of us is a combination of experiences, information, readings and imaginations. "Each life is an encyclopaedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly shuffled and recorded in every way conceivable" (p. 124).

Chapter III

Embodied Critique into Dismembered Bodies

A Body in Pieces

In the vast majority of today's Italian crime fiction, we can find an emphasis on massacred and dismembered bodies that is not just the expression of a global trend. In the 1990s *neo-noir* writers and Pulpers (in particular the Young Cannibals) contributed to changing the way of representing the body and death by staging brutal and spectacular violence.

We have seen in Chapter II how critics analysed the success and the literary and para-literary roots of these *black writings*, which imposed themselves on the Italian publishing market and on the reader's taste. We have also discussed the reciprocal accusations of artificiality and sensationalism that rebounded from one group to another. Now we would like to underline that the key to their success is to be found in the vivid description of a body torn to pieces as a way of denouncing social suffering. Today this kind of representation has lost its strength as a social critique in a mainstream fiction addicted to the massacre.

The *neo-noir* authors renewed the Italian tradition of crime fiction by introducing a type of crude realism already common in North American writers such as James Ellroy of *The Black Dahlia* (1987) and Bret Easton Ellis of *American Psycho* (1991). In their texts, the vast portrayal of tortured and killed bodies represents the narrative fulcrum of the story. The extent of the disagreement with respect to the status quo is wide-ranging. They attacked a disquieting Italy, dominated by consumerism, by the sovereignty of the image and by the diffusion of mass culture. A densely built-up country, marked by political corruption and racism, bloodied by the widespread presence of organized crime, as well as mysterious and perverted serial killers. They inveighed against the structural male chauvinism and economic gap and job insecurity.

Despite the heterogeneity of themes, plots and settings, their critical and oppositional stance with respect to the social and cultural norms in force is always incorporated into wildly killed characters. The graphic description of violence goes along with a marked realism of the settings and the language adopted, as well as with the wide use of extra narrative sources and documentation, real or fake, such as procedural documents and police and medico-legal reports. Indeed, besides a renewed cult of monsters (today we call them serial killers) and a passion for hallucinatory and frightful atmospheres, *neo-noir* fiction grasped many narrative cues from reality, judicial reports and the most sensationalistic news (Crotti, 1982, pp. 82-83).

The Cannibals, for their part, did not just cannibalize heterogeneous languages and miscellaneous objects, but also showed a real passion for slaughtering the bodies of characters, scattering their remains in the stories and making them into food for other characters. Their pulp and horror visually detailed representation is hyperbolically spectacular, precisely like a television show that aims primarily at attracting audiences. Most of the time both perpetrators and victims of violence appear devoid of emotional participation, remaining passive or indifferent as if they were watching a splatter film or the evening news instead of acting out the events themselves. As we have seen, this was the main criticism raised against them by *neo-noir* colleagues and critics, who accused Cannibals of being manipulators of an easy voyeurism (Mondello, 2004b, p. 184), with no social or political commitment. In contrast, our interpretation is that they were, indeed, harsh critics of the normativity of cultural, social and gender models, shown precisely through their representation of abused bodies. Both irony and exaggerated violence are used in their criticism of individualistic narcissism and the obsession of unrealistic standards of wealth, beauty and health – all products of a society ruled by consumerism and inequality.

In the following sections, we will examine stories of alienation, dismemberment, oppression, abuse and injustice. We will take a path through texts in order to deconstruct the

representation of the body that is at their centre, and to show how that representation is the fulcrum, not only of disintegration of socio-cultural models, but also of negotiation of alternative forms of existence. In particular we will analyse the denouncement of the reification and commodification of the human body, the overturning of the male-dominated genre and gender canons which are traditionally at work in crime fiction, and the portrayal of the serial killer.

The horror path.

The 1990s writers were not the first in Italian literature to exploit graphic description of bodily violence. However, until that decade, violence was mainly present in low brow literature, fanzine magazines, and in comics such as the *fumetto nero* *Diabolik*, *Kriminal*, *Satanik* or Tiziano Sclavi's *Dylan Dog*, where it intertwined with science fiction, erotic and porn-*noir*. Moreover, violence was also at the core of the Spaghetti Western movies by Sergio Leone and the horror movies by Dario Argento and Mario Bava. Indeed, *Rabid Dogs* (1974) and all Bava's movies influenced greatly all Tarantino's production and, in particular, the movie that marked a crucial date for the breakthrough of the *pulp* trend on the publishing market, *Pulp Fiction* (1994), which made the word famous in the world. It is characterized by an aesthetic of violence and a hyperrealism so extreme that it becomes surreal and parodic (Sinibaldi, 1997, p. 41). The 1990s Italian writers and, in particular, the Young Cannibals, deeply influenced by the audio-visual media, took it as a representative model and competed to render on the page those detached and spectacular atrocities, mixing trash and pop culture with sophisticated quotes and poetical phrases in order to shake the literary panorama.

Italian literature had, indeed, kept on the margins the representation of violence, relegating it to popular fiction, some of the neo-avant-garde experiments and a few novels, such as Pier Vittorio Tondelli's *Altri libertini* [Other Libertines] (1980). The young protagonists of this novel, full of Pasolinian influences, live in the late 1970s Northern Italian

province; they are depoliticized, maladjusted to their social landscape and devote themselves to subversive libertinism, sex, alcohol and drugs to cope with their existential void and loneliness. When it was published it gained enormous success with the public, especially for the uncommon obscenity of the language, the subversive content (homosexuality dealt with as it were normal) with respect to current morals and the rough violence. For these same reasons, the book was temporarily sequestered, while the author became a mentor for many authors debuting in the next decade.

However, one of the fathers of the Italian *noir* genre, Giorgio Scerbanenco, is the essential literary reference when it comes to the narration of violence, in its most sadistic forms, impregnated with disgust towards the crime produced by mass society. In his copious works, he certainly did not skimp on horror, as happens in the initial pages of *I ragazzi del massacro* [The Boys of the Massacre]. Duca Lamberti's investigation opens on the murder of a young female teacher, massacred by her male students.

“È morta cinque minuti fa,” disse la suora. (...)

“La vuol vedere lo stesso?”, disse la suora. Sapeva che erano i poliziotti venuti per interrogare la maestra, ma interrogare una morta è un po' difficile.

“Sì,” disse Duca.

Avevano già levato le coperte, lei stava in un antiquato, patetico baby doll giallo, già stecchita, il viso alterato da una smorfia di sofferenza e dall'ematoma sotto l'occhio destro, l'armonia della fronte alterata anch'essa dal grosso ciuffo di capelli che bestialmente le avevano strappato, creando un'innaturale tragicomica calvizie, tutto il torace rigonfio, arrotondato a bótte per l'ingessatura, fatta in fretta, tanto per arginare lo strazio di tutte quelle costole rotte, erano tante, se non tutte, e comunque il chirurgo non aveva avuto il tempo di contarle. (...) Duca si avvicinò a guardare gli altri orrendi guasti provocati dai criminali in quella misera creatura di ventidue anni (...) Guardò e vide il mignolo sinistro spezzato, glielo avevano appena legato a una piastrina di plastica, tanto perché non si sparpagliasse ancora di più, perché era così guasta e rotta da per tutto che avevano dovuto riparare subito i danni più gravi, come si vedeva dal grosso rigonfio di ovatta che aveva all'inguine (...) martoriata come fosse andata sotto un treno. (Scerbanenco, 1968/1999, pp. 7-8)

“She died five minutes ago,” said the nun. (...)

“Do you want to see her anyway?”, said the nun. She knew they were policemen who had come to interrogate the schoolteacher, but interrogating a dead woman is a bit difficult.

“Yes,” said Duca.

They had already removed the covers, she was in an old-fashioned, pathetic yellow baby doll dress, already dead, her face altered by a grimace of suffering and by the hematoma under her right eye, the harmony of her forehead also altered by the large tuft of hair that they had roughly ripped out, creating an unnatural tragicomic baldness, the whole chest swollen, rounded as a barrel by the plaster cast, done quickly, just to stem the agony of all those broken ribs, there were many, if not all, and anyway, the surgeon had not had time to count them. (...) Duca approached to look at the other horrendous damage caused by the criminals in that miserable twenty-two-year-old creature [...] He looked and saw that the left little finger was broken, they had just tied it to a plastic plate, so that it would not spread out even more, because she was so damaged and broken everywhere that they had to repair the most serious damage immediately, as seen from the large bulge of cotton wool that she had in the groin (...) tormented as if she had gone under a train.

Anticipating today's trends, the description of the victim's body is full of graphic medical details, and even the detective is a former doctor. In Scerbanenco the merciless brutality of the crime is underlined by the choice of words that are characterized by emotional participation and moral judgment, such as *pathetic*, *bestially*, *miserable* and *tortured*. This expressive choice is far both from the aseptic and precise coldness of the medical-forensic reports of contemporary crime fiction – for whose protagonists' interrogating the dead is not at all difficult as the nun claims in this Scerbanenco's paragraph – and from the ironic and alienated distance of Cannibals.

Scerbanenco introduced in Italian literature a hyper-realistic sadism and a meticulous obsession with the body (odd, deformed, different, naked and tortured). He described repulsive corpses, without any necrophiliac aestheticism, which embody the cruelty of the world and of relationships between people. The disgust and rejection that Duca Lamberti feels and that the author wants to arouse in the reader, is always accompanied by a vein of piety, which urges identification with the victims of the horrible atrocities. His bad and sadistic characters are qualified with attributes drawn from the semantic field of dirt and disgusting, where physical dirt can only be caused by moral filth. The repulsion effect is balanced by the ultra-pathetic sentimentality shown by good characters, expressed in a redundant and emotional

adjectivation, full of diminutives and pity in order to connote the innocent and exorcise the horror (Canova, 1985, pp. 154-157).

Cannibals and *neo-noir* authors made extensive use of those terms, such as failure, agony and bestial, which punctuate Scerbanenco's writing, as well as degraded urban settings and morally ambiguous characters, raised on the margins of society, who populate his stories. Yet, unlike his disillusioned but morally Antigonian detective, who strives to bring some justice into the rottenness that submerges everything, the new protagonists of the 1990s are the abnormal, the amoral and the monsters. They are entrusted with the task of protest.

Bad deaths.

At the centre of their stories is death, a death that we could ascribe to the "bad deaths", since it is never natural but it is always a matter of murder or suicide. Death represents the human event that, more than any other, produces what the anthropologist Ernesto De Martino labelled as "crisi della presenza" [crisis of presence]. It is a profound disorientation that affects persons in radical circumstances such as disease, death or migration, when they experience a crisis of their historical being (the Heideggerian *Dasein*, or being-there). In these traumatic events, the usual social and cultural meanings of existence emerge in their precariousness and transitory nature (1959/2011, pp. 89-99). Sudden or violent deaths raise even more questions about the human categories of thinking, and reveal their arbitrariness and artificiality (Favole & Ligi, 2004, p. 4).

During the 19th century, in the West, medicine acquired the authority to pronounce the occurrence of death and to explain its organic causes in a scientifically rigorous way. It made death an increasingly medical, and less religious, matter. The medical post mortem investigation has gradually replaced other social forms of bereavement pain management and ritualization of disorder and anguish, caused by the termination of a human being. Today death

is seen as a measurable moment, legally definable as the absence of neuronal functioning and the cessation of respiratory and cardiac activity, attributable to a decisive and isolable cause. We surrendered, as Margaret Lock claimed (2002, p. 35), to the hegemony of a scientific reductionism that sees death as a mere biological event, sterilized and confined to hospitals.

Also corpses and mourning have been progressively medicalized. The consolation offered by the codified ritualization of death makes the tragic nature of grieving bearable and helps to restore a normal perception of life. The same applies to the need to dispose of the cadaver. Being a material and irreversible product of the disruptive and entropic process of death and potentially infected, it introduces chaos and bio-social disorder. It blurs the space that divides the living from the dead, until the moment when it becomes symbolically *domesticated* within a ritual frame. This frame gives place and meaning to the corpse, by turning putrefaction into a cultural representation (Favole & Ligi, 2004, pp. 8-9; Remotti, 2004, pp. 20-25). The obsession with a clean death is the result of today's mythology of dying. It is clean in a double sense. It is taken in charge by experts and placed in the aseptic spaces of the hospital, the pathologist's laboratory and the morgue. But it is also clean in the figurative sense that associates the adjective "clean" with the idea of transparency and clarity. A clean death does not arouse anxiety or doubts about its causes, nor does it return to torment the living.

Weapons of the poor.

However, within an extensively medicalized world, death is not the only matter to be understood in a clinical-anatomical language. Radical changes in the social and public sphere of advanced industrialized societies have made the traditional cultural forms of expression of individual and collective discontent disappear. Medicine and psychiatry have assumed a hegemonic role in taking charge of suffering but, consequently, forms of resistance and subversion have also been increasingly expressed through the lexicon of illness and physical pain. Those who cannot demonstrate open and organized political activity, but nevertheless are

oppressed, have a variety of forms of resistance at their disposal. Sabotage, desertion, theft and staging, but also somatic tactics such as possession and trance, madness, nervous paroxysm, witchcraft and carnivalesque reversal rituals, are all “weapons of the poor”. In addition, there are expressions of disease, disability and madness that can be considered as acts of incorporated refusal, farce and protests by those who are deprived of power against the oppression of ideologies and imposed social roles. In this sense, the body becomes a vehicle for telling the truth to the constituted powers, which claim to ignore it. Moreover, the process of secularization of society and institutions has made disease the most widespread means of expressing discontent, desires and disputes. This has led to pervasive medicalization and production of illness, while active forms of protest, no matter how furtive, have been replaced by passive moments of breakdown (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, p. 27). The scream of bodily protest, its pain and its conscience, have been more and more effectively taken over and silenced by the technical domain of medicine and domesticated in the form of suffering and pain.

The bodies of people, modelled and disciplined according to the culture in force, function as living texts in which society inscribes its own rules of sexuality, beauty, health and gender. The same bodies, nonetheless, can be turned into an instrument of denunciation and rebellion against the dominant values and compliance models. Since, as Foucault (1976/1978, p. 95) argued, “Where there is power, there is resistance”, everywhere within the power network there exists a multiplicity of points of resistance, mobile and transitory, local and changing, from which counter-discourses and revolution can be originated (pp. 95-96). So, there are not only the bodies desired and created by society, machine-bodies, docile bodies, normal bodies, but also bodies that, instead of interpreting the cultural code, conforming to it, become political means to express resistance, contestation and counter-hegemonic practices (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005, p. 8). Society, today, tends to make people responsible for their

own health, elevated to a cardinal virtue, while, at the same time, it conceals the structural causes at the origin of a distribution of mortality and disease that follows the lines of socio-economic well-being. The body that gets sick, refuses to reproduce, causes excesses in diet or sport, the aging body and the body deviated by madness, can all become weapons against the naturalization of oppression and marginalization. All these bodies are subversive corporal forms, mindful bodies that are the creative source of experience and the subject of an embodied critique of the hegemonic order (Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987, pp. 30-31).

In first person.

Many of the *neo-noir* and *Cannibals'* characters are ruthless killers, sometimes monstrously insane or exalted by blood, for example Lucarelli's shape-shifter serial killers in Grazia Negro's series, or the female organ-collectors in Alda Teodorani's horror-erotic tales. They practise vivisections that minimize the readers' perception of pain inflicted on the victim, instead insisting on the practices of transformation of the body and its perverse uses. Along with Simona Vinci's guilty children and suicidal women, Ammaniti & Brancaccio and Brizzi's gangs of bestial inepts, and Giuseppe Ferrandino's surreal sodomizer, these characters are truly alienated from society and are, almost always, also the protagonists of the story. The first-person narrative induces the reader to identify with their point of view and understand their suffering, which drives them to extreme forms of violence, inflicted both on others and on themselves, and it is caused by a radical refusal of the self-normalization urged by society. They are, at the same time, perpetrators of atrocious violence and victims of a context that sometimes is marked by abuse and marginality, other times by disgust and annihilation.

The protagonist of the stories is a desperate and alienated youth, who moves within disturbing, squalid and marginal landscapes, characterized by a nihilistic sense of emptiness, which, in the end, turns into destructive fury. The anthropologist Appadurai (1998) argued that, in the era of globalization, violence is linked to the experience of uncertain identities. In a

historical phase characterized by a deep and widespread insecurity, the alleged economic deregulation and forms of systematic impoverishment, the maps denoting classifications, typical of the old nationalisms, are missing. It becomes increasingly difficult to understand where “we” end and “others” begin, while the daily reality is poisoned by fear and horror of categorical confusion and by cognitive anxiety due for things being out of place. In a context of such indeterminacy, when violence explodes between persons in close proximity, who were neighbours, if not friends, until that moment, it leads to an extraordinarily cruel brutality and to a ritual that aims at, literally, extracting certainties from the bodies. This point of view is somewhat questionable. It seems more correct to affirm that the practices of overpowering and extreme violation of bodies have always been part of a well-known human repertoire, which have been deployed over different eras and historical and cultural contexts (Dei, 2005, pp. 41-46).

In the texts we will examine, violence is often portrayed as a ritual performance. However, the perpetrators of the atrocities don't seem engaged in repairing a normality threatened by anguish over anomalies, but rather in the radical destruction of a despised social order. The shocking staging of spectacular atrocities, tortures, vivisections and mutilations, which the characters of *neo-noir* and Cannibal stories both inflict and suffer, can be read in this light. Everything aims at breaking the daily and obvious routine of life: acts of perverse sexuality, ritual performances such as drinking the blood of the victims, cooking parts of the body and eating them. They are absurd, immoderate and hallucinatory experiences, with incomprehensible and grotesque effects, which cast doubt on the very possibility of making sense of the world (Beneduce, 2004, p. 99).

These gestures of destruction and self-destruction serve to resist a deeper, silent and powerful violence that has naturalized the exclusion and pathologized the differences. That violence was defined “structural” by the anthropologist Paul Farmer (2004). Structural violence

is exercised in a systematic and indirect way by all members of a society characterized by profound inequalities. It functions by limiting the possibility of negotiating the terms of existence and opposing marginalization or oppression. It manifests itself as social suffering, that is, individual embodiment of wider processes, in the form of adverse events, such as disease, poverty, racism, genocide and physical and sexual violence. It is inscribed in the social organization and in the symbolic frameworks through which we view reality and our being-there (Farmer, 2006, pp. 21-23).

However, it is precisely in such a context that subjects appear who, although being in weak positions, have the transformative capacity to create new strategies of selfhood and identity. They place themselves at the centre of a self-construction that redraws the geography of their social or moral exclusion. Often, it is not easy to say whether they are victims or perpetrators, innocent or guilty: they are both makers and breakers (Honwana, 2005, p. 31-35). They transform their marginal power into a leading, active, attacking, violent, destructive and disruptive power. Of course, they are considered deviant subjects in a world that has translated antisocial behaviours from the juridical paradigm to the pathological one. Thus, crime, madness and misery have become weapons to produce an alternative sociality, new relationships and a residual freedom.

Scenes of horrific dismemberments, recurring in the works of 1990s authors, appear as grotesque parodies of tortures, surgical operations and the medical procedures of organ transplanting. It is not so much as, or not only, to indulge in a gratuitous, artificial and instrumental brutality, appreciated by the editorial trends, as it is to expose the alienation and commodification that bodies, some bodies more than others, undergo in contemporary society. The insistence on destroying bodies is an effective way of showing how much violence has been inscribed on those bodies by the same society that has produced both victims and villains, deviant destroyers of others. This vivisection writing, which disseminated the texts of human

parts, was labelled as exaggerated, but it has certainly the merit of having revealed the extreme objectification of the body, which today emerges much more normalized and trivialized than it was in the 1990s. We will see in Chapter IV how, today, the level of violence that the reader perceives in crime fiction has decreased, both as an effect of becoming a repeated stylistic module and as a result of the shift in representation of the body that has occurred in contemporary society.

Commodified Subversive Bodies

Inept and furious.

Among the characteristics shared by the stories collected in the 1996 *Gioventù Cannibale* [Cannibal Youth] anthology, there is an experimental writing that mixes advertising slogans, popular tunes and the whole harvest of consumerism. All kneaded with a lot of blood (Brolli, 2006, p. VIII). For the editor, Brolli, Young Cannibals were the heirs of the American horror writers, who merged into the splatter-punk style, and found, in blood, both the material of a fundamental horror and the pivot of their anti-social writing (p. IX).

The splatter component, accompanied by the unsettling effect that derives from the lively description of some severed fingers, treated like pieces of meat, is clear from the very first pages of the initial story of the collection, *Seratina* [translated as Evening Jaunt], written by Niccolò Ammaniti and Luisa Brancaccio:

– C’ha lasciato tre dita! Le ho viste io agitarsi a terra quelle dita del cazzo e a quel punto ho rotto il culo al primo buttafuori che ho trovato. Insomma, per fartela breve, siamo andati tutti al pronto soccorso. Riccardo, i tre buttafuori e io con le dita di Riccardo nella tasca del cappotto. Aspetta... – Aldo incominciò a frugarsi in tasca. – Forse c’ho ancora qualche pezzo di tendine... (...) Guarda che schifo... – Aldo rivoltò la tasca del cappotto imbrattata di rosso. – Devo portarlo in tintoria... (2006, p. 9)

“He left three fingers on that door! I saw his fucking fingers wiggling around on the ground, so at that point, the first bouncer I saw had to kick his ass. Whatever, to make a long story short, we all ended up in the emergency room. Riccardo, the three bouncers and me, with Riccardo’s fingers in my coat pocket. Hold on...” Aldo started to rummage around in his pocket. “Maybe there’s still a piece of tendon or something?”

(...) "Look how nasty this is?" Aldo turned his coat pocket inside out, it was stained red. "I have to take it to the cleaner's..." (Ammaniti & Brancaccio, 2001, pp. 166-167)

The protagonist, Emanuele, an inept young man, anxious to return home to take off his uncomfortable shoes, shows total indifference to the pain of others and a lazy condescension towards the escalation of violence triggered by his sadistic friend, Aldo, during a night off in Rome. A flash of conscience lights up Emanuele in the end, shocked by the torture inflicted by Aldo on a transsexual and (almost) overwhelmed by the awareness of the hypocritical monotony of his bourgeois life. But it lasts only a few moments, and then it is immediately forgotten. Similarly, the flash of freedom for the baby kangaroo, stolen from the zoo by the two guys, and set free at the end, suddenly finishes when a milk van hits him on the road.

The disgust caused by the consumer and television society of the 1990s, the search for extreme forms of resistance and rebellion against the status quo and the fundamental impossibility of getting rid of them are dominant themes in many Cannibal stories. For example, they can be found in Brizzi's *Bastogne* (1996), whose protagonist, Ermanno, is a hooligan, a young unemployed bourgeois, drug dealer and addict, who wanders the twisted streets of Nice. His is a restless search for some interest in life amid his hatred and disgust for the 1980s superficial and rotten society:

Puoi vederli, raggelati nella luce dei faretto, i nuovi mostri di questa Nizza anni ottanta. Quel che sono e quel che si apprestano a diventare. Lo capisci senza bisogno di leggere Nostradamus, quale straordinaria putrefazione è in arrivo, l'orrore del futuro che verrà. (p. 81)

You can see them, frozen in the light of the spotlights, the new monsters of this 1980s Nice. What they are and what they are about to become. You understand it without needing to read Nostradamus, what extraordinary putrefaction is coming, the horror of the future to come.

In the latter part of the punk era the protagonist found his way out by cultivating his vocation to destroy beauty and well-being's icons, to which society pushes him to adapt. Together with Cousin Jerry and other *furious* comrades, he fights the horror of the inevitable

future by raping and slaughtering victims, who appear to them as true incorporations of the worst stereotypes of society and deserve to be razed to the ground. From their last outpost – this is the meaning of the word “Bastogne” that Ermanno provides the reader – they fight a battle that was impossible to win from the beginning. The self-describing adjectives, used by Ermanno and his friends, all belong to the same register of non-compliance with respect to a pattern of behaviour that is not only rejected, but also challenged with blades on the cheeks (p. 80) and cigarettes extinguished on the ducky soap dispenser (p. 160): furious, wicked, asymmetrical, skewed, unrecoverable, anti-commercial, senseless, uprooted, violent, metropolitan warriors of the apocalypse (pp. 101-102).

From an anthropological point of view, these slaughterers live in a liminal dimension, which is universally found in contexts dominated by violence and is characterized by emotional effervescence, strong group cohesion, alcohol consumption and the search for altered states. They feel invested by the mission of devastating the order to which they belong, driven by the dream of founding a new one (Dei, 2005, p. 45). They are the offspring of Italian upper middle class, who are not struggling to redeem themselves from misery or to conquer freedom. Their enemy is the void, a social, cultural and, above all, internal void, symbolized by nausea and boredom. They tried to model themselves according to ideals born from the reshuffle of influences coming from popular and mass culture (from cinema, comics, but especially from TV), but which are actually the result of a crumbling and impoverishment of the sense of reality, of a cultural desolation that generates disillusionment and frustration. The desire to escape from the nihilistic anguish and the dull repetition of gestures, together with that of experimenting with extreme forms of fun, leads them to an intensification of violence, in addition to the normalized and varied consumption of narcotics. They look at the tortured, scarred and mutilated bodies of their victims as symbols of a dismembered and meaningless culture. Their apparently gratuitous and disproportionate violence represents a socially

untenable idea, staged by a beyond limits behaviour. It is an act of purification of a social body considered deeply corrupt, the last resource for the radical affirmation of the self, produced through the definition and exclusion of the other (Jourdan, 2010, pp. 81-110). The sadistic Ermanno fiercely despises the dying nineteen-year-old girl he is raping and slaughtering, who is just a normal girl, guilty only of not appearing as a real girl, but rather as the worst female stereotypes, all assembled together as though an obscene Frankenstein (Brizzi, 1996, pp. 172-178).

The misdeeds of such rich and bored young men bring to mind episodes of Italian news, in particular the heinous Circeo massacre that happened in 1975 in Rome, when three young far-right men kidnapped and tortured two girls, eventually killing one of them. Taking inspiration from current events to stimulate the public's voyeurism is certainly not original, yet there is some novelty in the way the violence is told. All the exploits of these mad guys are described from their point of view. Readers are not only attracted, caught, pleased or disturbed by the exaggeration of truculent and porno-violent details, but they are also provided with an unusual perspective on violence: the perpetrators'. Moreover, the images of dismemberment, beheading and castration are depicted without any psychological insights, any social or political justification. Besides the evident influence of films – not only those of Tarantino, but also Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) come to mind – all this perverse brutality appears as a way to appropriate the North American *neo-noir* style, of writers such as James Ellroy, Thomas Harris and Bret Easton Ellis, in order to both expose the black soul of Italy and renew its narration. Thus, under the joint pressure of North American fiction and this desire of renovation, the features of pulp violence and sadistic killers started to become insistent, filling the stories with increasingly graphic descriptions.

Evirated alienation.

When the violence represented is self-addressed it is no less savage. Aldo Nove's *Il mondo dell'amore* [translated as *The World of Love*], included in *Gioventù Cannibale*, shows, precisely by representing self-destroying bodies, the schizophrenic alienation produced by mass-consumption.

The protagonists are two friends who love to spend time watching and making fun of people shopping in a big mall: "Io e Sergio siamo normali, e per questo, ogni sabato pomeriggio, tiriamo su e andiamo alla Iper della Folla di Malnate" (2006, p. 54) [Me and Sergio are normal, so that's why, every Saturday afternoon, we get our stuff and go to the *Iper of the Folla* in Malnate] (Nove, 2001, p. 197). One afternoon, after watching a porn b-movie, they put into practice what they see. They take turns castrating themselves, completely disconnected from self-consciousness and the perception of their bodies. Their imagination, permeated by media trash and reality television auctions (La Porta, 2001, p. 73), appears as the result of the annihilation process that consumerism induces on individuals (Antonello, 2001, p. 52) and it leads them incapable of distinguishing reality from fiction. Naive and ungrammatical, as expected from a little less than normal boy from northern Italy, ignorant and narrow-minded (he is racist and homophobic), the protagonist describes the home surgery procedure in this way:

Mi faceva male, stare lì così, appoggiato al divano con il batamazzo tagliato come se è un cotechino scongelato prima. Era come se morivo. (...)

Avevo al suo posto una figa dilettantesca.

Sergio aveva intuito perfettamente come andavano le cose, come dovevano andare quella sera. Migliaia di film lesbici bellissimi, che avevamo guardato senza capire...

Senza poter provare quelle esperienze d'amore. Senza poterci leccare le fighe che non avevamo.

Ci voleva una soluzione radicale.

Sergio, un colpo solo verso l'inguine, si tranciò violentemente il cazzo, come avevo fatto io. (Nove, 2006, p. 61)

It hurt, staying there like that, leaning on the couch with my cut groin all bloody like it was a defrosted already cotechino. It was like I was dying. (...)

In its place, I had an amateurish cunt.
Sergio was able to sense, perfectly, how things were turning out for us that night.
Thousands of beautiful lesbian movies that we had watched together without ever understanding...
Without ever being able to feel those experiences of love.
Without ever being able to lick each other's cunts, which we didn't have.
We needed to take drastic measures.
Sergio, with one quick stab to his groin, violently dismembered his whole cock, just like I had. (Nove, 2001, pp. 203-204)

Sergio and the narrator live alienated from the surrounding world and need to go to the hypermarket to see what other people are doing to make sense of things. Their alienation reaches a climax when, as they castrate themselves, they watch their blood flow as if it were a virtual, harmless and painless substance, as if death were a spectacle that is never personally experienced. Aldo Nove's flat, linear and sequential writing emphasizes their attempt to enter a television reality that pervades the story and pushes them to get out of their bodies, to modify them according to a pattern dictated by scarce economic resources (the choice of the film) and finally to deprive them of life (Renello, 2001, pp. 148-150). Their bodies appear artificialized and virtualized, flattened by society and television as if they had lost flesh and depth (p. 157). The two guys don't distinguish between what is real and what is virtual anymore, nor the difference between tragic and comic. The style gives an account of it, by constantly mixing registers.

On the other side, their naked and emasculated bodies, in the end, are tied to each other in a dramatic and grotesque attempt at love: "Avvicinò la bocca alle mie gambe. Anch'io avvicinai la mia bocca alle sue" (Nove, 2006, p. 62) [He moved his mouth toward my legs. I also moved mine toward his] (Nove, 2001, p. 204). These bodies have indeed freed themselves from the prejudices of an ethics dominated by consumption, male chauvinism, individualism and racism. They emerge as the last bastions of freedom, while their incredible wounds give voice to the malaise the two men suffered from, without being aware of it.

In the collection of short stories *Woobinda* (1996), later expanded and republished as *Superwoobinda* (1998), Nove further exploited the theme of body commodification and collective stupidity. In particular, he ironically and ruthlessly attacked the late-capitalism dichotomies, which blow up consumer bodies, gripped by the increasing numbers of needs, desires and the tension between self-normalization and rebellion (Lucamante, 2001b, p. 22). The work is divided into commercial *lotti* [items to be auctioned], instead of chapters, with each of them ending with an apocopate word as if the reader was actually a television viewer, immersed in a semi-passive channel hopping. The plot is dis-articulated by a continuous variation played on the surprise effect of images and words.

Episode after episode, the characters present themselves with a few grotesque traits. They are emotionally primordial, summarily literate and project desires and fantasies on goods and advertising. True protagonist is a boredom that never ends (Nove, 1998, p. 26) of an inept youth, nailed down to the flashes of the images of the TV, expressing, with a vulgar and naive jargon, its distorted relationship with sex, family and the world. The ironic speech is immediately evident in the language permeated by television advertising, by the tone flattened on an Italian mass media influenced slang. A sort of mimesis aims at suggesting the scarcity of the expressive means of the narrative voices and their identification with products on sale and cathode images. The polished Italian language to which the characters aspire is heavily parodied, given that it is a collage of school memories and clichés, deformed and juxtaposed as pieces of language found. The suppressed or reduced punctuation, the subdivision into short narrative sections – debtors of Malerba and Balestrini postmodern writing – tends towards an acoustic dimension (Castaldi, 2007, pp. 373-374). The main target of the protagonists' fury is the moral hypocrisy of the average Italian family, represented as a mix of TV, pornography, shit, living cadavers and political rhetoric for the mentally impaired. With meat pestles, the young members of this dysfunctional and surreal Italian family tear apart the obtuse minds of

their parents and grandparents. And, if they are not angry, it is because they let themselves be captured by the advertising sirens, losing self-awareness: “a me di tutto questo non importa nulla perché sto facendo la raccolta punti della Star” [I do not care about all of this because I am collecting the Star points] (Nove, 1998, p. 119).

This extreme form of surreal and harsh critique has remained a typical stylistic feature of Nove, who returned to the *Superwoobinda* stories twenty years later, in the anthology *Anteprima mondiale* [World Premiere] (2016). He made fun of the most famous chapter in his earlier publication, *Bagnoschiuma* [Body Wash] (1998, pp. 7-9), where a young boy ferociously kills his parents for the simple reason they don't use his favourite body wash. In the 2016 parody, the young assassin has updated his motif. This time, the tragicomic postmodern generational conflict is caused by the trivial fact of the parents' literary preference for Aldo Nove's *Woobinda* over Harry Potter and the weapon of matricide becomes a can of strictly organic peeled tomatoes. As Nove stated in the afterword, the Cannibals' nonconformist enthusiasm of twenty years ago has faded, while the very reality they denounced has now become the dominant and stable one. “Dark places” are increasingly darker (2016, p. 189). During this time, apparently, nobody has awakened from the consumerist orgy of thoughts, words and products. Today's commodification disguises itself behind superficial attempts at ecology and mystical-esoteric easy paths towards self-awareness, but the only real way to free oneself is the one that Sergio and his friend, castrating themselves, had shown.

Pop goods.

The mimetic tendency to represent a reality made of goods and pieces of popular culture, which promises to be not so much a denunciation of late capitalism and the full affirmation of mass culture, but rather an ironic recording of the process, is a typical feature in *Young Cannibals* (Castaldi, 2007, pp. 371-378). They learned from American minimalist narrators, such as Raymond Carver (*What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, 1981;

Cathedral, 1983) and Peter Orner (*Esther Stories*, 2001), to show men and women in a raw and cruel way, passively living among disquieting objects of use (TVs and buzzing fridges), closed in a pseudo-autism, lost in everyday life, blind to themselves (Rodler, 2000, p. 147).

Remolo Rex, the protagonist of Tiziano Scarpa's *Madrigale* [Madrigal], says: "Io sono figlio di una lavatrice Rex nuova fiammante" [I am the son of a brand-new Rex washing machine] (1997, p. 139), while he talks about a *stuttering love* at the time of thought being used as a commodity. Remolo is a boy who goes to primary school and is in love with his clumsy and short-sighted classmate. He was procreated during a centrifuge and, for him, the 1962 model appliance, symbol of the well-being and modernity of the middle class, is the elective place of parental sexual intercourse. The abrupt bumps that it gives to his back help him to heal from stuttering, while the phrases he overhears, broken by washing cycles, teach him the first love words. Actually, they are pieces of phrases stolen from his mother, which in their pragmatism, opaque to the infantile ears, have nothing poetical.

Garbage-body.

The *neo-noir* and Cannibals texts, no matter if they choose the point of view of the murderer, the detective's, the victim's or others', insisted on the ease with which the victims of rape and murder are transformed into objects and, then, garbage. The faster their body becomes stuff to throw away (a quick massacre is sufficient), the more they had been devalued and reified when they were alive.

For the philosopher Judith Butler (1993/2011), not all bodies have the same value: there is a hierarchy of power in society whereby some bodies matter more than others. A commodified body has been made an object within a system that gives things an intrinsic value, such as colour or weight. This commodity fetishism, according to the Marxist interpretation of capitalist societies, means that objects have an assigned value in terms of the quality they do

or do not possess (new/old, fashionable/unfashionable, beautiful/ugly, original/counterfeit), depending on the availability or scarcity of supply and demand, but also with respect to the symbolic meanings and power relationships that are inherent in them (Lock, 2002, pp. 48-49). For today's post-industrial society, which is accustomed, by the miracles of surgery, pharmacology and medicine, to correcting the deformity from standardized canons, sweetening the disease, postponing and masking old age, a young, beautiful and healthy body is definitely worth more than a sick, deformed or old one. In such a system, an overused or ruined object, no longer usable, loses value until it becomes waste.

At the end of the lifespan we have the corpse, the biological remains of a person who ceased to exist at the moment of loss of brain activity, stripped of cultural significance and deprived of a post-mortem social role. Some of its parts, on the other hand, can acquire a very high value on the new global and neoliberal healthcare market, as transplantable organs, fully fetishized and autonomous from the subject, which has become a mere envelope. The writer Giulio Mozzi was not overly exaggerating when he wrote, in a work dedicated to the obsession with death in contemporary Italian fiction: "Quelli di oggi non sono funerali, sono raccolta differenziata, smaltimento rifiuti" [Those of today are not funerals, they are recycling, waste disposal] (2000, p. 22). A new type of trade in corpses and body parts, not all with the same value, based on social inequalities, resulted in a sort of new cannibal market (Courtine, 2015, p. 39).

There are numerous examples of this garbagizing of used bodies in 1990s narratives, such as *Ferro recente* [Recent Iron], the debut novel by Marcello Fois. It opens with a cruelly massacred young couple in a gas station, on the road to the Sardinian city of Nuoro. Shortly after, a gypsy is burnt alive in a dumpster because he was the inconvenient witness of a murder (1992/1999, p. 25). A comparison with rubbish is made of the girl raped and killed in Ammaniti's short story *Rispetto* [Respect] (1999b, p. 143-147), as is the girl with the same fate

in his novel *Come Dio comanda* [As God Commands] (2006, pp. 421-425). In Nove's *Superwoobinda* we find a prostitute who dies of suffocation while she is hidden in a chocolate egg for a surprise party. In order not to waste the goods, the two brothers, who had rented her, sexually assault her corpse (1998, pp. 105-106). In Teodorani's *Labbra di sangue* [Lips of Blood], the victims of a serial killer are described as garbage (1997a, p. 22).

However, the most disturbing image is perhaps that of the corpse of little Greta narrated by Simona Vinci in *Dei bambini non si sa niente* [What We Don't Know about Children]. The plot focuses on the tragic initiation into sex and adulthood of a group of children, set in a dystopian and funereal countryside in northern Italy. It ends when the children move from erotic games, played with each other to kill boredom, into the brutal and murderous rape of the frailest girl – a tiny thing, easy to crumble, like clay. Her name, Greta, even sounds like the word for clay in Italian. All this happens in an atmosphere of total estrangement. The children, for a long moment, appear possessed by the genius of evil and, after, petrified by the immensely inhuman actions they have carried out, which annihilates their growth toward maturity. They watch the inside of Greta's tiny body flowing in a dark liquid, halfway between blood and slime, but are unable to give meaning to what happened, and, in the end, they get rid of the cadaver by throwing it into a garbage bin. Around this body, the search for meaning stops and falls silent. Eventually, the little friends roll her up like a ham and throw her away as a broken thing (1997, pp. 142-152).

Neoliberal fairy tales.

Trash-bodies to clean up, bodies that matter less or do not matter at all. Alda Teodorani's contribution to *Gioventù Cannibale, E Roma piange* [And Rome Cries], staged the dark side of the obsession with public health and safety. As she claimed in an interview, with her murdered homeless people, tortured immigrants and the misfits that the consumer and

wellness society gives us every day, she tried to show the most sinister face of the opulent Western economies (Mercadante, 2001, p. 38).

This horror-slasher fairy tale tells of the heroic deeds of an unemployed young man from southern Italy, recruited as an assassin by an old gentleman to clean up the Roma Termini station of what they both consider to be dregs of society: homeless, gypsies, trans, niggers, HIV positives and the like. After escaping from his past as a mafia killer, and passing a surreal, gloomy rite of passage – he kills a homeless man, pokes out his eyes and eats his testicles – he dedicates himself with enjoyment to his new job. He begins by slaughtering tens of tramps with a razor and continues in this way, in a crescendo of sadistic atrocities, surrounded by general indifference (Teodorani, 2006, p. 51). The insertion of fairy tale elements into a metropolitan adventure and the use of paradoxical techniques of the fantastic mode, invites the reader to a figurative interpretation of the meaning. The murderous and cannibalistic acts are exaggerated and incredible, just as the protagonist is when he says: “sentirete sul serio la città che piange, ma ricordatevi che sono stato io a farla piangere” [you will hear for real the city crying but remember that it was me who made it cry] (p. 52).

The social cleansing, which we see through the eyes of this urban monster, so well organized and punctuated by ferocity, is a parody of the paranoia for safety and the horror to which it leads. This is a recurring theme in 1990s *neo-noir* fiction as a critique of the tightening of anti-immigration laws and the alarmist media propaganda, in Italy as in the rest of Europe, aimed to distract the public’s attention from the deregulation of labour and the widespread unemployment that was becoming the norm. The red sunset of Rome, a sign of a city that cries after shedding the blood necessary to be cleansed, is a metaphor for the neoliberal government of social insecurity that applies harsh social policies in order to control the poor and the weak populations created by globalization itself (Wacquant, 2009, pp. 2-32). Thus, the scrupulous police, judicial and penitentiary repression is directed towards marginal groups, such as the

unemployed, beggars, drug addicts, homeless people, prostitutes and immigrants, who are stigmatized and identified as the most natural carriers of a kind of Lombrosian ancestral difference. Their bodies, unpleasant to see for the violent and hypocritical society, are represented as the target of allegoric and excessive acts of perversion. In fact, they are exaggerated as the real effects of these discriminatory attitudes for these scapegoats of eroded Western well-being.

Everyone plays their cards.

Vallorani's *Visto dal cielo* [Seen from the Sky] (2004), in contrast, gave voice to urban pariahs, who invent transversal forms of mobilization and solidarity to resist marginalization and xenophobic attacks. In this novel, the body is used as the main critical tool of a wealthy but criminal society. Zoe Libra, a prosperous woman who works as a waste collector and amateur detective, investigates the murder of the teenager. Guts who has been knocked out, tied up, seasoned and even overcooked like a roast beef, in the absolute tranquillity of the school building during the Christmas holidays.

The crime, a tidy and clean job, took place in several carefully planned stages: first, the young man was skilfully beaten to death, then, an excellent barbecue was set up for the body. The ironic tone livens up the trite procedure of the legal examination of the body, as well as of the list of somatic damages, which is done first-hand by the ghost of Guts, while he is surrounded by other whispering ghosts, who have never had justice:

Mascella fracassata.
Occhio destro tumefatto.
Frattura composta della clavicola.
Lesione spinale.
Numerosi colpi di arma da taglio sul torace e sul basso ventre.
Un'unghia incarnita (ma quella ce l'avevo da prima).
Acne diffusa su viso e collo (falso come Giuda: solo qualche brufolo qua e là. Uno muore e subito lo calunniano).
Tutto questo lo dirà il medico che farà l'autopsia al mio cadavere. (p. 133)

Smashed jaw.
Swollen right eye.
Compound fracture of the clavicle.
Spinal injury.
Numerous stab wounds to the chest and lower abdomen.
An ingrown toenail (but I had that before).
Acne spread on face and neck (as false as Judas: only a few pimples here and there.
One dies and immediately he is defamed).
All this will be told by the doctor who will perform an autopsy on my corpse.

Behind the levity, the ethical participation of the moved and angry narrative voice appears clearly, and later explodes. The action takes place in Pasteur, a multi-ethnic and turbulent neighbourhood a few steps from the centre of Milan, where several generations of immigrants (old people from the Italian South, young Africans and South Americans), retired, transvestites, prostitutes and various other undesirables coexist. This extended and irregular family, which oscillates between thirty and eighty individuals, is made up of marginal and doomed people: blind, paralyzed, alcoholics, drug dealers, psychologists, widows, orphans, voodoo sorcerers graduated in law at the service of the poor, professional thieves, tramps and dead grandmothers whose ashes are kept in the Nutella jar. A gang of unfortunate teenagers and antisocial adults, therefore, goes onto the street with the intention of grabbing the killer and breaking his bones with pincers, since the police do not care about them. Vallorani is not new to this kind of post-apocalyptic representation of Italy, seen as a lawless land where tribes replace missing families and State institutions, whereas the city becomes a war zone, divided among those who live in constant fear, those who have the power to inflict that fear, and a bunch of survivors.

At first glance, Guts' friends seem to be just kids who have seen too much TV, who put the surgeon's mask on their face and imitate what they have seen on the screen, but who don't know what real life is. In fact, the reality is quite the opposite, and much cruder. They are all children whose existence does not interest anyone, apart from friends, and who have known only disinterest and oppression in their blood family. They have fought with tooth and nail

(with those that remained) against cruel and perverse family rites and methods for raising the children. This is the case of Tutù, traded by her mother to her stepfather's sexual desires in exchange for a comfortable life, or Rocky, fortnightly fiercely beaten, one bone at a time, by his truck driver and arms dealer father. Welcomed, disinfected and patched up by friends, and then killed by mysterious assassins, they are victims who count for nothing, or next to nothing. These children killed in Pasteur don't make the news and don't worry the police. Only the tragic and ironic voice of their ghosts, helping Zoe's investigations, remains.

The inquiry proceeds as a parody of the detective fiction conventions: deductions are made haphazardly (they work only if the premises are not considered), and the mysteries remain unsolved. It is clear that the novel is dealing with political and social issues: the deviant characters, protagonist of the various stories, are represented with positive qualities and such an openly moralizing attitude makes the novel a powerful critique of society's violence.

The Female Body

Sexualized, objectified and commodified, the female body stands out among the favoured victims of the homicidal acts in pulp, *noir* and horror literature, which is full of whores, women ready for recycling, mortified bunnies incapable of resistance who leave the scene with a feeble moan, as the sadist and hallucinating Cannibals' characters would have said.

Gender history, accessed by tracing history of the social construction of the male and female categories (Pancino, 2003, p. 61), helps in pointing to the models that influenced the idea of the female body, such as human models for scientific study and for the arts and behaviour models related to body education in various socio-cultural contexts, including photography, anthropometry, measurements, and studies on diseases, childbirth and death. The analyses of the representation of the feminine body in the visual arts, in the history of medicine,

in medical, theological and moral treatises, and in the medical-anatomical iconography is paramount to understanding its representation in a male-dominated literature, as crime fiction has mostly been.

The history of Western anatomy and iconography has contributed to this sexualization and humiliation of the female body in culture and literature. The opening up and observation of the internal cavity of the body had an impact on the work of anatomists, artists, engravers, printers and modellers who, in various ways, codified a visual heritage that organized the ways of presenting and representing the human body.

In 1543 the treatise *De humani corporis fabrica* [On the Fabric of the Human Body] by Andreas Vesalius was considered, by many, to be the first work of modern medicine and a rupture between two different ways of doing anatomy. They stopped looking for what was written in ancient texts and turned the human body into the text; the lesson, however, remained for a long time a social and ritualized occasion. Thus, at the origin of the scientific revolution there was a renewed interest in anatomical studies. The new science, from speculative and philosophical, became increasingly experimental, based on the direct contact and observation of body and death. Evidence of the evolution of the scientific gaze are the illustrations contained in the medical treatises, the collections of anatomical models and artefacts and the anatomical theatres that appeared in numerous European university cities. The dynamic and animated designs of Vesalius inspired the subsequent three-dimensional models in ceroplastics, detailed in a hyper-realistic sense and at the same time respectful of the Renaissance aesthetic canons. Anatomy evolved from morphological, mimetic and static to physiological, plastic, explanatory and conceptual; anatomical collections lost the taste of the marvellous and the unique piece, to become scientific and sober, hosted by academies and scientific research centres.

The anatomical wax models and wax Venuses of the Italian 18th century continued the redefinition of the visualization of the body. In these works, the gaze of museum visitors, the authority of the modellers, the different conceptions of the body and the conventions of visual representation met. They expressed a sensitivity far from that of today, as embalmed and gruesome as they appear, yet the current development of digital visual technologies and simulations of bodily functioning has, once again, brought the relationship between knowledge and visual representation to the centre of scientific investigation. The questions about the role of objects and artefacts in the transmission of medical knowledge, and about the instances of control and power associated with the exposure and reproduction of the human body, have returned to the fore. Anatomical representation has been, and is, a specific way of visualizing, linked to the processes of construction, communication and ritualization of body knowledge (Dacome, 2005, p. 416).

In this evolution, the male body has been taken as the preferred model, both in the anatomical chambers and in the manuscripts. At the same time, the female body almost disappeared, only to recover visibility in terms of representation of the skeleton, to reiterate the irreconcilable difference between the sexes as part of a process that naturalized the gender difference, or in relation to the reproductive organs, that anchored the woman to her historic role of mother (Dacome, 2005, pp. 422-423). Furthermore, the possibility of publicly expressing and representing a female gaze on sexuality has been limited to only a few cases until very recent times, while the process of gradual visualization of the female's body, in its sexual and generative function, has led to the extreme objectification of some organs and parts.

In the models of bodies in the anatomical collections of the 18th and 19th centuries we see inscribed the gender assumptions that exist in Western society, those coercive gender norms which, according to Judith Butler (1993/2011, pp. XI-XXX), produce bodies conforming to a heterosexual imperative. To the philosopher, gender is the social meaning that sex assumes in

a given culture. Sex, in turn, is a regulatory ideal that produces and governs bodies through regulated performative practices: the sexual difference materializes in the forced repetition of regulatory norms. The subject is, therefore, defined by exclusion and abjection. The original repudiation of alternative forms, considered abject, creates the boundaries of the subject. At the origin there is a selective violence in the sexual identification of the subjects, who build themselves as people by subjecting themselves to the norms of sex and assuming those norms for themselves. This historical arbitrariness is concealed and naturalized. The regulatory schemes and identification criteria from which the ego emerges, which produce and vanquish bodies that matter, are not timeless principles but revisable criteria of intelligibility. Abject are, for example, non-binary gender subjects, whose humanity itself is questioned, or their status as citizens, when they are not criminally liable.

This exclusionary matrix of subject and sexual identity formation, however, is inevitably unstable, because the bodies never fully adapt to the model. In the process of repetition, there are openings and possibilities for internal destabilization. Those who resist the rules challenge the symbolic hegemony of bodies and can potentially induce a radical rearticulating of accepted ways of life. The regulation of repetitive and ritual identification practices, which naturalize sex, oppression and exclusion, can be challenged by feminist and queer politics. They can precisely be activated by refusing to identify with the rules that materialize sexual difference. These collective de-identifications allow us to reconsider which bodies matter. Abjection can be converted into political action.

Destroying the female.

Two of *Gioventù Cannibale*'s short stories are based on the destruction of the female body: *Il rumore* [The Noise] by Stefano Massaron and *Giorno di paga in via Ferretto* [Pay Day on Ferretto Street] by Paolo Caredda.

The protagonist in Stefano Massaron's *Il rumore* is a gray man, raised in a dormitory suburb in Milan, who suffers from chronic insomnia. The cause is his memory of and remorse for the death of a child, Debora la Palla, which occurred at the time of his childhood. Debora had been the victim of both family violence and that of a gang of young bullies, to whom the narrator belonged. In the description of Debora, whose nickname "la Palla" [the Ball] already speaks of social violence, the gaze of the narrator is merciless. Like that of the other kids, he makes abundant use of hyperbole, as though the monstrous physical ugliness that derives from such a point of view could justify the enormity of the evil committed against the unfortunate:

Debora, questo era il suo più grande difetto e la sua grande croce, era grassa (...) anzi, forse sarebbe meglio dire che era colossale. (...) I suoi vestiti erano enormi, immensi tagli di stoffa a quadrettoni rossi e bianchi che le svolazzavano intorno come le vele delle navi dei pirati. (2006, p. 133)

Debora was fat, and this was her biggest flaw and her biggest pain (...) actually, perhaps it would be better to say that she was colossal. (...) Her clothes were huge, huge pieces of red and white checked fabric that fluttered around her like the sails of pirate ships.

The same applies to the sociological picture of the girl, as it is offered by the sleepless narrator. The insinuation that her clothes came from the tablecloths of the tavern where Debora's mother worked as a skivvy while her husband was in jail (p. 133) is attributed to an alleged malignant ferocity of the children. With a skivvy mother and a father in jail, the existence of the girl is confined, by genetic inheritance, to a squalor without escape. Then there are the augmentative expressions to make her body monstrous: immense arse, big dress, huge calves and immense chest (p. 135). Even her tears are big and her shoulders, shaking with pain, are abnormal (p. 147). On the other hand, the little gang leader Carmine, the villain of the story, at just eleven years old, embodies the canons of Mediterranean masculinity and male chauvinism. He is handsome, with dark skin, eyes and hair like coal and, above all, had many sexual experiences with the girls in his class.

When Debora dares to claim a minimal right to dignity, she becomes obscene in the memory of the protagonist: with her lollipop dripping from her mouth, she challenges the badness of the kids, claiming her turn in hopscotch. The sole result is to trigger the brutal reaction of the bullies, which resurrects the sexual abuse she has been suffering from her father for a long time and drives her to commit suicide. The loss of balance and the fall in the game anticipate the definitive jump that will cost her, not only their scorn, but also her life. Powerful and incredible is the final thud, the noise that will persecute the boy forever, guilty, together with the others, of the violence towards Debora.

The girl's point of view is opposed to the macabre description of the fall, the passive cowardice of the protagonist, the total indifference of the bullies' leader, who, in front of the shattered body, disgusted, comments: "Minchia che schifo" [Shit, that sucks] (Massaron, 2006, p. 151). Taking her eyes off the ugliness of her body, Debora chooses a fantastic alternative to reality. The moment she throws herself out of the window is not, for her, a fall into the void, but a liberating jump. With fantasy, the little girl challenges the meanness of an unbearable reality and takes her own life, in a gesture that shakes the banality of evil with its extraordinary sound: the "noise" (*rumore*) of the title.

The meticulous destruction and mutilation of the beauty of a female body is the task of Danny, the professional killer protagonist of *Giorno di paga in via Ferretto* [Pay Day on Ferretto Street] by Paolo Caredda. Mr. Drago wants Danny to take revenge on Monica, a former show-girl who dared to leave Drago. Monica comes from a world of superficiality and boredom that disgusts Danny. He strongly believes that it is the fate of all those soft and superficial females to end up crushed. Danny, who lives in a hallucinatory state that distorts reality and human relationships, feels himself invested with a therapeutic task. He wants to heal the sick social body by treating the girl for her beauty and her seductive power.

After anesthetizing Monica with Lexotan, while she dreams of new clothes and travels, he expertly dismantles her beauty: the hole left by the shiny white extracted incisors is followed by the hair, ruined forever with oxygen at 60 degrees and, finally, only the eyes remain for a peripheral modification, by tearing out the lashes one by one. It concludes with Danny considering how much money it would cost her to become “human” again. Finally, he quickly kills her young son by pushing him down into a ravine. The scream of the child thrown into the void, a void that echoes Danny’s perception, falls into the indifference of the abandoned areas of the city, of the wild animals that stand in the dark above them.

Debora’s and Monica’s bodies are the object of derision, desire, revenge and violence. Very little else is said of the characters, who seem to live according to their bodies: their solitude emanates from them, their destiny too. In both cases, it is a female body sexualized by the male gaze. “Un po’ di succo le era rimasto impiasticciato sulle labbra, conferendo alla sua grossa bocca una patina zuccherosa di rossetto che risultava semplicemente oscena nella sua tranquilla lascivia” [A bit of juice had remained smeared on her lips, giving her large mouth a sugary patina of lipstick that was simply obscene in her quiet lasciviousness] (Massaron, 2006, p. 133). The juice is a protagonist’s memory of Debora, but from a different perspective, the girl was only sucking a lollipop without any lewdness. Danny, on the other hand, describes an old television image of Monica as follows: “Camminava sotto i riflettori come una dea minore, camminava sulla passerella come se nessun uomo potesse mai sperare di sfiorarla” [She was walking in the spotlight like a minor goddess, she walked on the catwalk as if no man could ever hope to touch her] (Caredda, 2006, p. 179). The look, the consumption and the pleasure are all masculine, they are *other* than them. The two protagonists, the boy and Danny, are not primarily responsible for the violence: Danny is the hired killer, while the boy follows the older bullies. Moreover, they show some discomfort towards their actions, albeit unconscious. In fact, the causes of Debora’s and Monica’s terrible fate are deeply rooted in an unjust, male

chauvinist and violent society. However, Danny and the boy are fully involved in this violence, both physically and morally. That Debora's fatness isn't monstrous, and that Monica's beauty could be harmless never crosses their minds. Nor that they are people, and not just bearers of bodies.

The male Cannibals included, in their texts, a harsh critique against the male chauvinist logics, which animate and incite their protagonists to rape and kill women, then get rid of their bodies as if they were garbage (Nerenberg, 2012, p. 226). They pushed masculine domination to its unbearable limits, to the territory of sadism, perversion and voyeurism, in order to make domination visible through its excess. However, their condemnation is all focused on the spectacular representation of violence, which attracts the public's attention and disturbs its conscience, without going further.

Sisterhood in Pulp

Precisely the favourite victims of objectification and massacre, female bodies became the cornerstones of the feminist deconstruction and overturning of this literary cliché made by the female exponents of the *neo-noir* and Cannibals groups. Writers such as Simona Vinci, Alda Teodorani, Isabella Santacroce, Silvia Ballestra, Rossana Campo, Francesca Mazzucato and Nicoletta Vallorani contributed to the process of criticism and renewal of Italian writing and society, which had been started by feminists in the 1970s (Lazzaro-Weis, 1994, p. 112). *Pulpiste* [female Pulpers] radically refused to debase women and their relationships with other women (Nerenberg, 2012, pp. 145-150). Sometimes they did this in a humorous way, other times more seriously and, only rarely, tragically.

Crime feminists.

The feminist criticism of crime fiction, as a genre based on male chauvinism, has a long and not homogeneous history.

For Kathleen Gregory Klein (1988, pp. 220-224) it is an inherently conservative genre focused on a male hero, or one with masculine traits, whose conclusions aimed to restore the patriarchal order of the status quo, ignoring the consequences of existing social injustices. It has always been centred on male models and universes, incompatible with radical feminism, since it leaves the existing power hierarchy intact. Maureen Reddy (1988, p. 10), on the other hand, found in it an opportunity for women to play with narrative authority and exploit a feminist point of view to reveal patriarchal conventions and social mythologies. The re-appropriation of the narrative ego by female subjects, who act in the first person, would be the cornerstone of a counter-discourse that reconfigures traditionally prescribed gender roles and would compensate for the lack of female agency typical of this literary genre (Walton, 1998, p. 133). Furthermore, if the *eye* of the text is feminine, the themes dealt with in the stories and the point of view on them also change. The matter of the narrative is gendered: abortion, prostitution, pornography, domestic violence, motherhood.

Between 1977 and 1986, in the United States, Marcia Miller, Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky created independent and tough heroines, inspired by the hard-boiled tradition, which was a misogynist genre depicting women as either *femmes fatales* (wicked, unworthy of trust and destined to a bad end) or angels to save (Walton, 1998, p. 130): in any case, victims of male violence. Thus, the traditional tough guy became a tough gal, who helped spread a new female figure as an active and strong investigator, requested by the ever-growing public of female readers who had entered the world of buyers, the workforce and the crowd of consumers.

In 1986 Sara Paretsky founded *Sisters in Crime*, a militant collective that promoted the works of female authors among critics and publishers, both of whom deliberately ignored them (Walton, 1998, p. 130). For Merivale (1996, p. 699), as for Klein (1988) and Munt (1994), the female detective is an oxymoron. To be authentically feminist, the investigator must be lesbian,

because endemic violence against women – which is well exemplified in the diffusion of the figure of the serial killer (Merivale, 1996, p. 696) – does not seem to be questioned by works where those who hunt down murderers are often portrayed as women who are indistinguishable from crime victims.

According to Joy Palmer (2001, pp. 55-59), in crime fiction, the detective is traditionally the epitome of rational logic and the positivist gaze. He embodies the male desire for knowledge, based on a sexualized vision that sees woman as a personification of nature that must be penetrated, discovered, made visible and scrutinized. In this sense, the object of the male/investigative gaze is feminized. The illusion that the scientific approach reveals full knowledge of the true nature of things would legitimize the systematic dismemberment of the female body, enriched with empirical details that spill over into fetishism. No genre, then, reflects this better than the medical-forensic fiction, the clinical, disciplinary and intrinsically violent gaze that dehumanizes bodies, objectifies them, makes them into spectacles and fetishizes them. This gaze has sharpened, today, thanks to the spread of new observation techniques and technologies. Crime fiction would, thus, perpetuate the dominant male-dominated ideology. However, in our opinion, the current scientific trend of police investigation narratives, operated by teams of men and women of mixed colour and sexual inclination, seems less like the dominant male-dominated ideology than the Tough Guys' pulps of yesteryear. Instead, it perpetuates the domination of the discourse of science.

Don't think you have any rights.

In Italy, there have been few examples of stories with feminist detectives. The most significant are the publications of the *La Tartaruga Nera* series, founded in 1984 by the feminist publishing house La Tartaruga. They include the mystery stories written by authors such as Fiorella Cagnoni – *Questione di tempo* [Matter of Time] (1985), *Incauto acquisto* [Incautious Purchase] (1992), *Arsenico* [Arsenic] (2001) – and Silvana La Spina with *Morte a*

Palermo [Death in Palermo] (1987), *Scirocco e altri racconti* [Sirocco and Other Short Stories] (1992), and *Penelope* (1998).

These writers challenged, so to speak, the traditionally bourgeois and patriarchal narrative genre of Italian *noir* by proposing alternative solutions to the victimization of women, in line with the ideas behind the Milanese feminist manifesto (Lazzaro-Weiss, 1994, pp. 119-127). Women must not fight for rights, but for a revolutionary feminist justice, which unmasks the inadequacy of male justice based on the historic social and psychological suppression of women. Such a revolution will offer alternatives to the institutionally sexist laws that support the misogyny underlying the majority of sexual crimes. The series published the few Italian cases of lesbian detective fiction which, in the mid-1980s, questioned and subverted gender and gender conventions. Apart from *La Tartaruga Nera*, lesbian characters remained rare until the 1990s when, in conjunction with a greater social and political visibility of female homosexuality, novels by Elena Stancanelli, Rossana Campo and Isabella Santacroce were published.

The feminist groups formed in Italy after 1968 were mainly engaged in the political struggle for recognized equality, autonomy and freedom in the management of their bodies, and fundamental rights such as divorce (Law 898 of 1970), the reform of family law (Law 151 of 1975), and access to abortion (Law 194 of 1978). In the following decade, the debate continued on philosophical and political levels, above all through the experience of the *Libreria delle Donne di Milano* [Milan Women's Bookstore Collective], which published *Non credere di avere dei diritti* [Don't Think You Have Any Rights] in 1987, and the philosophical community of women based in Verona, *Diotima*, with its fundamental text *Il pensiero della differenza sessuale* [translated as *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice*]. The perspective of those feminists centred on the need to rethink the difference between the sexes, not only in a reproductive sense, but also as an existential category and an equal but

different way of being in the world. They fought for the importance of creating communities and networks of only women to promote self-awareness and relationships of entrustment¹³.

During those years, feminist publishing rediscovered a female literary tradition and republished texts written by women, created new book series and brought the debate on the *écriture féminine* to the foreground. Originally, this term indicated the radical idea that female sexual pleasure was the starting point of self-awareness, the source of free writing and of the possibility to re-create the world. In this perspective, female psycho-sexual specificity, a physical and unconscious libido, was at the basis of the production of anti-phallogocentric texts and gave women the power to reject male ideologies and create new female discourses, freeing them from historical repression (Jones, 1981, pp. 364-366). The assumption of a pre-social and pre-symbolic sexuality, as well as a pre-cultural *féminité*, which can develop outside the relationships between persons and among literary signs, has been criticized from many sides (pp. 367-368). In a broad sense, the *écriture féminine* denotes a potentially subversive way of writing, not tied to biological sex but to gender as a social construct and a way of positioning oneself in the dominant discourse (Wood, 1993, p. 15).

For what I care.

After the period of radical feminist literature, in the 1980s and 1990s Italian female writers showed a renewed interest in crime fiction, seen as a tool to criticize the failure of a structurally male chauvinist justice and other pressing social issues.

Dacia Maraini, in *Voci* [Voices] (1994), sharply criticized the patriarchal structures at the origin of the disproportionate number of femicides. A law that is not equal for men and

¹³ The relationship of entrustment, in Italian *affidamento*, is one in which one woman gives her trust or entrusts herself symbolically to another woman, who thus becomes her guide, mentor or point of reference – in short, the figure of symbolic mediation between her and the world (De Lauretis, 1990, pp. 8-9).

women is demystified and the exclusion and isolation of women in a society dominated by men is revealed.

Between 1998 and 2004 Barbara Garlaschelli published a series of *noir* novels, focusing on the point of view of women who, as victims of violent family relationships, becomes perpetrators of violence themselves, in search for that justice that is not guaranteed by the system (Pieri & Rinaldi, 2011, pp. 117-123).

Grazia Verasani is the author of *Quo vadis, baby?* (2004), which inspired both the film (2005) and the Sky miniseries (2008) of the same title, directed by Gabriele Salvatores. Giorgia, the protagonist, is a hard-boiled private investigator, alcoholic and depressed as per (male) tradition. Alongside this, her short story *Per quello che mi importa* [For What I Care] (2011) looks like a pamphlet against femicide, with the most macabre descriptions of unfortunate and defenceless women.

Female detection and feminist issues are also prominent in Margherita Oggero's work. This writer is well known to the Italian public for her character, the teacher/amateur detective Camilla Baudino, made famous by the Endemol screen adaptation for Rai channel *Provaci ancora Prof!* [translated as *The Teacher*] (2005-2017). Yet in the short story *Povera Rosa* [Poor Rosa] (2011) Oggero employed a more raw and bitter tone than usual, in denouncing the fact that abortion as a right was not yet fully achieved for women, especially the disadvantaged.

One of the few Italian science fiction writers, Nicolletta Vallorani, mixed *noir* with cyberpunk fiction. In *Eva* [Eve] (2002) and *Il catalogo delle vergini* [The Catalogue of Virgins] (2017), both set in a futuristic Milan reduced to rubble, she addressed issues such as social marginality, sexual fluidity, merchandise and the overpowering and exploitation of the female body.

The texts of these authors, who exploited the aesthetics and violence typical of *noir* to expose the oppression that characterizes social and family relationships, traced a disturbing and provocative portrait of contemporary Italy. The body of the victim is often the focus of narrative attention. The sympathetic but realistic representation of the horrors suffered is engaged to emphasize the writers' critique, which sometimes appears openly pietistic or excessively didactic.

Getting wilder.

On other occasions, female authors, especially if closer to pulp than *noir* fiction, contributed to the fight for women's rights in literature by representing a more radical edge. This is the case of Isabella Santacroce, Alda Teodorani, Simona Vinci, among others. Their stories put into the foreground the pain, both inflicted and self-inflicted, together with acts of extreme body deformation, rape, murder and suicide as forms of lucid subversion against the physical and psychological violence perpetrated on women.

The *fil rouge* of Vinci's *Cose* [Things] is the decomposition of the body as an extreme and lucid self-erotic practice: "Mi piace molto quest'idea della superficie del mio corpo che si squaglia, si spacca, si apre e infine si consuma. La stessa fine che fanno le cose, prima o poi" [I really like this idea of the surface of my body that melts, breaks, opens and finally wears out. The same end that things have, sooner or later] (Vinci, 1999a, p. 101). The progressive transformation of the narrator's body into a thing starts from a feeling of abandonment and loneliness, which was caused by the end of a relationship. Only things are left (p. 87), she asserts at the beginning. Gradually, her body also becomes a thing, her vagina like that of a Barbie, while her skin remains the only thing alive. It is the only thing that reacts, and it only reacts to contact with other things: "il tatto è diventato il suo sesso (...) Le cose, sono come me" [the touch has become her sex (...) Things, they have become like me] (p. 88). The perverse ritual of the body reification process focuses on the meticulous description of the

fetishes that cause her epithelial vibrations, like a bulimia involving the senses rather than food (Rodler, 2000, pp. 148-149). With more and more enthusiasm, she looks at objects with an emotion she no longer feels for anything else. She tries to recognize all existing materials with her skin, touches everything in the shops with less and less discretion and wonders naked around the house, where she accumulates and takes care of objects, all new, without history and, above all, made of plastic.

She bites, sucks and rubs against things. She masturbates with the carpet and with a heated iron on her buttocks. She is enchanted with teleshopping, she dreams of a sheath that can completely cover her, she voluptuously falls asleep on synthetic grass that stings her epidermis and in sheets made of rubber. The aromas, additives, pesticides and preservatives have become, for her, the true flavour of food, the absolute abstraction of taste. This addiction, however, becomes more and more demanding, sensitivity decreases while boredom increases. Soon, it is as if she has already felt everything. So, the protagonist moves on to more extreme things, from covering herself with paint that painfully stains her skin while enjoying this pain to planning to melt and split the surface of her body with hydrochloric acid.

In this story, the themes of the reification of the female body and the pervasiveness of consumerism (Tabanelli, 2008, p. 383) mingle, in the full consciousness of the woman who is covered with plastic layers in an increasingly extreme way, until she is destroyed. Plastic, a material symbolically linked to both the domestic and sexual spheres (Lucamante, 2001a, p. 117), instead of being an artificial film between her and perception, becomes her real skin, the exclusive source of pleasure and emotions. Thus, the fetishization of body and things is a tool with which the author has renegotiated the female image, the ways of enjoying consumerism and the traditional forms of pornography (p. 109).

A similar narrative is found in the short stories *Notturmo* [Nocturne] (1999) and *La ragazza angelo* [The Angel Girl] (1999), included in *In tutti i sensi come l'amore* [In Every Sense Like Love]. The theme of self-mutilation has become a way to transgress the social norms of aesthetics, sexuality and love and to react to the codified and commercialized ideas of the female body (Tabanelli, 2008, p. 380).

The brother of the Angel Girl, indifferent to the will of the woman who had consciously altered her body with extreme results, turns to a doctor to return her to what she was before she was transformed (in his opinion) into a monster. The description of the woman's body arriving, awake and conscious, on the operating table seems to be the result of a reverse cosmetic surgery, which has produced a body transformed according to the most horrendous dreams. Meat nightmares (Vinci, 1999c, p. 111). Bit by bit, the girl has dismantled the ideal of female beauty that she embodied, from face to breast, from the eyes to the back, on which a pair of wings have been opened. Compared to Caredda's short story, in which the counter-aesthetic intervention made by Danny while Monica is sedated, in this narrative not only is the director of the destruction the girl herself, wilfully, but the male subject, an authentic surgeon, also chooses to respect her wishes until the end, by bringing her work to completion. The doctor has been presented as a man prepared by experience to mend, patch, transform and bring horror back to decency, to bearable ugliness. He should, therefore, be subject to the rules of aesthetic normalization of the world. On the contrary, he decides to ignore the brother's requests and to listen to the woman's body instead. When, in the end, she has been turned into an empty puppet, a deconstructed anatomical doll, the girl (incredibly still alive) exclaims: "Finalmente" [Finally] (p. 119).

These are no longer bodies reified by men and society, but extreme interventions in which the body is modified, often with real enjoyment, according to the conscious directing of the female subjects. Hydrochloric acid, the insertion of a mechanical trap into the vagina (as

happens in the Vinci's *Notturmo*), or the stitching up of the vaginal lips and plastic surgery to take the shape of a winged angel. All these forms of drastic transformation are close to the cyberpunk representation of mutant bodies, who are a mixture of human and machine, composed of prostheses, implanted circuits and genetic alterations (Mollo, 2004, pp. 88-91). And they all are fierce protests against the structural oppression that stands behind the contemporary propensity, not only to perform cosmetic surgery, but also to practice modifications of all kinds, from dieting, body building and doping to bio-technological engineering. In the era of the remaking of bodies, especially women's bodies, according to beauty models imposed by male and consumerist logics, the sort of post-human bodies of Vinci expressed a radical point of view.

These monstrous manipulations are also acts of resistance. Instead of conforming the bodies to a prescribed aesthetics, surgery becomes an instrument of conscious distortion of the social ideal of beauty and decrees the end of female submission (Tabanelli, 2008, pp. 380-387). The sexual body of women, the fundamental site of disciplinary control exercised by society (Palmer, 2001, p. 69), is freed by becoming abject. Those subjects who manage to escape the ideally exclusive matrix that regulates the sexuality of the Western world, can implement counter-hegemonic practices, starting with their own non-conforming body. The mutilated or monstrous body, then, is no longer deviance spectacularized in a freak show, but an alternative model of beauty, which challenges power.

Such a critique affects the coinciding ideals of health and beauty, which produce self-normalization as a new behavioural model (Rodler, 2000, pp. 154-155) and cause frustration and suffering because it is unattainable, it is the new utopia of the body, which goes far beyond the lack of disease or discrepancy. The dialectic between punishment and privilege, gratification and sanction, which serves to educate subjugated bodies and consumers, is made paroxysmal. In pulp female authors' works, the apparent mortification of the body is actually

at the service of pleasure. The self-destructive or destructive moment is, for them, the only effective protest to the degree of objectification to which women have been reduced, the only possible project of freedom. For the female Cannibals, the strategy to resist a primarily gender violence is based on the refusal of the internalization of moral norms, in the service of power, and on the refusal of docility, in the name of a very material and bloody promotion of their rights. They challenge the symbolic hegemony of bodies that count as lives worth protecting, saving and grieving (Butler, 1993/2011, p. XXIV). They converted their abjection into personal, civil and political responsibility.

Their characters are protagonists of extreme, violent and liberating performances. No matter how much they are, or have been, victims, they are never inert or passive, but always act and react to the power and exploitation they have undergone. Their liberations are narrated as ecstasies and revolutionize preconceived ideas of pain, pleasure, female identity and justice. For the authors, it was necessary to stage an extreme, obscene re-appropriation of the acts of violence that the female body has traditionally suffered, a body that has been dismembered, cut into pieces, scarred, a body that is no longer worth anything. Such escalations and mixtures of *Eros* and *Thanatos*, which involve shocking bodily mutilation and pain, is reminiscent of the extreme art performances of Gina Pane and Marina Abramović in the 1970s. It brings to mind also the French writer Virginie Despentes, with her violent and provocative *Baise-moi* [Fuck Me] (1993). Moreover, there is something more deeply embedded in this narrative rediscovery of punishing the body in order to reach a greater good, a superior state of being and, at the same time, to rebel against the patriarchal authority. It is the long run of the model of the feminine mystique in the Catholic tradition, being the fusion of pain, caused by self-mutilation and ecstasy in the way women used to express themselves within/against the power of the Church.

Bloodthirsty heroines.

“Non ho desiderio di lui. Mi devo semplicemente riappropriare di qualcosa che è mio da tempo” [I have no desire for him. I simply have to take back something that has been mine for a long time], says the protagonist of Alda Teodorani’s *Organi. Manuale di scrittura anatomica* [Organs: Anatomical Writing Manual] (2002, p. 16). She collects the most beautiful parts of male bodies, without pity nor particular cruelty, with the aim of creating a perfect male body. The common thread of the novel is the parody of fetishism for singular sexualized and exciting parts of the female body, such as hair, breasts, buttocks and vulvas, with which male pulp writers are obsessed, as well as the parody of stereotypes that depict women as irrational, moody and emotional. In the first chapter, the protagonist literally uncovers the brain of a man, Carlo (winking to the *neo-noir* writer Carlo Lucarelli):

un gran cervello. Anche se glielo dimezzo ne resterà abbastanza per lui. (...) sono sicura che sopravvivrà. Guardo dentro la testa di Carlo. Quanti bei gialli riposano ancora lì dentro, in attesa di essere scritti! (...) Delle impronte non mi preoccupo, non sono una scrittrice di gialli. (...) Non state in ansia, voi. In futuro leggerete sicuramente roba sua. A parte che ne ha una riserva inesauribile già scritta. (p. 20)

a great brain. Even if I cut it in half, there will be enough for him. (...) I’m sure he will survive. I look inside Carlo’s head. How many beautiful detective stories rest there, waiting to be written! (...) I’m not worried about my fingerprints, I’m not a crime writer. (...) Do not be anxious, you. In the future, you will certainly read his stuff. Let us not even mention that he already has an inexhaustible amount of unpublished stories.

This is a theme that Teodorani has often exploited in her narratives. Her bloody heroines trick the reader, by overlapping pseudo-autobiographical and explicitly fictional writing, in a ruthless reversal of horror and pulp violence on the traditional female victims. In a subsequent chapter, the same protagonist indulges in another act of revenge, not just against a man, but against the entire tradition of *noir* and horror fiction, which is well symbolized by the famous Hitchcock’s frame of the girl stabbed in the shower.

The mixture of pulp, irony and violence is particularly evident in Alda Teodorani’s short stories and novels, which mainly focuses on female characters and their pleasure in sex

and murder. The ways for those heroines to enjoy and kill range from punitive revenge for being (or risking to be) abandoned, deprived of a love and rejected, to the expression of a free and violent sexuality that meets the pleasure and gratitude of male victims.

The reversal of the *Black Dahlia*, i.e., the cliché of violence (verbal, sexual, homicidal and symbolic) typically inflicted on female characters in crime fiction, which reflects the treatment reserved to women by a deeply masculine and patriarchal society, is themed in many ways. Underage boys exhibited as trophies, vampire and Cannibal women who feed on the blood and flesh of males, raped girls who get rid of their rapists and of their insane and unwanted children as well. The necro-erotic acts of these women challenge, sometimes with much irony, the hegemonic male imagination.

The women protagonists of such anthologies as *Sesso col coltello* [Knife Sex] (2001) or *La Signora delle torture* [The Lady of Torture] (2004) are certainly indebted to the sexy heroines of the 60s and 70s Italian *fumetto nero* like *Satanik*, characterized by cruelty, violence, sadism and a taste of the macabre. Their revenge against the male gender and genre materializes, above all, in the themes of blood and knife. Drinking male blood, flowing from wounds opened with a symbolically phallic weapon and, at the same time, placing the emphasis on the female orgasm, appear as acts of liberation from the male monopoly of pleasure, from sexual violence and from the treatment suffered by generations of female characters from horror and *noir* stories.

The re-appropriation of the body and the subtraction of violence from the male monopoly passed not only through the drama of self-inflicted pain and destruction but also the mixing, often full of irony, of eroticism and horror. In Teodorani, as well as in other female Pulpers, female sexuality is revisited and activated as a pornographic exploit, which is shared and enjoyed by both female readers and authors. The graphic lexicon, the dramatic, often ironic

tones, the detailed representation of bodies and sexual acts, are all subversive procedures. They appropriated and inverted pornographic canons, typical of the pulp narrative, designed by and for men, the idea of bodies as objects to be consumed, the juvenile, raw and scurrilous jargon that distinguishes the genre (Lucamante, 2001b, p. 34). Their heroines dominate the sexual scene and are never inert or passive (even in masochism). They are actresses of erotic performances often full of irony and fun, while men (when present) appear to be complacent and happy to please. The protagonists' bodies become a battleground between competing ideologies, in which the renegotiation of the pornographic module is essential (Lucamante, 2001a, p. 98-100).

Revolutionary justice.

1990s female Pulpers were radically nonconformist to the patriarchal order. First, they involved the public in a process of identification with what could be perceived culturally as a monster, then they mixed male *noir*, horror and pulp languages with an eroticism designed for what they constructed as feminine and feminist pleasure. These changes ended a long tradition of abuse of female characters and forcefully criticized the terrible, structurally violent and unjust "Father's Law". "Delitto tu dici, non credo. Delitto mi sembra (...) non cogliere i miei giorni" [You say crime, I don't think so. Crime seems to me (...) not to enjoy my days]: so says Valeria Parrella's modernized Antigone, the Sophoclean heroine who refuses to obey an unfair law and pays the consequences (2012, p. 5).

The traditional institutions of the patriarchal power, the mononuclear family in particular, are attacked as some of the most fearful agents at the source of female repression and oppression: the deepest level where phallogentric society imprints social and sexual identity on girls and on boys (Jones, 1981, p. 368). A positive model of extended family, chaotic, non-hierarchical, emotionally rich and composed mainly of women, is counter-proposed to it. The boundaries extend far beyond blood (or in spite of it) and give space to the

desire for meaningful relationships and strong ties, which break the chains imposed by the traditionally male vision of institutions (Pieri & Rinaldi, 2011, p. 125). Zoe Libra's family, in the Vallorani aforementioned *noir* novel, is an example of community life as dysfunctional as that of the patriarchal one, but certainly more fun and libertarian. Once again, the genealogical line goes back in time, long before the feminist battles, to the unisex communities of sisterhood, not yet without religious precedents.

“– Non voglio sigarette – gli dico – voglio scopare, invece. Mi ha squadrato da capo a piedi, come dovesse acquistarmi. Poi s'è girato e se n'è andato” [– I don't want cigarettes – I tell him – I want to fuck, instead. He has looked at me from head to toe, as though he should buy me. Then he has turned around and left] (Teodorani, 2001, p. 49). A lawyer, bored to death, offers legal advice, in exchange for sex, to a young man suspected of rape and murder. After enjoying him, she abandons him to a life sentence, with no regrets. Often, the male victim of the feminine revenge is kind of casual, while the punishment is exemplary and, most of time, includes a recurrent theme of castration. We find a typical example in Simona Vinci's *Notturmo* [Nocturne]. In this short story, the protagonist sews a mechanical trap in her vagina to close up her body and heal her desire for men, who have only caused her pain. Her liberation is reliant on an extreme and obscene act: “era già tutti gli altri” [he was already like all the others] (Vinci, 1999b, p. 148), she says pushing a random guy inside her, suddenly, without hesitation. He screams, while his sex has become living flesh, red, dropping on the floor (p. 149). In the finale, reminiscent of that of *La ragazza di nome Giulio* [A Girl Called Jules] (1964) by Milena Milani, the girl finally feels calm, in the peaceful and beautiful night, like those of her childhood.

In all these stories, the laws of an alternative *giustizia femminile* [female justice] are at work (Lazzaro-Weiss, 1994, p. 120), which punish and domesticate men (whether guilty or innocent), leaving women unpunished, protagonists of an empowerment that makes carnage. As also happens in Santacroce's *Trilogia dello spavento* [Trilogy of the Frightened], the

critique of androcentric Italian society passes through unusual plot results. The classic pulp scheme, which kills and punishes the *femme fatale*, is abandoned. In its place there is a new destiny for female characters, a new freedom to enjoy and to behave without being subject to punishment and condemnation (Lucamante, 2001a, p. 196).

The ability to play with narrative authority and to exploit and overturn gender conventions to propose feminist ideas places the works of Teodorani and the other female Cannibals on a *continuum* with the experience of the *Tartaruga Nera* series. What appears in female characters – be they investigators, victims and murderers, or all together – is a new powerful female subjectivity capable of defining alternative justice and freedom.

Kill the pink.

This, therefore, is the end that the female writers chose for their “fucking feminist” protagonists, as a Young Cannibal’s creature, such as Ermanno in Brizzi’s *Bastogne*, would have called them (Brizzi, 1996, p. 15). Ermanno wished the overly emancipated girls to understand the spirit of commerce (i.e., sex):

sbarbe così emancipate, ma così emancipate che le abbiamo abbandonate senza accompagnarle a casa, facili prede della notte. Che capiscano lo spirito del commercio, caso mai, invece di emanciparsi tanto. (pp. 35-36)

chicklets so emancipated, but so emancipated, that we abandoned them without taking them home, easy prey of the night. So, they will understand the spirit of commerce, if anything, instead of emancipating so much.

The female Pulpers made that happen, as it were. These post-feminist characters, who desire independence and adventure, do not fear aggression nor fall into victimization, although they do turn into male serial killers and castrators too often to be called truly free. They are still in the process of liberation from patriarchal authority. After being treated for centuries as sexual objects for men, their sexuality emerges as a semiotic liberation that has exploded linguistic and social codes. The challenge to the dominant discourse has been made by its own means:

liberating practices, phallogocentric cognitive and emotional patterns and contradictory symbols are mixed (Jones, 1981, p. 372-373).

It is difficult not to see how much it was needed, if we consider the frequent removal of the female contribution to crime fiction that characterizes non-fiction dedicated to the genre – the female writers are often grouped in a chapter with diminutive titles such as “Ladies in black”, “A pink thread” and similar – and the primordial tones on the back cover and in the preface of “feminine crime fiction” anthologies. For example, the anthology *Le ragazze con la pistola* [Girls with a Gun] (2004), introduced by Marcello Fois, announces: “Donne sul filo di un delitto, da vittime o da carnefici, ma sempre e comunque *armate* (...) signore in nero della narrativa italiana” [Women on the edge of a crime, as victims or executioners, but always and in any case armed (...) ladies in black of Italian fiction]. The introduction is even worse than what is promised to readers in the cover (pp. 9-10).

The editorial idea *Sbirre* [Women Cops], dated 2018 and conceived by three men (Carlotto, De Cataldo & De Giovanni), does not seem to have made any step forward in fourteen years, with respect to sexism. The front cover promises: “Non dimenticano, odiano, sanno vendicarsi. Sono poliziotti. E sono donne” [They don’t forget, they hate, they know how to take revenge. They are cops. And they are women] (2018). This last sentence stressed in yellow. On the back cover is noted: “Anna aveva due vite e ha perso tutto. Alba non crede a nessuno. Sara è la donna invisibile. Il nuovo *noir* italiano comincia qui” [Anna had two lives and she lost everything. Alba doesn’t believe anyone. Sara is the invisible woman. The new Italian *noir* starts here] (2018). Finally, the front flap of the dust jacket states that this book inaugurates a new wave of black literature, in which women no longer have any *femme fatale* qualities, given up to the martial poses of the avenger and, far from inquisitive heroism, it restores the gloominess of a very controversial reality (2018).

Claiming that three sixty-year-old male writers have created an innovative *noir* fiction, with respect to female figures, could be acceptable just to launch yet another anthology on a saturated market. Perhaps not even for this. The problem is that even the language used is penetrated by the phallogentric dogma, as the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s would have said (Jones, 1981, pp. 369-373). Grammar, syntax and semantic choices and narrative techniques: everything is an expression of this dogma. This reminds us that female writing cannot fail to consider the socio-literary and socio-sexual context in which the works circulate, from authorial authority to the audience, from publishing to distribution. The authors, and women in general, are united by the power relationships that put them in a position of subordination and oppression with respect to men.

The heroines of today's Italian crime fiction, increasingly numerous, have not only been influenced by famous scientist-detectives – such as Kay Scarpetta and Temperance Brennan, but are also heirs of an Italian tradition that has renewed the narrative. Both genre and gender provide space for negotiation and performance, where one can work to rewrite the social role of women and encourage the change of the status quo (Palmer, 2001, p. 69). The crucial point, made clear by *neo-noir* and pulp female authors, is that the representation of wild fury or manic murderous coldness, which brutalizes the female bodies, must not be reabsorbed in a conservative vision that restores the patriarchal order. Instead, it is necessary to challenge the system, both individually and collectively. Ways to do this are: the appropriation of a pornography that always sees women as victims or masochists and its transformation into a fluid, free and joyful sexuality; emphasis given to loyalty and mutual responsibility between women; the rejection of both an ethics and a justice that are universal only on paper, but actually are oppressive to women; the importance of the intimate friendship circle and the female micro-community as a primary resource of practical, emotional and intellectual support. In the neoconservative phase that crime fiction is experiencing today, at least feminist conquests seem

to have entered the narrative norm. Both in literature and in TV series, female figures now stand out from the conventional roles of victim or assistant they have always had. Female detectives, and criminals, have become essential for success with the public. The new Italian releases on Netflix, such as *Suburra* [Suburra: Blood on Rome] (2017-2019), *Nero a metà* [translated as Carlo & Malik] (2018) and *Il processo* [The Trial] (2019) provide good examples.

The Counter-Building of a *Camorrista*

Pericles the Black.

One of the rare male voices that attacked male chauvinist models and violence, typical of both Italian society and crime fiction, is that of Giuseppe Ferrandino. His rough and amusing novel *Pericle il Nero* [Pericles the Black] engages the public's expectations for half gangster-half *neo-noir* text by overturning them.

The history of the book's publication is somehow indicative of its non-conformity, as it were. Ferrandino published it in 1993 without great success with the *nom de plume* Nicola Calata for the small publishing house Granata Press. In 1995, however, the book became famous in France, where the author was already appreciated as a cartoonist, when the publisher Gallimard bought the rights and released it in its *Série noir*. Republished in 1998 by the sophisticated publishing house Adelphi, it was warmly welcomed by both critics and readers (De Michele, 2004).

This *noir* targeted the traditional Camorra's value system by mixing crime fiction with farcical expedients, gore moments and quasi-pornographic descriptions. The fast rhythm and the blend of different genres within a Neapolitan setting is the legacy of Attilio Veraldi's style, who, after years of experience as Raymond Chandler's translator, gave life to a Neapolitan version of the private detective, half hard-boiled and half comic (Carloni, 1999, pp. 50-51). In Veraldi, irony was combined with traits of fierce realism in both the representation of the city

and the characters of the world of organized crime (Camorra) the remorseful and desperate marginal, old-fashioned bosses, unscrupulous exponents of the new business logics (Carloni, 1994, pp. 102-105).

Pericle il Nero's protagonist is not a tough guy, nor a gangster. He is a miserable Camorra's private, who works for Don Luigino, a boss of small caliber. He is an orphan, little educated and not so smart. His job consists of punishing and humiliating Don Luigino's competitors. This is how he introduces himself:

Io mi chiamo Pericle Scalzone. Ho trentotto anni. Sono un poco grasso e ho i capelli un po' bianchi perché mia madre dice che pure mio padre li aveva. Di mestiere faccio il culo alla gente, stordisco la persona con un sacchetto di sabbia, la lego coi polsi vicino ai piedi a cavalcioni di una sedia o di un tavolo, e poi uso pasta antibiotica per fare scivolare il pesce. (...) Non ho un gran pesce e non faccio mai molto male, io devo solo svergognare. (Ferrandino, 1998, p. 10)

My name is Pericle Scalzone. I am thirty-eight years old. I am a little fat and I have white hair because my mother says that my father also had it. My job is to fuck people in the ass, I stun the person with a sandbag, tie them with wrists near the feet, astride a chair or table, and then I use antibiotic ointment to lubricate my cock. (...) I don't have a big cock and I never do much harm, I just have to put them to shame.

His voice is characterized by a distinctive style, made up of short jokes, naive observations and a lively and simple figurative language. When he experiences an unknown or strange sensation, he links it to simple things or back to childhood memories. The similarities, however, also contain a philosophical and poetic impulse that communicates to the reader the bizarre peculiarity of the character, not only in his profession.

One day he runs into an unexpected witness during one of his exemplary punishments performed against a priest, who had dared to attack his boss from the pulpit. This incident triggers a huge change in his life. Initially he must hide, the family of his uncle is decimated, and he goes on the run to escape the revenge of the Camorra, including Don Luigino. A number of random peregrinations follow: hiding places, stampedes, unfortunate encounters and

unexpected strokes of luck, which counterbalance his grotesque naivety. The actions are concatenated and combined with rapidity and expressive economy, until the showdown, paying respect to the typical fairy tale's style (Calvino, 1988, p. 38), as well as being influenced by the author's experience as a comics' screenwriter¹⁴. The rhythm of the story, however, is slowed down by Pericle's reflections. Step by step, he decides to rebel against his hopeless destiny and the role of passive executor of dishonouring acts. But not as you would expect in a *noir* story, set in the Naples' underworld.

Pericle il Nero is the reverse *Bildungsroman* of a Camorra man, or rather, the emancipation of a criminal from the imposed social and cultural models. It is marked by humiliations, betrayals, revelations and twists. Above all, it is *incorporated*, that is, it is lived and expressed through his body. He goes through a series of psychopathologies through which his body somatically and symbolically protests against the model of criminal he had conformed to, rebels against it and, finally, expels it. It starts with a heaviness in the head, immediately after the attempted murder, which confuses him. The fever rises when he takes refuge in a shop, killing his relatives, and becomes a fire in the head along the highway that takes him away from Naples. The mounting fear and anger are first a round pain in the stomach, then stabs of gastritis. After days of escaping without washing, he stops on the seafront in Pescara to feast with fish at the restaurant and, in this way, to feel all right. In the humid night, a sadness comes over him, so strongly that he cries, and his crying solidifies in punches of hate and self-pity into the sand. Then insomnia and nightmares occur.

The turning point of the story is the meeting in a bar with Nastasia a Polish woman in her forties he immediately likes. It is the parody of the romantic a love at first sight. Pericle

¹⁴ Ferrandino made his debut as a comic writer in 1982 and then collaborated with magazines such as *Intrepido*, *Monello*, *Lancio Story* and *Skorpio* and, more recently, for *Dylan Dog*, *Martin Mystère* and *Nick Raider*. He is among the most important Italian comic writers, known for the speed of his literary output.

takes a cathartic salty bath in the frozen sea water and begins to think. From the beginning, the relationship with her is one of modest generosity and mutual insecurity. She offers him a place to sleep in her modest apartment, he experiences unusual sensations: an initial erectile dysfunction, then the intimacy of daily gestures charms him. This time out of the world (he is still hiding from Don Luigino's hired assassins) lasts eight days, until she gets upset because, despite all his positive qualities, she doesn't see him as intelligent. At least, this is what he concludes. His sexist spontaneous reaction – whose protagonist is the usual cock, accustomed to violence – is dismissed with just a glance from Nastasia but marks the end of his stay and the start of the final phase of his re-education.

Back in Naples, he wants to kill everyone: his hatred takes his breath away and fills him with a desire for power as a Camorra leader. After a series of picaresque adventures Percicle's rebirth reaches its peak in the final scene, when he manages to fool his master and is ready to humiliate him, in front of the camera, in the usual way.

Luigino era già a culo nudo. Avevo svegliato pure lui e non solo Anna, perché lui doveva sentire mentre lo inculavo. Così era più difficile, ma era come una guerra con me stesso. (...) Ho messo la crema antibiotica sul buco del culo di Luigino. Lui lo teneva stretto e ho dovuto dargli due o tre pacche sulle natiche. Quando però stavo per infilarglielo mi sono fermato. Sono rimasto col pesce dritto in mano, a guardare il culo rapposo di Luigino, sentendo come una meraviglia. Ho pensato: ma che sto facendo? (Ferrandino, 1998, p. 138)

Luigino was already arse-naked. I had woken him up too, not just Anna, because he had to feel it while I buggered him. So, it was more difficult, but it was like a war with myself. (...) I put the antibiotic cream on Luigino's asshole. He held it tight and I had to give him two or three pats on the buttocks. But when I was about to slip it in, I stopped. I stood with my cock erect in my hand, looking at Luigino's flaccid arse, in amazement. I thought: what am I doing?

Percicle's astonished epiphany makes him renounce the violent revenge that all those like Luigino would have carried out. It is a double revolt. Not only did he learn to think on his own, but, above all, he completed his counter-education. It happens when, with a gesture that parrots the omnipresent gangster and *noir* motif of the male who drops his pants to demonstrate

being a real man, Pericle feels like an idiot, pulls them up and even renounces kicking his old boss in the arse. He finally understood that “the rule of the eyes” (it does not matter who you are, but who commands), that all of Naples respects, is a poor man’s law. The cold air on his teeth, while waiting for the dawn on the roofs of the city, and a sense of disorientation caused by strange sounds and unrecognizable words, as if the world now spoke a new, precise and complicated language, completes the transformation. Now he can go away forever and fantasize about giving Nastasia the twenty-five million lire to open a boutique in Poland.

The reversal of gender clichés is represented as a parodic overthrow of the principles and practices of Camorra power, which are centred on overpowering the weakest, sexism, the ethics of illicit and easy money, selfishness and craftiness. The male sexual organ, which is a typical metaphor for male power in the Camorra’s apparatus, seems to be the only quality that Pericle identifies with at the beginning. In fact, it ends up being treated as a sort of independent character in the novel, showing a strange, quasi-autonomous nature and behaviour. It becomes a thing, a tool, separated and disconnected from his body, leading its bearer into a subversive awakening. Starting from a gesture of clumsy violence, which fails in its murderous intent, Pericle and his penis go through vicissitudes and make an escape which is, at the same time, a path of liberation and self-determination. This path, eventually, leads them to get out of that system, denying it, revealing and denaturalizing it in a final act of kindness.

A docile body, domesticated to violence, has functioned as a point of resistance within the system, it rose and rebuilt itself. It has become the bearer of an alternative counter-discourse to the model and very poetics of mainstream crime fiction, which uses death and the body, more or less dismembered or otherwise divided into parts (Pericle’s cock, stomach, head, fists, gestures, blood, dirt), to gain an audience. The scenes of carnal violence could be yet another example of the male and male chauvinist violence that permeates the genre, at least from the times of hard-boiled, gangster and Westerns adventures, until highly successful TV series such

as *Romanzo criminale* [Crime Novel] and *Gomorra* [Gomorra]. Here, on the contrary, they are undermined by a light style, full of comic sketch, which mixes with pulp realism.

The text is made up of short scenes that follow one another quickly, of dry dialogues and Pericle's thoughts, described as though in a diary. In other words, it has a cinematic style, which makes the story ready for a film transposition. For years, the novel had been in the process of becoming a movie, until Stefano Mordini did it in 2016. Some of the events have been moved to France and Belgium, but otherwise the adaptation has preserved the irreverent spirit and the bitter irony of the text. Pericle's narrative voice is expressed in a colloquial Italian, mixed with Neapolitan, full of grammatical inaccuracies and metaphors alluding to the protagonist's concrete, and somewhat childish, vision of things. On the screen the scenes of violence and sex are softened, while the mixture of pulp realism and grotesque tone appears less explosive than that of Ferrandino, but certainly more suitable for reaching a bigger audience.

The originality of the figure of Pericle, combined with the particular body and acting of the actor Riccardo Scamarcio, has contributed to the success of the story and the appreciation of both public and critics.

The Ruthless.

The choice to shoot the gangster comedy *Lo spietato* [The Ruthless] (2019), and also to assign the protagonist's part to Scamarcio, is certainly a consequence of Pericle's success. The film is inspired by the investigative novel *Manager Calibro 9* [Manager Caliber 9], written by Pietro Colaprico and Luca Fazzo (1995). The two journalists retraced the criminal career of the criminal-informant Saverio Morabito through his testimonies, which led to hundreds of arrests in the Milanese 'Ndrangheta [the Calabrese mafia].

The script abandons the judicial chronicle and mixes irony and violence. The film is dominated by the figure of Santo Russo and his ferocious determination to make his way into crime and climb the Milanese 1980s society. Emigrating as a young boy, during the economic boom years, from Calabria to the desolate suburb of Buccinasco. Santo sees his rise in the Calabrian hinterland gangs as a young yuppie, who aspires to reach the top of the firm. He surrounds himself with luxury and beautiful women, as in the most classic gangster movie. Moving from robberies to kidnappings, he soon specialized in “miracles”, jargon for cold-blooded executions, then moved on to construction contracts and heroin trafficking.

His social climbing ambition, however, is immediately marked by a grotesque side, which we find condensed in one of the first sentences he says: “Non c’era molto da discutere, dovevano morire tutti, *ça va sans dire*” [There wasn’t much to discuss, they all had to die, *ça va sans dire*] (Barbagallo & Barbagallo, 2019, 00:05:42). The effort to emulate the Milanese dialect and the cultured speech of the upper middle class is one of the comic traits of the character, who continually uses the French idiomatic expression “*ça va sans dire*” [that goes without saying], in common use also in the Italian spoken in Lombardy. Scamarcio’s body has a precise function in the semantic system of the film and is present from the first scene, which shows Santo seated on the terrace: open knees, lips parted on the lit cigarette, hair tied up, gold necklace, sunglasses, silver watch and *Gazzetta dello Sport* [Sports News]. The view of the golden Madonna of the Milan Cathedral is a symbol of true social affirmation. The tacky and expensive dressing gown unfolds on his bare chest and reveals the dark boxers. The first minutes’ sequences alternate between scenes of him dressing and those of him driving in a gaudy Lamborghini towards the first destination for the day, with the camera focusing on the details of his *nouveau riche* accessories and his good looks. The character, through his rough and elegant body, undoubtedly endowed with all the attributes of a vigorous and Mediterranean masculinity, is immediately presented for what it is, the body of a self-made criminal, who

craves to be part of the Milanese society that counts. We know what to expect from such a body, which certainly belongs to the *Scarface* tradition of gangster movies.

Santo is violent, rude, abusive with his submissive wife and unable to accept his educated and wealthy lover's sexual freedom. He is as smart in business as he is emotionally and morally primitive. And yet, precisely because his body is that of the same actor who interpreted Pericle, who is handsome and criminal but also lost, melancholic and clumsy, it is impossible not to connect the two figures, if you know the two films. Even before the mocking tone, it is in the choice of Scamarcio, in the way of making him act, speak and show off his body, that the film undermines the phallogocentric idea of power conquest. Both Santo's women, in the end, manifest their strength and independence, while he is arrested and, only much later, he rebuilds a life, without any more swagger. In the end, the informant gangster follows the example of the reformed punisher. He abandons the male and violent rules of crime.

The Organs' Marketplace

In *Cannibal* and *neo-noir*'s texts, the destruction of both feminine and masculine body did not spare an abundance of pseudo-scientific and horrifying details. Often victims end up sectioned, as if they were on operating tables, or torn to pieces, as if they were on the butcher's counter. In the 1990s the representation of objectified human organs, of Frankenstein-style assemblages, of crazy surgeons and nightmare operating rooms, was already widespread in horror literature and cinema. The figure of the serial killer was increasingly popular, staging realistic organ harvesting operations, with organs transformed into anatomical trophies or macabre ritual idols. Organs that appeared as fetishes infused with a sort of magical power by the perverse imagination of the murderer, carefully removed and handled, while victims, once used, remained empty, anonymous and useless containers.

As mentioned in Chapter I, this explicit and spectacular way of showing the dismemberment of the body has its most traceable origin in the French theatre of the *Grand Guignol*. However, with the release of the film *The Exorcist* (1973), it reached a global diffusion, since the success of this movie generated a sort of re-emergence of the horror genre (Collins, 1993, p. 29). The 1970s' and 1980s' avant-garde Italian comics by artists such as Paziienza, Tamburini, Liberatore and Scozzari, were also a crucial model for narrating torture and dismemberment (Trevi, 2006, pp. 208-209).

Body parts.

The collection of body parts is a leitmotiv in Alda Teodorani's work, deeply influenced by both horror fiction and *fumetto nero*. In particular, *Labbra di sangue* [Lips of Blood] (1997) narrates the unstoppable crimes of Lilith, a transsexual serial killer who murders, dismembers, removes parts of her victims' bodies and finally collects them in a glass case. The story is freely inspired by the "Monster of Florence" case, a name used by the Italian media to refer to the perpetrators of eight serial killings that occurred between 1968 and 1985 in the province of Florence. The victims of these crimes were young couples caught in intimate moments. The plot is marked by the detailed description of the anatomical trophies and the surgical expertise employed for getting them, in a classic erotic-horror style: not just the victims, but also Lilith's body has a crucial role in this novel. She is described as a sexual hybrid, so perfect in its completeness to appear almost as an alien. Despite the monstrosity of her acts, the reader is led to feel empathy for her, thanks to the narrative that breaks down her personality into many and all reasonable parts, gathered together only in the final unveiling.

Horror influences are not only frequent in Young Cannibals, but also in *neo-noir* writers, such as Carlo Lucarelli, Eraldo Baldini, Marcello Fois and many others. For example, in Fois' *Ferro recente* [Recent Iron] (1992/1999), one crime stands out among several because of the meticulous description of the corpse of a young woman, who was tortured and

dismembered piece by piece with the expertise of an organ export surgery, but without anaesthesia.

Not only horror cinema and *fumetto nero*, but also the evolution of social and medical practices influenced literary and cinematographic representation, bringing back into fashion the 19th century nightmares about premature burials and living dead. The mad doctor of the Frankenstein tradition has been transposed in a time of a scientific market for organs, transplants, implants and increasingly extensive interventions on the body. Surgical horror has gained a new dimension.

Brain death.

The development of new medical protocols and new legislation on the definition of death and organ transplantation has caused profound changes in the perception of the body. “Brain death” is a definition that emerged only in the late 1980s, when advances in immunosuppressant, resuscitation technologies, such as iron lungs and artificial respirators, and transplantation interventions made it possible to keep alive people whose heart would have otherwise stopped, due to the cessation of respiratory activity¹⁵. Thus, states were forced to redefine the boundary between life and death and it was approved that, when cognitive functions are missing due to irreversible brain damage, the person ceases to exist and becomes a mere biological body. Such an idea is possible only in a culture that considers reason as the discriminant of a human being in possession of all citizenship rights and that locates consciousness in the brain. In other historical moments or in other cultures, however, family ties or social position determine the rights of a person. For example, in ancient Rome, the slave belonged to the category of *res corporales* (things that can be touched), while in the West a

¹⁵ In 1986 cyclosporine was discovered, which counteracts rejection of implanted organs and enhances cell regeneration. The iron lung, developed in 1960, revolutionized resuscitation techniques. They include all methods of assistance to the sick body involving a dependence on machines and drugs to maintain blood pressure and ensure venous supply.

patient with pathologies that seriously compromise the brain, such as Alzheimer's or dementia, is no longer considered, by law, an independent adult. The permanent vegetative state, or neocortical death, does not correspond to biological death but to that of the person.

This sudden interest in brain coma has been closely linked to the biomedical development of transplantation (Lock, 2002, p. 64). Corpses have always been a valuable resource for the advancement of Western science but, more recently, a new category of death has become valuable. They are those created by accidents, saved by medicine and artificially kept alive thanks to new technologies. Within a decade, this new death, technologically produced and dependent on the medico-legal concept of brain death, found the formulations still in force and paved the way for the commodification of organs intended for transplantation. Comatose patients, together with anencephalic neonates, have become the best organ donors on the market. Looking at them, they do not seem dead but only asleep, yet they are completely dependent on technology to exist. Hybrid beings between man and machine, in transition between life and death, count as dead in an increasing number of countries. In the United States, and in some European countries, laws have adapted to medical values and beliefs with relatively little debate¹⁶. In other places, the comatose body has become the territory of a hard-fought negotiation between competing interests and social conceptions (p. 91). Often the secularization and modernization of societies with different traditional conceptualizations and values has ended up being a cultural colonization by the reductionist and individualist North American hegemony (pp. 151-152).

¹⁶ Crucial was the signing of the Uniform determination of death act (UDDA) in 1981, to which many of the United States today adhere. In Italy the matter is regulated by Law of 29 December 1993, n. 578 (*Norme per l'accertamento e la certificazione di morte*), by Decree of 22 August 1994, n. 582 of the Ministry of Health (*Regolamento recante le modalità per l'accertamento e la certificazione di morte*) and by the Decree of 11 April 2008 (G.U. n.136 del 12/06/2008, 'Aggiornamento del decreto 22 agosto 1994, n. 582').

To make the transplant legal, death is declared twice on the certificate: when the brain dies and when the heart stops (Lock, 2002, p. 183). When these living-dead cease to be persons and acquire the status of corpse, if they are donors, they suddenly turn into delicate containers to be handled with care since they contain rare, precious and perishable goods. At this point, the organs, extracted and ready for replanting, become the centre of medical attention since they must be brought quickly and without damage to the transplant teams. Finally, the bodies of the donors are mended and returned to the families. Medical violence against their bodies has gradually become more routine, naturalized and accepted by society (pp. 94-98).

Gifts for trade.

Organs are not born as things, but have been progressively separated from the individuals from which they come, objectified, rendered alienable and treated as gifts or as goods (O'Neill, 1985, pp. 127-128). The roots of organ donation lie the history of vivisection and in ancient genealogical foundations: traffic in relics of saints, collections of celebrities' skulls, fingers, ears, penis and other phrenological curiosities. For many centuries, the parts of the body have been traveling in pieces, and traded as commodities across the European market (Courtine, 2015).

In the Western contemporary world, alarmed by the shortage of organs, the medical dismemberment of good-as-dead bodies has become common practice. The treatment of the parts of the body, as independent organic entities endowed with a monetary value, is coupled with the cultural acceptance of the necessity to dismember, recycle and commercialize in the name of generosity and medical need. To facilitate circulation, however, a biological and individualistic vision of the human being and the technological possibility of capitalizing on isolated organs and tissues is not enough. The latter must also be transformed into objects with a very high symbolic and material value, supported by a utilitarian pragmatism that encourages the recycling of the parts against the waste of scarce resources and medical futility. In a system

based on the individuality of the goods, on the anonymity and on the gratuitousness of the gesture, this value transcends the person, excludes a possible social or community recognition, keeps the two ends of the donation chain separate. One of the less rational results of this practice, is that the gift of life has come to mean even more for some. Many believe in a vital force that, through the organ, passes to the recipient's body, in some cases also influencing their personality. Thus, a double fetishism is created: that which objectifies organs as things and that which animates them with magical powers (Lock, 2002, pp. 318-320).

Transplanted organs are not always gifts. They are also monetised and placed on an international network that hides their illegal origin and underlying forms of violence. With economic globalization, the movement of goods (including human labour, body parts and corpses) has transcended local meanings and regulations. The exchange processes (illegal in most countries) are rapid and involve a chain of intermediaries, each of whom protects their interests at the expense of the exploitation of those who offer these goods (Lock, 2002, pp. 46-50). Living donors from the most disadvantaged countries are valued as only second-class people and, paradoxically, become more valuable as alienable bodies or dismemberable corpses, than they are as individuals (Benenduce, 2004, p. 96). The rhetoric of selfless altruism coexists with the brutality of a global million dollar organ trafficking enterprise which, in the symbolic and commercial value of the organs and in the alleged anonymity of their origin, incorporates profound inequalities of power (Scheper-Hughes, 2000, pp. 191-224). Therefore, the cannibal metaphor for defining the current neoliberal and global market for organs and body parts is not too far from reality.

Cannibal markets.

The denouncement of how easily, today, a colossal bioengineering industry – founded on banks of blood, sperm and embryos, on inventories of spare parts and genetic materials – forges and controls a medicalized and fragmented body, the epitome of cannibal consumerism,

is a common theme in *neo-noir* and pulp writings, as well as in science fiction literature, comics and the horror cinema of the 1990s.

Ammaniti's debut novel, *Branchie* [Gills] is an adventurous fairy-tale, written in a tragicomic and pulp style that paved the way for the fully Cannibal works that followed. The protagonist is Marco Donati, a thirty-year-old man, terminally ill with lung cancer and boredom for his Roman life, made up of parties, cheap alcohol and disused aquariums. He moves between Rome and India, meeting grotesque characters with extravagant objects. His mother refers him to an illegal organ market. She is the new recruit of a brilliant and ruthless surgeon, who practises experimental surgery based on the bricolage of human parts. As a defender of bio-ethics and moral integrity, Marco prefers to die rather than receive the lungs of a vivisected donor. His point of view collides with his mother's crazed perspective. Unrecognizable after some global aesthetic reconstruction, she praises the crazy doctor who, like a god, builds perfect bodies by joining anatomical pieces of different people, because everyone has something beautiful, be it the nose, be it the gallbladder, be it the ears, be it the duodenum (1994/1997, p. 107). The material of the surgeon's creations are the organs of poor and degraded Indians, sacrificed either voluntarily or by coercion. The final battle between the forces of good and evil takes place between anatomical tables, covered with organs ready for the assembly line, hanging cages of prisoners, destined for the slaughterhouse, calling for mercy, and a final dip in a river of blood, that flows into a lake where human waste floats among crocodiles (pp. 123-129). The happy ending is ensured by the redemption of the villain, who not only saves the protagonist's life by implanting gills, but also puts his art at the service, far less joyful, of medical progress (p. 182-183). The television comedy and horror-splatter comic tones that dominate the narrative weakens the critical content of this work, whose main purpose is to amuse the reader.

The scenes of torture and dismemberment in Young Cannibals' works are often exacerbated in a grotesque way and have an ironic connotation, which does not make the criticism of Italian social customs less bitter.

Dovevo scongelare Claudio, il freezer era tutto incrostato perché da quando lo ho comperato non mi sono mai preso la briga di pulirlo, così il sangue di Claudio, uscendo dai sacchetti, ha sporcato giù tutto il mio freezer. (Nove, 1998, p. 99)

I had to defrost Claudio, the freezer was completely encrusted because since I bought it I have never bothered to clean it, so Claudio's blood, coming out of the bags, has soiled all my freezer.

Aldo Nove clearly demonstrated it in *Superwoobinda*, where he made fun of the surreal outcomes of fetishizing specific parts of the female body, both in reality and in fiction. For example, he describes the absurdity of the consumption of a web-pornography that offers female genitalia like parts of a puzzle and female organic liquids, as well as the fiction mania to use trite images, such as those of anatomical trophies collected because of a sexual trauma suffered in childhood. Many times, the combination of splatter details with scenes of domestic routine highlights the general alienation of characters, who are not ruthless killers but only ordinary people, unable to make sense of death beyond a material and utilitarian interpretation. Other times, Nove strikes people's addiction to the vision of a worldwide violence, constantly renewed by new wars and TV News.

Indigestible violence.

This passive and constant view of a spectacularized and dematerialized violence collides with the daily indifference towards other forms of abuse that, in contrast, are close and tangible.

In Vallorani's *Visto dal cielo* [Seen from the Sky], for example, there is an explicit sameness in the Pasteur's murders of unfortunate children and the series of other brutalities narrated. The corpse of young Guts, well cooked and killed, is only the surreal apex of a "continuum of violence". In other words, there is a usual, creeping, widespread and sometimes

invisible violence that is practised and normalized in the everyday life of some places, such as asylums, prisons and rest homes. It is based on the human ability to reduce others to the state of non-people by means of social exclusion, dehumanization, depersonalization and reification. It also transforms the death of those who count less than others into a routine of little importance (Scheper-Hughes, 2005, pp. 273-282). The marginalized children, in search of revenge for Guts's death, experience an everyday violence within the silent complicity of families and, in the end, they painfully succumb to it. Thus, they are just more victims of unpunished criminals, not so different from the ones produced by full-scale slaughtering institutions. In 2004, when the novel was published, the memory of the massacre of unarmed students at the Diaz school, the tortures at the Bolzaneto police station and the murder of Carlo Giuliani, during the 2001 G8 in Genoa, was still fresh for the author.

The police brutality of that episode, as Andrea Camilleri wrote in the novel *Il giro di boa* [translated as *Rounding the Mark*] (2003), brought to mind the ways of the fascist era, but it is not qualitatively different from what constantly appears as news on the television screen. Hours and hours of slaughtered meat under selective bombardments in Iraq and Afghanistan, of dismembered children who remain alive: stuff for maniacs. Thus, in *Giro di boa*, a toughened Inspector Montalbano comments on yet another report of migrants drowned off the coast of Italy:

Intanto si vedevano immagini di corpi d'annegati, di vrazza che pinnuliavano inerti, di teste arrovesciate narrè, di picciliddri avvolti in inutili coperte che non avrebbero più potuto dare calore alla morte, di volti stravolti di soccorritori, di corse convulse verso ambulanze, di un parrino inginocchiato che pregava. Sconvolgenti. Sì, ma sconvolgenti per chi? – si spiò il commissario. A forza di vederle, quelle immagini così diverse e così simili, lentamente ci si abituava. Uno le taliava, diveva “povirazzi” e continuava a mangiarsi gli spaghetti alle vongole. (Camilleri, 2003, p. 65)

Meanwhile they showed images of drowned corpses, arms dangling inert, heads thrown back, children wrapped in pointless blankets that could never warm their dead bodies again, relief workers with contorted faces, people running wildly to waiting ambulances, a kneeling priest praying. Upsetting stuff. But for whom? the inspector asked himself. The more one saw those kinds of images – so different yet so similar –

the more one got used to them. One looked at them, said “poor things,” and continued eating one’s spaghetti with clam sauce. (Camilleri, 2006, p. 57)

The spectacle of distant death and pain, constantly present in the media, is an integral part of contemporary visual culture and is another source to be taken into account to explain the central position of the corpse and its visualization in contemporary crime fiction. Particularly when these dead bodies get closer, washed away on Italian beaches with wave after wave of migrants. “If it bleeds, it leads”: an increasing flow of non-stop imagery, made of death and corpses, surrounds, informs and entertains the modern spectator of elsewhere atrocities and calamities in the daily news (Sontag, 2003). The presence of those images on the television, computer and phone screens is one of the ways in which dead bodies creep into our general visual culture, notwithstanding the fact that these bodies are usually damaged, maimed, annihilated by the violence of faraway wars etc.

Aldo Nove could not resist having his say on the theme: “Questa violenza che c’è in giro, la vedi dappertutto” [This violence all around, you can see this violence around] (1998, p. 71). His *Superwoobinda*’s characters take to the extreme the effects of this constant incorporeal flow of blood and dismemberment happening elsewhere than in Italy. In *Ruanda* [Rwanda], a man is obsessed with seeing all kinds of deaths in the war between Hutu and Tutsi. Thanks to the screens installed everywhere, he can always connect with the news: under the water of the swimming pool, while parking, in the mountains on his self-synchronizing wrist TV (when stopping to admire the landscape and eat something), while defecating. The protagonist of *Baghdad*, on the other hand, reacts in an even more alienated way to the discovery of the Arab-American conflict: “Proprio come pensavo. Tutti i telegiornali dicono che adesso c’è la guerra. Ho caricato mia moglie sull’automobile, i miei figli, il cane e siamo andati all’Esselunga” [Just as I thought. All the news says there is now war. I have put my wife in the car, my children, the dog and we have gone to the supermarket] (Nove, 1998, p. 121).

Shape-Shifter Serial Killers

The abnormal body is the dominant theme of the detective/*noir* novels written by Carlo Lucarelli between 1994 and 2013, starring inspector Grazia Negro: *Lupo mannaro* [Werewolf] (1994), *Almost Blue* (1997), *Un giorno dopo l'altro* [Day after Day] (2000), *Il sogno di volare* [The Dream of Flying] (2013) and the short story *A girl like you* published in the anthology *Giochi criminali* [Criminal Games] (2014). As we have seen, Lucarelli has been one of the most representative writers of the new generation of *neo-noir* authors. In all four novels, we find a trained police team, highly specialized and equipped with cutting edge investigative technologies, whose members hunt for a serial murderer, skilful in changing appearance and mixing human qualities and feral traits. In other words, a shapeshifter specialized in massacring more or less innocent victims.

Werewolf.

The first of Lucarelli's monsters comes from *Lupo mannaro* [Werewolf]. The engineer Velasco is father of a family, successful businessman and politician by day, perverse murderer by night, when he captures young drug addicted prostitutes and then bites them to death. Commissioner Romeo, suffering from lethal hereditary insomnia, a genetic pathology of the nervous system that is getting worse and worse, is assisted by the young policewoman Grazia Negro. Here, in her debut, she is already characterized by a rationality strongly influenced by instinct. The police procedures are very modern and computerized and make use of scientific analysis of the crime scene and psychological profiling of the serial killer. In 1990s Italian crime fiction, these techniques were establishing themselves and still had not achieved the popularity they would come to achieve after the worldwide success of TV series such as *CSI*. The narrative, as in all the novels in the series, alternates the point of view of different characters. The reader follows Romeo's mind going into madness, as well as the lupine engineer's heinous violence, seeing him brutally biting the corpses more like a hyena or a jackal

than like a werewolf would. At certain moments, he appears unaware of his actions, like a beast. Usually, however, he is fully aware of his own behaviour. He perfectly hides his murders, even makes fun of himself (as when he tries, unsuccessfully, to howl next to one of the victims) and gives the commissioner a pragmatic reason for his acts:

Io vinco e lei perde. Sinceramente, credo che il mio metodo sia un attimino migliore del suo, dal punto di vista produttivo (...) l'unica cosa che non so è perché le mordo. Tra l'altro, trattandosi di soggetti a rischio è anche un attimino poco igienico. (1994, pp. 67-68)

I win and you lose. Honestly, I believe that my method is a little bit better than yours, from the point of view of productivity (...) the only thing I don't know is why I bite them. Among other things, because they are subjects at risk, it is also a little bit unhygienic.

In the engineer's speech there is repetition of the expression "un attimino" [a little bit], which became trendy in 1990s' Italian language and was parodied, a couple of years later, by Aldo Nove in *Un attimino bella* [A Little Bit Beautiful], a chapter of *Woobinda* (1996). Here, as in Nove, the words evoke the expressive poverty and, by synecdoche, the smallness of mind that is hidden behind the brilliant appearance of the successful exponents of the *Berlusconi* society, such as, not only entrepreneurs, lawyers and financiers, but also actresses, show girls and models. The manner of speaking of Velasco, who also often repeats "please allow me", is an explicit example of the linguistic tics of the entrepreneur and politician Silvio Berlusconi (Pieri, 2007a, p. 196). Or rather, the werewolf is to be seen as a metaphor for capitalist greed and neoliberal ferocity, which sucks the blood of ordinary people. The motive for murders, as a matter of fact, is simply the stress accumulated in a managerial job. Velasco kills to get better and boasts an absolute moral relativism that makes him immune to that sense of guilt through which, according to the criminologist consulted by the police, it would have been possible to frame him. The capture turns out to be quite complicated. First of all, the early stages of the investigation are hampered by the Italian reluctance to employ new methods and lexicons and

to accept that, in the region famous for tortellini, there may be a serial killer. This is how the deputy prosecutor replies to the commissioner:

Non ci sono altri casi. Glielo ho già detto una volta cosa penso della sua teoria del *serial killer*... guardi un po', lo vede? Anche la parola... è americana e qua siamo in Italia e non in America. Da noi si chiamano *mostri* e sono come quelli che tirano i sassi sulle autostrade o quei calabresi (...) A Modena, poi, in Emilia! (Lucarelli, 1994, p. 34)

There are no other cases. I already told him once what I think of his serial killer theory... look a little, do you see it? Even the word... is American and here we are in Italy and not in America. We call them monsters and they are like those who throw stones on the highways or those from Calabria (...) In Modena, then, in Emilia!

It is a difference of ideas. Commissioner Romeo, the young inspector Grazia and the criminologist Professor Gatto find an analogy in the *modus operandi* behind the twenty-three victims, pointing towards a single criminal mind. In the same way, they imagine the territory of crimes as a Los Angeles-like macro-area, which goes north from Bologna to Piacenza and south to Ancona, crossed by the ancient Via Emilia as an American road, inhabited by subjects always on the move, such as taxi drivers, truck drivers, prostitutes, salesmen and students (De Lorenzis, 2017). Professor Gatto's character is the spokesperson for the didactic approach that distinguishes Lucarelli's work, both in fiction and in television true crime and unsolved mysteries programs, as well as in his non-fiction dedicated to crime. He explains how, in Italy, the criminological concept of serial murderer was missing and only after the so-called Florence facts did the investigative approach change.

SAM, the *anti-monster* team, was born in 1984 precisely to seek the person responsible for the murders attributed to the monster of Florence. Still in the 1990s it was preferred to use the word *mostro* [monster], a term that transposes the meaning on an irrational, gothic and fantastic level, or *omicida seriale* [multiple murder], thus indicating, not the seriality of the crimes, but the multiplicity (Nerenberg, 2012, pp. 55-56). However, the point of view of the science is only one among others, and not decisive. The ability of profiling to predict, in particular, is limited. The werewolf, classified by the psychiatrist as "impulsivo cosciente"

[consciously impulsive] (Lucarelli, 1994, p. 60), should be guided by a morbid and perverse will but, like all serial killers, he should also have weaknesses, such as guilt and the need to make cadavers disappear. On the contrary, he does not. Moreover, he is protected by the gap between his political and economic weight and the social invisibility of his victims, mostly young, drug addicted and casual prostitutes. He is the metaphor of the guilt-free and ruthless neoliberalism indeed.

The only way to get him is, in the end, a tribute to the Italian *noir* tradition. Grazia, following in the footsteps of Scerbanenco's Livia, in *Venere privata* [A Private Venus] (1966), disguises herself as a prostitute to lure and catch him in the act. The ending remains open with the feral clash between the two, but the reader can foresee a happy ending. Both the lucid pragmatism of the engineer, which only leaves unexplained why he likes to bite the victims so much, and that of the scientific investigations are beaten by a corporal resolution, with a monster hunted by setting traps.

The subsequent novels present a similar narrative and stylistic structure. A polyphonic narration follows the serial crimes of a heinous murderous shapeshifter and the police investigation, which combines high-tech approaches with inspector Negro's instinct and intelligence, occasionally helped by characters suffering from some perceptual alteration.

Iguana.

Almost Blue has been one of Lucarelli's most successful novels and the best known of the series (Somigli, 2011, p. 81), in part thanks to the cinematographic transposition of the same name (2001), which had more luck than the film *Lupo mannaro* [Werewolf] (2000). In both cases, Lucarelli participated in writing both the storyline and the screenplay.

In this novel, he applied a successful narrative model, combining the *CSI* scientific approach with mystery fiction's investigations and the hard-boiled thrills, following the

example of North American literary and television crime fiction. All the necessary ingredients are there: a politically correct investigation team (a young woman of southern origin, menstruating, a criminologist who ends badly and a blind guy), accurate descriptions of the crime scene, realistic scientific procedures and, of course, a psychopathic killer.

This time, the murderer, a brutal killer of Bolognese students, is a young man capable of completely transfiguring himself and taking on the characteristics of his most recent victim when killing the next. He is nicknamed Iguana for his ability to change his outward appearance¹⁷. On his tracks are the chief commissioner Vittorio Poletto, a pioneer of the scientific investigation, and the twenty-six-year-old inspector Grazia Negro. The plot sounds almost banal today, when the serial killer and its antagonist, the profiler, are among the most popular characters in crime fiction but, in 1997 Italy, Lucarelli was a forerunner of editorial trends (De Lorenzis, 2017).

The police investigation is related in the third person, mainly through the point of view of Grazia, who has now become the protagonist and features all the characteristics she will have throughout the series. Her animal pragmatism (Lucarelli, 1997, p. 66) and stubborn instinct (p. 30) are indispensable tools to capture crazy and elusive serial killers, but her feminized body is also emphasized.

Grazia enters the series of novels as a chosen member of the *UACS (Unit for the Analysis of Violent Crimes)*, a consultancy group in investigations concerning alleged serial

¹⁷ The choice of the name Iguana and its ability to transform himself into the appearance of the victims refer to a series of literary reptiles, such as the monster in Anna Maria Ortese's novel, *L'iguana* [Iguana] (1965). The careful removal of the epidermis recalls *The Silence of the Lambs* (Harris, 1989), but the greatest debt is to the first work of the Hannibal Lecter trilogy, *Red Dragon* (Harris, 1981), where the killer is covered with ink as a second skin, tattooing the huge red dragon drawn by the poet William Blake. It also worth mentioning another reptile that appeared in Italian *neo-noir* literature in 1997 with the first novel of the Alligator series, created by Massimo Carlotto. The theme of skin, peeling, deformed and monstrous returns also in the works of other 1990s writers, such as in Eraldo Baldini's *Bambine* [Girls] (1995) and in Andrea Pinketts' novels (Nerenberg, 2012, pp. 66-67).

killers¹⁸. Despite the trust of the Chief Scientific Officer and the team in her tenacity and skills, she has to put up with well-meaning but diminishing nicknames like *bambina* [little girl], and the male effort to reconcile the concepts of police officer and menstruation:

Non mi starai male proprio adesso, vero? (...)

Non sarà l'influenza? [...]

Vittorio, ho le mestruazioni. Stanno per venirmi le mie cose, va bene? Tranquillo, mi fa sempre così... è normale.

Vittorio disse – Ah – e per un momento le lasciò il braccio, imbarazzato. (...)

Lo so che è normale, Grazia, – disse. – Sei una donna.

Sono un poliziotto. (pp. 18-19)

- You won't be sick right now, will you? (...)

- Could be the flu? [...]

- Vittorio, I am menstruating. My period is coming, okay? Quiet, it is always like this... it's normal.

Vittorio said – Ah – and, for a moment, he let go her arm, embarrassed. (...)

- I know it's normal, Grazia – he said. – You're a woman.

- I am a police officer.

Her uterus is always present in the series of novels. It makes its entrance with the menstrual cramps that mark the rhythm of the detection progress in *Almost Blue*, develops in the love and sexual relationship with her partner Simone in *Un giorno dopo l'altro* [Day after Day], with whom she tries to conceive a baby by assisted fertilization in *Il sogno di volare* [The Dream of Flying], until the pregnancy at risk in *A girl like you*. Her fight to be respected in the male chauvinist world where she works is constantly and inexorably linked to her body.

This emphasis on Grazia's body is far from the feminist extreme representations we have seen in the previous paragraphs. On the contrary, the author gave space to a number of points of view, as well as a sexist one, for which being a woman ends up negating other roles, such as that of a police officer. In particular, in the latest story, the inspector forgoes acting on

¹⁸ The *UACV* was founded by the nuclear physicist Carlo Bui, who entered the special investigations section in 1992 after a period at both the *Behavioral Science Unit* in Quantico and Scotland Yard. The unit has been operating since 1997, today it employs 70 specialists and is a center of excellence for Europol. The working method consists of starting from the crime scene to reach a logical-investigative profile. The descriptive paradigm of the unknown author of a crime is obtained on the basis of the semiotic observation of the scene and the comparative and statistical analysis of the national series (Picozzi, 2006, pp. 92-93).

her hunches to safeguard her pregnancy. These intuitions, however, would have revealed the culprit of a series of murders. Two women, mother and daughter, who exploited the female body as a weapon for a morally justifiable revenge. Through the beautiful and young Amina's body, they managed to kill all those responsible for the suicide of a teenager, who was desperate because of gambling. Lucarelli left unpunished their "female justice", external to the law, but at the same time pushed Grazia away from work – "Questa volta no." [Not this time] (2014, p. 184), she repeats to herself – in favour of motherhood, thus satisfying the expectations of his wide readership.

Besides Grazia and her pragmatism, there is a second crucial character in *Almost Blue*. Simone is a blind young man, who spends the night listening to the jazz song *Almost Blue* by Chet Baker and intercepting the voices of the city:

Ascolto. Scandaglio il silenzio che mi circonda, come uno scanner (...) ascolto le voci della città. Io, Bologna, non l'ho mai vista. Ma la conosco bene. (1997, pp. 7-9)

I listen. I probe the silence that surrounds me, like a scanner (...) I listen to the voices of the city. Bologna, I have never seen it. But I know it well.

His extraordinary ability to know things without seeing them, based on the difference between normal hearing and proper listening, appears as the sensorial transposition of that circumstantial capacity not just to *look*, but also to *see*, deeply and in detail, to grasp the clues and discover a truth not directly attainable. Only by following Simone's approach, do the police eventually identify the invisible Iguana. His criminal profile, reconstructed from fingerprints, photographs and psychiatric reports, is only an empty container, unable to keep up with his rapid metamorphosis. In contrast, Simone, by dint of probing the ether and capturing conversations of radio amateurs, truck drivers, taxi drivers, police officers and mobile phones users, eventually runs into the voice of the murderer: a green voice, hidden in white noise.

Non mi piace. È una voce verde. (...) è una voce verde ed è verde perché non ha colore. Il colore di una voce è dato dal respiro che uno ci mette. (...) Questa voce non è niente. (...) è una voce verde che finge. (pp. 36 -37)

I do not like it. It's a green voice. (...) It's a green voice and it's green because it has no color. The color of a voice is given by the breath one puts in it. (...) This voice is nothing. (...) It's a green voice that pretends.

Thanks to this creative capability, synaesthesia that he developed to compensate for his visual deficiency, he tracks down the killer because he recognizes the chromatic qualities of the voice, while the special police forces fail to do so.

A hearing alteration also detects the serial killer, but in a pathological sense. While Simone's darkness is dominated by gloomy music and the sounds of Bologna, Iguana is tormented by hallucinating perceptions. Among them, he sees a green animal, running fast under his own skin, and hears the "bells of Hell", a mournful and frightful sound he can only suffocate with loud music in the headphones. His psychosis is described as a macabre and fantastic worldview that carries the reader inside his madness, his inescapable pain and his loneliness.

We are no longer facing an entrepreneur with the habit of relieving stress by biting corpses. Here, the shapeshifter is a subject suffering from schizophrenia, marked by a childhood of abandonment, abuse and failed psychiatric care. His mental state takes on a particular and pervasive biological form, making the boundaries of his body permeable. He perceives his psychic condition as if it concerned his own body, he kills to incorporate the identity of the victims. The reader finds out how he became a serial killer through a series of documents that mimic specialist jargon: a *POP (Psychological Offender Profile)*; the testimonies of a child neuropsychiatrist, a psychologist and a priest; the Bologna police report and the transcription of an interrogation. The fingerprints found at the crime scenes nail the thirty-year-old Alessio Crotti, believed to be dead after starting a fire in the asylum where he had been locked up. Actually, he survived and rose up from the fire like a salamander.

Terrified of death, represented by the incessant ringing of the bells, Iguana kills younger and younger victims, and reincarnates as them in order to never die. This is why he kills people: he tears to pieces, crushes and destroys them, then he strips them naked, he strips himself naked and takes on their appearance, as if he were covering himself with a second skin (pp. 96-97). He does not have a defined face, he is uncatchable even after being found by the blind guy. Only when he goes in person to meet his hunters, can he be stopped. He is in Simone's house, naked (i.e., momentarily without identity and form) and ready to kill Simone and take his appearance. Iguana wants to be Simone because the blind guy, without seeing him, is the only one to actually see him for real. The synaesthesia of the blind met the metaphors of the mad in an act of mutual and necessary recognition. After this moment, everything is played out in the final fight between the tough gal Grazia and the monster. In this last sequence, the points of view of Grazia, Simone and Iguana alternate quickly, as in a parallel cinematographic montage, and finally collide (Somigli, 2011, p. 82).

The whole novel, indeed, is built in this way, alternating, not only narrative voices, but also detailed police reconstructions, scientific digressions and anecdotes, which keep the reader's attention, not unlike what Lucarelli does in his crime television programs. In the ever shifting perspective of the narrative, which includes the investigation's findings, the murderer's crazy thoughts and the blind person's perceptions, the public cannot easily take a viewpoint. In the end, the bad guy is restrained in a psychiatric hospital, where, in a curious way, he heals. In his last metamorphosis, clinging to Simone, he has blinded himself with a cutter. Then, the touch has become colour, the bells have given way to an obsession for jazz and the animal running under his skin has let himself be silenced with 50 mg of *Serenace* (haloperidol) every 15 days. Self-mutilation has worked as a poetic healing act. Thus, the irrationality represented by the extreme mutations of Iguana has been deprived of the potential subversive power and bent for a purpose of order. In the happy ending, the ideal and lawful framework is recomposed,

according to which the good policemen take the bad criminals, the madmen are treated or, at least, kept in their “leper colony”. This end, at the same time original and traditional, must be read within the irony that pervades the novel, sparing nothing, and invites a non-literal reading of the text.

It is the exploitation of the narrative clichés of the splatter genre, to which *Almost Blue* cannot fail to belong, that is targeted by Lucarelli’s irony. Hyperbole defines everyone: Grazia’s reproductive apparatus spreads through the clue moments of the investigation, Simone’s synaesthesia classifies all the people through the colour of their voice, Iguana’s somatic metamorphoses massacre the victims, and victims themselves are wildly slaughtered.

Pitt Bull.

Pitt Bull, the protagonist of *Un giorno dopo l'altro* [Day after Day], has transformational skills. Under the guise of Vittorio, a thirty-year-old commercial agent who leads a boring and vaguely inept life in the company of an oppressive mother and girlfriend, there is actually a professional killer, able to change identity as he wishes, who kills alone without missing a shot (2000, p. 48). He is tenacious like a pit-bull, when he bites his prey. On his trail, in addition to Grazia Negro, now in the anti-mafia *Sezione Catturandi*, there is Alex, a depressed and sleepless boy, who is employed by an Internet provider to monitor the chat rooms. Night janitor, electronic postman and cyber patrol for paedophiles, he obsessively listens to the song by Luigi Tenco that gives the title to the novel.

Vittorio, for his part, is a maniac of precision. When he shoots, he protects his shirt from the spatters of blood, leaves the cushions with which he suffocates the victims immaculate, turns locks with the pick, millimetre after millimetre for infinite minutes. Above all, he patiently models latex casts of other people’s body. He dismantles the pieces and

reassembles them on himself: not only parts of the body, but also characteristics, voices and gestures. The nose of an old man broken by life, the gait of an energetic host, a Ferrarese accent outside its area, a denture with a chipped tooth, a wig, coloured lenses, face powder to discolour the skin, a piercing etc. His motto is: to adapt, to adapt, to adapt. It doesn't take much to look like another. It is more difficult to be another. As in the case of the Iguana, the police are grappling with an assassin who made metamorphosis his (second) talent and he is uncatchable. His features even deceive the scientific program for anthropometric comparisons.

The police are put on the right track, again, with the help of a kind, melancholic and lonely young man, who accidentally comes across an online chat between Pitt Bull and his instigator. Alex has a dog, a reminder of his ex-girlfriend who abandoned them, who is named *Cane* [Dog] and looks like a pit-bull but is not. The recurrence of this assertion is a further invitation to read history in a non-literal sense, if Vittorio's camouflage was not sufficient to remind the reader that people are masks that cover changing and elusive identities.

The three of them, Grazia, Alex and Vittorio, suffer from loneliness, but the killer's position is the most extreme. His character incorporates the author's socially critical and ironic message. The dull and spineless appearance of the young assassin hides his authentic and brutal competence. Pitt Bull, at the age of ten, had already killed a peer and since then he had been trained in the profession by a mafia boss. His psychiatric report describes him as a bloodthirsty narcissist who expresses his theatrical ability and, when "naked", seems nothing, completely anonymous like a primer before makeup (Lucarelli, 2000, p. 230). This report is dismissed as "bullshit" by the commissioner and does not contribute to his capture. Once again, as in *Almost Blue*, he is the one to find Grazia and to be, in the end, overwhelmed by her in an animalistic clash. The psychologist and everyone else had understood nothing of Pitt Bull, but it is not her job to understand him. Her job is to take him (p. 260).

The validity of the psychiatric report, which claims to shed light on the criminal's personality and to predict his conduct on the basis of symptoms that appeared at an early age, is targeted by the writer's irony. Not only does he allude to himself as a journalist, pretending to be a criminologist who didn't understand a fuck (Lucarelli, 2000, p. 85), but he also repeatedly stresses the futility of a discipline that reliably fails in his predictions and rehabilitations. Pitt Bull, like Iguana, despite being a monster, is a co-protagonist of the story. His point of view is almost as valid as that of Grazia, representative of the established order. His madness is a way of being that challenges the normalizing push of society, even if it is eventually annihilated by the heroine's intervention.

Dog.

In the novel *Il sogno di volare* [The Dream of Flying], Grazia has become an inspector of Antimafia and she contemplates without enthusiasm ultrasound scans of her uterus (which appear to her as scanned fingerprints or images of surveillance cameras sent by fax) and investigates an alleged gangster's murder.

A student, the grandson of a building contractor who is also one of the most wanted bosses in Italy, was murdered with bare hands. His teeth, nose, ears, tongue and jaw have been torn off. Other murders follow the first, and it is always the same bestial massacre by a murderer who snarls, drools, bites like a rabid dog and leaves a tear on the clothes at heart level. Extreme violence, excessive brutality and lacerations to reach the hearts of victims, united only by the fact that they are anything but innocent, make one think of an organized and very angry serial killer taking revenge against an unfair world. *Il Cane* [The Dog] attacks the most immediate and accessible symbols of this unjust society, choosing people involved with the illegality and exploitation of things and persons, such as building speculation or the smuggling of toxic waste.

Grazia Negro is immediately called to investigate, but she is frightened, because she still remembers the nightmare of the Iguana. Now she prefers mobsters, with their fierce but rational logic, to all the monsters that she has captured in the past, with that violence that comes “from somewhere inside” and that is not easy to understand (2013, p. 44). Even the Dog, in fact, is a psychopathic killer suffering from dissociative identity disorder, also known as multiple personality disorder. During the investigation, four personalities emerge: “C’è il Cane, il Giovane, quello che tiene un blog, e l’altro, il Vecchio, quello che si arrabbia.” [There is the Dog, the Younger, the one who runs a blog, and the other, the Old Man, the one who gets angry.] (p. 154). His identities are in conflict with each other, to the point that he hunts himself. The ferocious killer, indeed, turns out to be the young Captain Pierluigi, who investigates, together with Grazia, and who begins a relationship with her while looking for the Dog. Meanwhile, a third personality shouts for help on the blog where the fourth proclaims that it will eat the hearts of all the oppressors of the poor people.

Thus, in this fourth novel, the serial killer is again a mentally ill man, who transforms himself into a ferocious beast, but this time he is angry about social disparities and no longer a predator of innocent lives. The narrator’s critical position towards the excesses of the psychiatrization of antisocial and criminal behaviour appears to have changed. Psychiatry was already present in *Lupo mannaro*, where a criminologist failed to predict the conduct of the serial killer. In *Almost Blue* more space was devoted to it: Grazia dealt with a mad murderer in textbook fashion. Ironic critique, perhaps winking to Michel Foucault’s masturbator, as described in his lessons on the *Anormaux* [Abnormal] (1999/2003, pp. 60-61), is evident in one of the psychological testimonies of the Iguana as a child (Lucarelli, 1997, p. 84).

Foucault, tracing a brief history of psychiatry in modern and contemporary European society, explained how this discipline has psychiatrized a series of behaviours related to family relationships. The ancient science of the alienists stopped dealing with delirium, dementia,

delusions and other mental alienation, and became interested in the obsessed and the perverse. Psychiatry was then used to explain a range of conducts, disorders, threads and dangers to the familiar relationships. Dozens of dossiers of children began to appear. As soon as they showed bad family feelings, they became psychiatric objects, with pathological symptoms that required internment and intervention (Foucault, 1999/2003, pp. 146-150). The masturbator, together with the human monster and the individual to be corrected, was one of the principal targets of mental medicine between the 18th and the 19th centuries (pp. 57-60). Lucarelli's expertise in giving space to a multiplicity of perspectives included the psychiatric report. Sometimes, it is targeted by explicit irony. At other times, it is entrusted with more credibility, as in this fourth novel, when Grazia's attitude is more favourable toward psychiatry.

However, what clearly eventuates is the effect of the advanced psychiatrization of crime and society. The psychiatric report has progressively rewritten the infringement as an individual trait. More and more, we have focused, not so much on the crime, as on the way of being of the delinquent, to the point of making the way of being the crime itself. The breach of law has been interpreted as irregularity with respect to physiological, psychological and moral rules. The psychiatric report, in particular, is called for primarily to separate between illness and responsibility, since madness cancels the crime and, therefore, the medical institution has replaced the judicial one in taking charge of the guilty. It has scientifically legitimized the punishment, which has become a set of techniques for treating, transforming and re-educating, or otherwise segregating, the mad delinquents. Thus, over the course of two centuries, offenders have passed from being the legal target requiring punishment to being the object of a knowledge and technology of repair, re-adaptation, reintegration and correction. Today, offenders are evaluated in terms of normal and pathological. Punishment has become a power of healing, normalizing and preventing the abnormal (Foucault, 1999/2003, pp. 25-46). This idea, i.e., that monsters are recognizable by the resemblance between their criminal acts and

their most intimate nature, has been ironically portrayed by Lucarelli's shape-shifter killers, who unleash their true inner beast. It has been exaggerated to the extreme.

The renewed attitude of the inspector, in the last novel, perhaps reflects that of the author, who published numerous essays with the actual criminologist Massimo Picozzi, on topics such as serial killers, sex offenders, crime scene analysis and, in general, the dialectic between science and crime. The Picozzi character, immediately presented as a trustworthy expert on the subject, explains the Dog's dissociative identity disorder. He comments that it is a nice suggestion for the imagination of a culture fascinated by the idea of the *Doppelgänger*, and also a good defence strategy in a trial (Lucarelli, 2013, p. 155). During the detection, everyone hopes that one of the Dog's personalities, called *Pentito* [Repentant], shows up, but actually the investigators are all blinded to the fact that the monster is one of them, in the form of the kind and intelligent Captain Pierluigi, who collaborates with Grazia and is, himself, oblivious to his own alter-identity. In reality, the crazy assassin is hunting himself. His madness knows no bounds (pp. 161-162).

The metaphors used by the writer in *Almost Blue* to describe Iguana's hallucinated world have been substituted here with a trendier didactical scientific jargon: prefrontal cortex, amygdala, adrenaline and dopamine. But the result does not change. There is no salvation from the universal evil, from the rotten world, against which the Dog takes revenge in bites. There is no shelter from his own evil, which makes him a slave to a primordial instinct (like a shark, he says), and from a disorder manifested as anger against injustice. The only solution, as always, is a ferocious fight with Grazia.

The Dog reminds us of the true case of the serial killer Gianfranco Stevanin, "the Veronese werewolf", as told by Lucarelli and Picozzi in their non-fiction work, *Scena del crimine* [Crime Scene] (2006, pp. 37-50). His legal story is described as a battle of psychiatric

reports (p. 47). The trial began in 1997, when he was accused of six murders committed with premeditation and cruelty, for abject reasons, taking advantage of a state of inferiority of the victims, and of concealment, mutilation and dismemberment of the corpses. The real mystery – Lucarelli also dedicated an episode of his TV show *Blu Notte* [Blue Night] (2000, Oct. 10) to that same story – is whether Stevanin intentionally killed or not. Initially, he was sentenced to life imprisonment but, on appeal, the sentence was reversed, and he was deemed mentally incompetent due to an injury to the limbic area that presides over emotions and aggression. In 2000 the court of cassation quashed the sentence and postponed the case to review. The new verdict confirmed life imprisonment: he was found guilty and mentally capable of understanding the crimes committed, with the motive to satisfy his degenerate libido and the aggravating factors of choosing the victims among defenceless people, and his lack of remorse (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 47-50).

Multifaceted truth.

Altogether, Lucarelli's bright and unpredictable monsters, who compulsively change their identity, are variations of the same idea, developed in the series of novels. On the one hand, the excesses of the medicalization of crime, which transforms punishment into health treatment and turns delinquents into monsters, are addressed both through irony and the portrayal of a savage violence. On the other hand, the traditional happy ending ensures the capture of the bad guy and the victory of the detective.

The deviant killers, however, are of a different type. The madness of the engineer Velasco hints at the true nature that hides behind the facade of the successful entrepreneur, dedicated to work and champion of family values. It is a symbol of how this type of luck is made (in bites) on the skin of the weakest, of the invisible who stands on the edge of a society that he sucks dry. The Iguana and the Dog stand on the other side. They are the abject, sick with anger and terror, executioners as well as victims, not only of their own madness, but also

of a system incapable of (and uninterested in) caring for and taking charge of them. The pain they experience enters their body space like a shifter that triggers violence and turns them into beasts. Their suffering is a form of rebellion that breaks their body and mind into pieces. They rebel against the unbearable perception of reality (the bells of hell, the animal under the skin, the personalities who fight against each other), the injustices that they have suffered as children or that they see every day around them. The language they have at their disposal is that of their experience of illness. Theirs is a fragmented body, estranged, perceptually and emotionally stunned, alienated from the centre of the ego and saturated by the implosion of a multiplicity of incoherent sensations (Rodler, 2000, pp. 138-141).

Then, we have the exponents of science – Professor Gatto, Professor Morri, the clinical history of the Iguana – who try to outline the profile of the bestial nature of serial killers but, despite the attention to modern psychiatry, criminology and crime scene analysis, they fail. Lucarelli's in-depth knowledge of the history of psychiatry and forensic psychiatry goes along with his narrative capability and awareness of the mechanisms of diffusion of mass culture. He also demonstrated this ability in the novel *L'ottava vibrazione* [The Eighth Vibration] (2008), where, to reach a large audience, he adopted an ambiguous language that seems to appreciate the Fascist and colonial ideologies but, instead, is openly and strongly critical of them (Manai, 2012). He is extremely aware of the importance of media and he has made extensive use of the means of advertising available in the web age, starting from his personal website, which helped build his public image, both as an author attentive to readers and as an established writer appreciated by critics. Its intermedia fluidity is accompanied by the tendency to tell stories similar to each other and to exploit the same narrative techniques, such as the alternation of testimonies, anecdotes and scientific data, to keep the attention of the audience and invite different interpretations.

His works present an original interaction between crime fiction and true crime, especially in relation to the idea of a writing committed to denouncing social evils (Pieri, 2007a, p. 194). Lucarelli has presented himself, not as a simple crime narrator, but as a journalist-historian-detective, exploiting his talent by overlapping the boundaries between fiction and reality. His insistence on scientific research and technological developments in forensic disciplines has given an aura of authenticity to his fiction. Nevertheless, despite insisting on the *neo-noir* fiction as a form of investigation and engagement, Lucarelli has often not taken an explicit position among the many he has brought to light. In Giuliana Pieri's opinion, this would confirm him as a master of suspense but not of detection. He would have taken away from the characters the role of champion of truth and tried to take it on himself but remaining ideologically ambiguous (pp. 195-201). Pieri supported this interpretation because there is no manifest social criticism in the writer's works, as one could expect from a socially engaged literature. However we disagree with Pieri. Such a vision of commitment takes us back to the level of the socialist realism of Andrej Ždanov and to a moral didacticism that, fortunately, Lucarelli has spared the reader.

His texts offer several and contradictory intertwined perspectives, without telling directly the public what to think. Some readers can appreciate the respect toward police authority and crime fiction's tradition, personified by the undefeatable Grazia, whereas others can be amused by the disrespect shown by the mad villains, who challenge law and order. The readers pleasure in identifying with one character or another goes along with the possibility of finding both what is expected and what surprises (Ross, 1989, pp. 1-14).

Bad or Mad

The *Gorilla* saga.

Another author writing about personality disorders in a *neo-noir* frame is Sandrone Dazieri, who created the *Gorilla* saga, set in Milan between 1998 and 2011, with his most recent novel published at the end of 2019. At the core of these novels, which combine classic detection with typical hard-boiled violence, there is a private investigator without a license, a former bouncer and repentant bodyguard, who investigates by fighting in the sordid submerged life of the metropolis.

Gorilla's peculiarity is his creative way of managing the schizophrenia he suffers, thus avoiding medicalization. He has a *Doppelgänger*, his business partner and alter ego, called Socio [Partner], who is a tough guy, like a Dashiell Hammett tough guy. The Partner is a guest personality and not always welcome. He wakes up in the hours reserved for sleep, so he has the attributes of the investigator of the night: he hangs out at bad places, drinks and smokes, distributes and receives punches. Obviously, since he represents the investigative vocation of the protagonist, when he takes over he loses myopia and sees very well. The two try to make room for a mutual lifestyle and inquiring style, by communicating through a system of notes left in the kitchen and by loving the same woman.

According to Dazieri's words, the invention of the Gorilla was a response to those American thrillers focused on the sick figure of the serial killer, as opposed to the healthy one of the police officer, the detective, or of the good guy (Zola, 2006, p. 21). It was a way to show that, sometimes, the so-called normal are the more frightening. In what seemed to be the last work in the series, Socio is killed with a gunshot wound to the head, leaving the Gorilla alone inside his own mind, and ending his detective work. However, the death was only temporary, and the mad couple is now back in action in a subsequent publication.

Compared with Lucarelli's work, here we find a much clearer condemnation of the psychiatrization and medicalization of forms of protest and rebellion. The Gorilla boasts Manichean morality, whose positive pole is occupied by socially marginal conduct and the negative pole by representatives of established power and capitalist economy. As we saw in Vallorani's *noir*, the humorous critique of Milanese society takes the opposites to the extreme. On the one hand, there is the great well-being of unscrupulous entrepreneurs and, on the other, the urban pariahs of underground movements, squats, rave gatherings, etc. (Pieri & Rinaldi, 2011, pp. 139-140). Against neoliberal individualism, which tends to profit and leads to social isolation, the writer suggests community spirit, which addresses interests and common goods, and inclusiveness. Against the hypocrisy of the family and patriarchal values, he presents friendship networks and love relationships based on gender equality and mutual respect. The re-appropriation of degraded urban spaces and neighbourhoods, typically inhabited by the underworld, through the community principle and collective participation in common goods, are described as ways to escape the marginalization of industrial society (Runcini, 1979, pp. 182-183)¹⁹.

The novel *La cura del Gorilla* [The Gorilla Cure] inspired the film of the same name (2006), a *spaghetti-noir* produced by Colorado Film and Warner Bros Pictures Italy, with Dazieri's storyline and screenplay, together with Pasquale Plastino, directed by Carlo A. Sigon²⁰. Gorilla and Partner are played by the comic actor Claudio Bisio, who makes this Doppelgänger more fragile and tormented than the literary version (Zola, 2006, pp. 19-23).

¹⁹ See Pezzotti (2012, pp. 29-35), who analyzed Dazieri's ideological portrait of Milan, a city made up of clear contrasts between the non-communicating spaces of rich and criminal society and those of the misfits, who are always unjustly accused of crimes never committed and who are ready for solidarity.

²⁰ Dazieri also worked as a screenwriter for the TV series *Crimini* [Crimes] (2006-2010) and for several detective serials, such as *Squadra Antimafia* [Antimafia Squad] (2009) and *RIS Roma – Delitti imperfetti* [RIS Rome – Imperfect crimes] (2010-2012).

Between the second to last and the last, unexpected, episode of the Gorilla, Dazieri released another series, the best-selling *Father's Trilogy*, in which *neo-noir* mixes with James Bond-style action. The protagonists are a bizarre couple of detectives, formed by an invincible but traumatized policewoman (Colomba Caselli) and an elegant and crazy young man (Dante Torre) who survived years of segregation and torture in an on-farm silo. Here, too, the theme of madness is in the foreground and its unique contribution to detection is always enhanced. The reductionism of psychiatry is rejected but, especially in the third novel, *Il re di denari* [translated as *Kill the King*] (2018), the scientific and technological approach occupy an unprecedented space in the writer's works. Accurate and repetitive descriptions of the scientific police procedures and medical examiner's specialist analyses are accompanied by a real explosion of bodies massacred in the most imaginative, perverse and detailed ways. *Tutine* [literally the overalls, meaning the forensics] (p. 68), as narrator appeals to them by simulating police jargon, are always at work, are reliable and indeed crucial for the solution of the intricate case. When compared to the Gorilla stories, the writer has decidedly opted for a more cinematographic style and a horror representation, in line with current trends, less critical and more spectacular.

Mind hunters.

In recent years a flood of publications featuring serial killers and psychiatric investigators or profilers has hit Italy, especially due to the influence of the success of these characters in North American television series, such as *Criminal Minds* (2005-2020), *The Mentalist* (2008 -2015), *Lie to Me* (2009-2011), *Hannibal* (2013-2015), *Bates Motel* (2013-2017), *Mindhunter* (2017-2019), *The Alienist* (2018) and many others.

The idea behind these series is to understand how one becomes a serial killer and how serial killers think. The task of the special agents who make up the teams – such as those that of the behavioural analysis unit, protagonist of both *Criminal Minds*, visible in Italy on the Fox

Crime channel, and the most recent *Mindhunter*, which debuted on the Netflix platform – is to trace the profile of the maniac of the episode, studying the behaviour and predicting his/her next moves. Little remains, in today's mainstream narrative, of the uncanny madness of the *neo-noir* serial killers. They incorporated a savagery that, in contemporary crime fiction, has instead been largely domesticated, medicalized and psychoanalyzed. Never before have serial killers been imprisoned in a Manichean antagonism that puts them in opposition to good investigators.

Like crime, madness has also had a destiny of normalization and psychiatrization. The control of insanity, as well as that of sexuality, is one of the fundamental strategies of the bio-power of the modern state, which governs by administering the life and body of citizens, down to the smallest detail. As Foucault stated, the discipline manufactures individuals through the use of simple tools, such as the standardizing sanction and the techniques of multiple and cross surveillance, which microscopically controls behaviours in a regime of constant and detailed visibility (1975, pp. 173-196).

The spectacularization of the confessions of the serial killers is, nowadays, in fashion and the admissions of guilt are sold as exceptional occasions to look into psychotic minds, to perform a sort of autopsy of the mind. The Netflix platform is one of many to offer examples of this successful trend, with TV series and films that mix true crime and fiction, such as the recent *Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile* (2019), which tells the life of the multiple murderer, Ted Bundy, through the memories of his ex-girlfriend.

The confession is one of the modern procedures of individualization that power uses and, in the West, is one of the most highly valued techniques for producing truth. Born within ecclesiastical practice, it has spread its effects far and wide: in justice, medicine, pedagogy, family relationships and everyday life. The obligation of confession is now so deeply rooted in

us that we no longer perceive as the effect of an external force. On the contrary, the impetus to confess seems to come from within. Actually, the production of truth is entirely permeated by power relations even if, when we are invited to share our innermost thoughts, we do not realize it. In addition, the rituals of confession work increasingly within the framework of a scientific, therefore authoritative, will to know. Confessing in itself is not enough: we must couple what confession reveals with the interpretation of what is said. The listener is the master of truth, its function is hermeneutic, it has the power to construct, through its deciphering, a discourse of truth (Foucault, 1976/1978, pp. 53-73). However, while older crime narratives had their narrative climax when the culprit confessed his crime, in the most recent fictions the truth can be administered by science itself, requiring no confession. Now the climax can be reached by observing a curve on a screen in the lab, interrogating the evidence, even considering the killers' mind as a piece of evidence among others.

A pervasive scientific discourse echoes in contemporary crime fiction. It appears as the most authoritative in taking charge of the murderous madness of serial killers and other psychotic offenders and considers criminal behaviour to be a pathological dysfunctionality. Neurosciences are increasingly being called upon to deal with philosophical and psychological dilemmas, to determine the degree of responsibility, freedom and guilt of individuals. The discoveries, in this field, seem to question the voluntariness of many of the criminal acts, linking them to biology and organic mental disorders. For example, the function of the amygdala is studied, which is involved in the control of emotions, such as fear and aggression, or the degeneration of the frontal and temporal lobes, while, with the progress of technologies to probe the brain, new problems are discovered and linked more clearly to aberrant behaviours. The interaction between the environment and genetic expression is also analysed, as well as the way in which genes are modified by experience. A paradigm shift is underway in the study of the brain and behaviours. Historically, doctors and lawyers have always accepted the

intuitive distinction between neurological disorders (brain pathologies) and psychiatric disorders (mental pathologies), but, today, a biological basis is attributed to almost all mental disorders, probably resulting from the increasing effectiveness of drug treatments, or as a way to promote drug treatments. One of the reasons for this conceptual shift from guilt to biology is perhaps the therapeutic successes, almost all obtained in the last sixty years, which suggest that it no longer makes sense to call some disorders brain pathologies and relegate others to the field of the psyche. People began to treat mental problems in the same way as a fractured leg. It becomes increasingly difficult to understand human actions separately from biology, and this inevitably has legal implications. Neuro-imaging techniques are still rudimentary, they are unable to explain human behaviour in detail and to anchor the wide spectrum of different types of guilt to the continuum of neural abilities. However, it can be expected that, in the future, lawyers will call upon biological extenuating circumstances to absolve the accused, unless a reform occurs of penalties and the concepts of guilt, voluntariness and responsibility, based on biological differences (Eagleman, 2011, pp. 52-58).

This tendency risks leading us to a rampant neo-Lombrosian eugenism, concentrated in the effort to predict the conduct and recidivism of criminals, increasingly pathologizing anti-social and delinquent behaviour and decontextualizing it from the power relations in which it is immersed. Today's entertainment industry no longer needs to entertain us with freak shows, human zoos, anatomical museums and corpses of delinquents or perverts. The body of the monster, the living aberration, is a cultural construction that had, as its purpose, the perceptual shock of the spectator faced with the extreme possibility of the abnormal. The observation of the abnormal has contributed to civilize us, according to the norms defined by mass society, while the monstrous has been routinized in a trivialized and commercialized mass voyeurism. However, those creepy shows have not disappeared, they have only changed devices. They

have updated themselves together with the evolution of science, fashion, taste and taboos. They have merged into mainstream literature, cinema and television.

Nowadays, the representation of a hierarchy of corporal perfections and the stigmatization of deformities show an unprecedented diffusion of the power of normalization and reinforcement of the bureaucratic, medical and advertising norms of framing of the individual body. At the centre of an immense corrective effort, which medicine has brought to the terminal stage, is the abnormal body. Genetics allow us to predict monstrosities in genes, while visual technologies in utero capture their early manifestation and plan their elimination. The multiplication of increasingly sophisticated prostheses, surgical intervention on deformities and plastic surgery correct the anomaly. The body renewal industry demonstrates universal tendencies and the postmodern body appears captured in an endless surgical quest that aims at hyper-normality (Courtine, 2006, pp. 271-273).

Chapter IV

Global Trends in Contemporary Italian Crime Fiction

Global *Noir*

In line with international trends, today's Italian crime fiction appears saturated with vivid violence and brutalized bodies, torn to pieces and reified. In Chapter III, we have examined how this representative taste, which draws heavily on the horror genre, was used in the 1990s by *neo-noir* and *Cannibal* writers, both as an innovative element of the genre and as a critique of the established order. In the 2000s that original and subversive potential did not continue. Rather, the splatter-pulp style has become an omnipresent component of crime fiction, and of narrative in general, the perception of violence has been eroded by its trivialization and horror is invariably framed in a reassuring medical-scientific iconography. The tortured, dismembered and massacred body – the red thread of *noir* counter-stories – has undergone a progressive domestication that has changed its ideological value and made it an isotopy of the dominant socio-cultural discourse.

The wave of experimental writings of the 1990s eventually flowed into mainstream crime fiction, which, today, shows representative tendencies at a global level, thanks also to both the success achieved by the authors and the marketing strategies. That distinctive transgressive style has changed to a less confronting, but easily sold and largely enjoyed, narrative. Today writers, publishers, directors and television producers wishing to be successful cannot ignore the fact that the crime genre has become an enormous and international multi-media phenomenon with a mass public following. This context shows an intrinsic paradox. On the one hand, it increasingly focuses more on novelty and less on the longevity of products; in Italy, for example, 61.7% of the published books in 2018 were first editions (Istat, 2019). On

the other hand, the market and the cultural industry have led to a predominance, never seen before, of an imitative literature that cleverly makes use of some conventional schemes to address the mass audience, with occasional renewal and updates (Schulz-Buschhaus, 1999, p. 21).

It also must be taken into account that, today, cultural representations travel on global communication networks and are less and less localized in individual territories (Scarduelli, 2003, pp. 14-17). The impact and meaning of this intertwining of human and virtual flows change according to the contexts of the users, but also depending on the power relationships.

In Europe and North America fiction bestsellers are mostly crime thrillers. Statistics indicate that crime fiction is among the most popular genres in the countries where it was born, such as the UK and the US. *Nielsen BookScan* figures²¹, released at the 2019 London Book Fair, revealed that crime was the UK's most popular adult fiction genre in 2018, outselling both general and literary fiction (Rowe, 2020). According to a 2019 *Statista*'s research on the publishing book market, mystery, thriller and crime were the leading genres in the US too. Forty seven percent of the survey respondents read a crime book during the research period and this increases to 50% for eBook readers. Moreover, *Book Ad Report* shows that crime and mystery is the sub-genre that makes the second most money in the US, after romance and erotica (Herold, 2019).

English-written bestsellers travel the world through their innumerable translations, adaptations and influences. This is certainly not a new fact, since exporting crime fiction is, actually, a longstanding trend. Literature, cinema and television have made characters, such as Sherlock Holmes, Miss Marple, and the Tough Guys famous worldwide, along with the

²¹ Figures produced by industry data provider *Nielsen Bookscan* and based on sales number over the period 31st December 2017 to 8th December 2018.

embedded socio-cultural paradigms. What has changed is that the contemporary cultural panorama is now crossed by a web of multidirectional exchanges.

Within this new context, medical dominance has become the marker of the crime genre, the most common feature. Crime scene investigations and the visualization of corpses have become a universal (or, at least, a translatable) *topos* which might help explain the fluidity and exportability of contemporary crime fiction. This is why Scandinavian crime may sound familiar to an Italian readership, and vice-versa. Italians read Mankell, while Swedes watch *Gomorra*. Furthermore, it is largely thanks to crime fiction that places, such as Sweden and Sicily, began to export both their literature and related TV shows in big numbers.

However, the emergence of both local crime fiction on the global market and local flavour in the crime genre must be read within wider processes of cultural globalization and translatability. Indeed, a paradoxical relationship is taking place between global and local dynamics. Under the apparent insurgence of the local, in fact, the global is erasing national features, reducing them to elements of colour, into cheap exoticism, easily sold in the mainstream market. At the same time, publishing companies and writing schools push for the homogeneity of standardized plots, setting and twists.

The Italian crime narrative landscape has always been more geographically and culturally heterogeneous than other European equivalents, such as the French one, where most crimes happen in Paris, its surroundings and *les banlieues*, with just a few examples of local *noir*, Izzo's stories set in Marseille being one. As it is known, however, often the tempting "Made in Italy" label is a false claim and literature is subject to this as well. For example, when someone, outside of Italy, mentions Italian contemporary *noir*, the first name that generally pops up might leave the Italian readers astonished: Donna Leon. Who is she? Most Italians don't know her, by the simple fact that this bestselling American writer, living and setting her mysteries in Venice, is not translated in Italian. Who are her most loyal readers, then? Germans,

as indicated by the fact that, in Germany, they have produced 17 seasons of a TV series inspired by her novels. These fake-Italian *noir* novels, full of clichés and inaccuracies, appear as the narrative version of those immense cruise ships that get stuck in the canals of Venice, pouring out hordes of tourists to taste what is sold to them as a typical specialty. The publishing industry eats up and spits out *Italianesse* in order to increase their sales.

The current trend of the global publishing and cultural industry, which has been organized in line with the neoliberal order like any other industry, aims to produce and commercialize the leading genre of fiction in the most profitable way. Thus, a highly exportable crime fiction – let’s call it “global *noir*” – is needed in order to reach both commercial appeal and a sort of universal readership. The difference between global and local, as well as the mixture of the two, exists within a set of predefined elements, which are present in the vast majority of crime fiction products and barely need a translation. Among these repetitive and stable narrative and visual materials, we find science, the morgue, the lab and the dissection of bodies, which are all part of a common and dominant medical culture, shared and experienced by producers, authors and the public.

From a Nigerian crime novel, such as Oyinkan Braithwaite’s *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018) to a Hong Kong-Chinese action film, such as *San ren xing* [Three] (2016), or to an Amazonian TV series, such as *Frontera verde* [Green Frontier] (2019), crime-medical features make the genre universally recognizable and help its translatability worldwide. The omnipresent binomial science-corpse, together with the taste for a perverse, mentally diverted and graphically detailed violence, represent the trending global background, in which the local appeal and meaning is trapped. So, the places of crime seem more and more similar to *non-lieux* [non-places], as they were named by the anthropologist Marc Augé (1992): places everywhere and nowhere, such as airports, hotel rooms, emergency departments and shopping

malls, where people meet for a short time and feel at ease with their anonymous and cross-cultural recognisability²².

Medicine above all.

The increasingly medicalized, reified and domesticated representation of the body has drastically influenced culture, crime fiction included, all over the world and, in doing so, has transmitted patterns of knowledge, along with forms of subjugation, to the Western models that ensure global power effects.

The praise of the extraordinary discoveries of science and medicine has taken the crime genre back to its late 1800s characteristics, with some predictable changes. Just as in medicine there has been a progressive replacement of the clinical gaze, overcome by an anatomical cognitive model, a similar phenomenon has occurred in fiction.

In Chapter I we saw how contemporary bio-medical technologies intervene more extensively in the procedures involved in shaping the human being along its lifespan, and how they have anchored the idea of a person to a series of biological data. The evolution and subsequent diffusion of visual technologies, applied to the medical field, have made possible the direct anatomical observation of the living body, as well as, frequently, surgical intervention. Today's medicine encourages unlimited, panoptic and violence-free scanning of bodies, which become increasingly transparent. A medical iconography, respected as truthful and realistic by virtue of the prestige of science, has monopolized the collective imagination and has entered everyday life (Moulin, 2006, pp. 55-71). Technology has allowed us to view previously invisible phenomena and can guide the surgeon's hand both into a microscopic world and, from a distance, to remote diagnostics, while permitting the creation of virtual clones of bodies and faces, as well as visual and tactile prostheses (Michaud, 2006, p. 440).

²² For a discussion on the mixture of international and exotic elements in crime novels and on the homogeneity of places, goods and people in today's increasingly globalized world, see Anderson, Miranda & Pezzotti (2012, pp. 1-6).

For its part, crime narrative has magnified the neo-positivist approaches of forensics teams and medical examiners, who extrapolate the truth from dismembered corpses and the most disparate objects, rather than through impressive guessing, like Sherlock Holmes did in the golden era of positivism. The representation of the body, minutely disarticulated by the serial killer or the coroner on duty (who have seen every type of cadaver in every possible way), has become an inevitable leitmotiv, together with a formulaic depiction of the crime scene. Thus, the public's taste has been shaped by the worldwide success of medical and medical-forensic fiction, both in literature and on television, which is based on the ability of forensic detectives and pathologists to collect and interpret material traces, mainly left on the victim. The portrayal of procedures, technology and medical dismemberments is marked both by a scientific and graphic realism and a fetishization of science that directs the expectations of an audience daily immersed in a medical and hyper-technological society.

The rhetoric underlying the homogeneity of the visual depiction of death and crime, in crime fiction, seems to be summarized in the idea that the more the forensic investigations are based on incontrovertible scientific results, the more justice will be facilitated (Greenwood, 2016, p. 20). Science becomes justice. The resources deployed in the prosecution of crime involve increasingly advanced technologies and knowledge. However, what is rarely problematized in fiction is that, as with investigative guessing, these are subjective interpretations of the data. The human eye is ultimately responsible for comparing clues and attributing meaning to them. According to the 2009 *NAS (National Academy of Sciences)* critical report on the scientific validity of analyses and techniques, no forensic science can be used with a high degree of certainty to demonstrate the connection between the results of a test and a specific individual or source, excluding that of DNA. Therefore, forensic sciences should speak of probability rather than certainty (pp. 29-35).

In fiction everything is licit and combining good writing with a more or less thorough knowledge of real police procedures has brought to the fore the detective novels of authors such as Lucarelli and Camilleri (Matrone, 1998, p. 123). However, theirs is a literature that seems to have renounced the task of deconstruction and denunciation that the 1990s *neo-noir* claimed, in favour of participation in the predominant narrative of the world. Today's fiction is pornographic and prudish at the same time (During, 2007, p. 38). Under the constant drumbeat of bodies, which appear at the same time brutalized and sanitized by a pervasive medical discourse, the binary and oppositional structure of the classic detective novel has returned to the fore.

The plot, positioned between the two poles of the beginning and ending, attributes to the final moment the task of solving the crime and relieving the public from uncertainty. The critical impoverishment of texts and the routinized representation of crime, and its very material effects, seem aligned with the current renunciation of the paradigm and pragmatics of complexity. In today's society, the preference is accorded to reductionism, essentialism and the tendency to apply simplified serial protocols, rather than deconstruct and question the reality. Thus, we have returned to the reassuring happy ending, which does not question the dominant point of view in a dissolution of different perspectives, all different and all possible. Book after book, episode after episode, the validity of an absolute and unassailable method and cultural model is reiterated. Crime fiction, while entertaining and distracting its millions of readers and spectators, functions as an additional agent of education and homogenization to the dominant cultural discourse. Behind the fantastic escape and the gratification offered by the pleasant alienations of fiction, there is the risk of all being conformed to the same model and way of reading the world. As Adorno and Horkheimer outlined in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the neo-liberal cultural industry tends to englobe everything, also what belongs to an anti-

normative aesthetic and was used to create counter hegemonic works (1944/1972, pp. 120-167).

This domestication of the imagination, which has turned culturally and socially specific perspectives into natural and universal values, stand in opposition to the intents of *neo-noir* and *pulp* literature. Even the mad scientist, a figure generated in opposition to the images of doctors and philosophers, symbols of the triumphant rationality of positivist thought in the second half of the 19th century, has been transformed into a trendy *CSI*-detective. In contemporary fiction, more than challenging the laws of nature, creating monstrous hybrids without scruples and without humility, doctors and scientists support police investigations with a clean white coat, an intellect above the ordinary and some acceptable psychosis, which are the last traces of their extraordinary madness. Even when horror and crime genres merge to create hybrid characters (a bit detective, a bit crazy doctor and a bit monster), as has happened in some fiction, the white coat is a must.

Among the aspects that escape this neo-conservative trend of crime fiction, is the representation of women. Finally, this traditionally male-chauvinist genre has not only given space to all-round female characters, as brilliant and strong as men, but has also tried to change the male-dominant perspective on the body, family and justice. On TV, we certainly do not see those pulp and *neo-noir* bloody avengers, collectors of male anatomical trophies, nor lesbian investigators, who put feminist justice above patriarchal law, but we also don't see any more just raped, scarred, pitied victims, sexy secretaries and fatal seducers, destined for a sinister (and surely deserved) end. However, this innovation has little power of social and cultural change and criticism, being more likely the effects on the market of a greater presence of women in audio-visual productions with a (relatively) better social status, which affects public expectations.

Gruppo 13 Crime Scenes

Dura Mater.

At the beginning of *Dura madre* [Dura Mater]²³ Marcello Fois, one of the writers of *Gruppo 13*, describes a ritual performance that has recently been turned into a crime fiction “must”. It is carried out every time one is faced with a dead person, especially if the corpse has clearly been murdered:

Nel frattempo l’attività intorno al cadavere si era fatta febbrile. Un agente, con un rotolo di nastro di quelli che usano gli operai delle autostrade, si fece largo, scusandosi, tra il giudice e il commissario. Altri esaminavano il terreno alla ricerca di elementi significativi.

Il fotografo della Scientifica, un tipo corpulento, già sudato alle nove del mattino, faceva scattare la sua macchina puntando l’obiettivo sulle ferite, sulle mani, sul viso dell’uomo abbandonato al suolo. Poi, chiedendo spazio con un gesto da nuotatore, cercava di inquadrare il corpo per intero. (...)

Quando arrivò il medico legale era passata un’ora buona dalla segnalazione. Osvaldo Pintus si piantò a poca distanza dal corpo con uno sguardo da critico d’arte che si apprestò a fare un’expertise. Guardò i fori d’uscita che avevano bucato la giacca sul petto del morto, poi sollevando la testa fissò la macchia slabbrata sulla parete rocciosa per ritornare, seguendo la scia sanguinolenta, al punto di partenza. (2001, pp. 8-9)

In the meantime the activity around the corpse had become feverish. An agent, with a roll of tape like those used by highway workers, made his way, apologizing, between the judge and the commissioner. The others examined the scene, in search of significant elements.

The forensic photographer, a heavy set guy, already sweaty at nine in the morning, clicked his camera focusing on the wounds, on the hands, on the face of the man abandoned on the ground. Then, asking for space with a swimming motion, he tried to frame the whole body. (...)

When the coroner arrived, an entire hour had passed since the report. Osvaldo Pintus stood a short distance from the body, gazing as an art critic who is ready to give an evaluation. He looked at the exit holes that had pierced the jacket on the dead man’s chest, then lifting his head he stared at the scrubbed stain on the rocky wall, and finally returned, following the bloody trace, to the starting point.

Set in the Sardinian town of Nuoro, this novel opens with the discovery, in a building site, of the corpse of a man apparently killed with a shotgun. The crime scene immediately appears as a complicated puzzle, since data that initially make no sense, are eventually revealed

²³ Meaning “tough mother” in English and “dura mater”, the name of the outermost meninges of the brain.

to be meaningful. With the initial formulaic beginning, typical of a crime story, Fois alludes to a particular view of the world, which is included in the sentence “with a gaze like an art critic ready to give an evaluation”. This is precisely that circumstantial method, underlined by Ginzburg, a connoisseurship shared by art critics, doctors and detectives.

However, the heuristic “corpse-police-forensics-investigation-truth” sequence is not to be taken for granted. Indeed, quite the opposite, it must be questioned. For this reason, nothing makes sense in the crime scene. “Ma credo di poter dichiarare ufficialmente chiuso il periodo delle certezze” [But I believe I can declare the period of certainties officially closed] (Fois, 2001, p. 16), says judge Corona during the investigation. Through his voice, Fois alluded to the years in which detective fiction was uneasy and authors such as Gadda, Dürrenmatt and Borges left their mysteries unsolved because everything in real life is chance, mess, tangle, knot, while crime became a metaphor for the painful conscience of people and their journey into an illogical and rotten reality.

Despite this pessimism, the detection gradually proceeds, in the hands of commissioner Sanuti, judge Corona and marshal Pili, and keeps up with the evidence emerging from the scientific and technological apparatus, crucial to support the investigative hypotheses. Multiple and meticulous analyses of the crime scene and the cadaver are performed in order to attribute meaning to incongruent facts, such as the lack of fingerprints, the time of death and the type of blood. There is no question of fallacy in interpreting charred documents and medical reports. In his notes, the pathologist Osvaldo Pintus lists: burst of buckshot in the back, severed aorta, perforated lungs, sixth and seventh ribs pulverized and a sea of blood (Fois, 2001, p. 10). Nevertheless, around the dead man there are no traces of a chase, no tire marks and no footprints. The ground around the dead is clean. Similar considerations occur numerous times. On the uncontaminated ground, investigated little by little and blown by a wind so strong that

it takes away the surface of things, the total absence of signs is confusing. The corpse himself, through his body, blood and clothing, tells a story that needs to be unravelled.

The sequence of crime analysis procedures marks the difficult progress of the investigation and serves as a constant counterpoint to the detectives' dilemmas. They find no explanation for what they see. Gradually, the scientific results clarify the field. The cause of death is identified, the lack of traces explained. The crime scene turns out to be a staged crime scene. The dead man was actually killed by strangulation, covered in pig's blood, dressed in a jacket of another who had died by shotgun, and finally transported to the place where he was found. The inconsistency of the "forensic red flags" – the clues that investigators must grasp from the first moment of their intervention, assessing whether the traces that can be analysed with forensic sciences are consistent with the other elements of the scene or not (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, pp. 129-130) – lead into the victim's past. Eventually, the motive is discovered and the culprit unmasked thanks to both the invaluable help of the coroner, who has deciphered the wounds on the body, and the skill of the technicians, who have reconstructed microscopic fragments of burnt sheets.

However, together with this anatomical ability to look *into* the materiality of things and bodies, there is also the detectives' conjectural ability in looking *beyond* the dead body, to his family's history, in order to retrace the chain of ancient injustices, new and old corruption, resentments and family hatreds that led to the crime. By talking to the people involved, commissioner Sanuti has made his way towards a solution that brings no consolation, because the fracture with the past prevents harmonizing it with the present. It is not easy to restore the fracture between the patterns of behaviour that existed until a recent past and the fragility of the globalized and impoverished present.

The real torment does not seem to be that of the victim. Much more than him, it is the landscape that is described in the most pathetic way. “Ancora sangue si era infilato nelle canalette regolari dello spiazzo straziato dai cingoli delle ruspe” [More blood had slipped into the regular furrows of the open space lacerated by the tracks of the bulldozers] (Fois, 2001, p. 9). The lexicon serves to humanize the landscape where the new has been built on the open wounds of an ill-conceived modernization. Today’s Nuoro looks like a patchwork blanket, where the ancient Barbagia of the *disamistade*²⁴ has been sewn together with the tentacles of an urban sprawl founded on corruption and greed. In *Dura madre*, buildings are like ill and dying bodies: “Quella che vede è la cartella clinica del male più diffuso da queste parti: il male del mattone” [What you see is the medical record of the most widespread sickness in these parts: construction sickness] (p. 14), the judge states. This landscape, similar to a construction site, is made of opaque lime and heaped bricks. It is provisional, rough, abandoned, abusive, arranged, and mad, sold out for a piece of bread. It stands out as the victim of the most heinous and unpunished crime. It incorporates, more than the corpse, the evil that afflicts the inhabitants of the city, for whom there is no meaning, because the meaning is always the same: we live in a wild jungle, between rivers of shit and blood (p. 78).

In the end no one stands out as an absolute culprit, while death pervades as an inescapable atmosphere that goes beyond the individuality of the crime and serves the author as a tool for an open social and political message. His denouncement is entirely centred on the problematic relationship of Sardinia with modernity, its shattered and contradictory panorama, which the ongoing development processes have chaotically, but inexorably, outlined. These same issues have been debated by the anthropologist Giulio Angioni both in his vast scientific work on Sardinia and in his novels. In 1988, *L'oro di Fraus* [The Gold of Fraus], simultaneously with Salvatore Mannuzzu’s *Procedura* [Procedure], opened a sort of Sardinian

²⁴ A Sardinian word that indicates a feud, or revenge, between families in the internal area of Barbagia.

crime fiction school, of which Marcello Fois is one of the best-known representatives. Angioni, in his novels, staged that anthropological revolution which, even before the social and economic radical changes, completely transformed the Sardinian reality. This mutation became a paradigm of the national and global one, due to the rapidity, radicalism and catastrophism with which things changed in Sardinia (Manai, 2006).

In *Dura madre*, it is the moral transformation of a “shame culture”, that of traditional Barbagia, into a modern “guilt culture”, and their deadly coexistence, that is, ultimately, the real motive of the crime. With the expression “culture of shame”, the Greek anthropologist Erich Dodds (1951), applied an idea conceived by the anthropologist, Ruth Benedict, to the social model of the Homeric civilization. By it, is meant a society in which respect for the rules is based on certain types of behaviour and failing to adhere to them incurs the blame, shame and dishonour of the community, which fall on the whole family. In contrast, a “culture of guilt” is regulated by prohibitions and laws imposed on citizens, whose transgression causes a sense of guilt and remorse. In this novel, the murder has been motivated by a morality aligned with the shame system, where blood is shed one generation after another, as happened in the days of Oedipus. Michele Marongiu has been killed by his wife, because of his infidelity, which was aggravated by his lover unexpected pregnancy. Moreover, his mistress has been, since childhood, the maid of his elderly, strong-willed and merciless mother. Marongiu’s mother is the architect of the staged crime scene, as well as the crime. As a young girl, she had been the cause of a bloody honour killing, when her brothers avenged her loss of respectability. Although only a few decades have separated the generations, this *dura madre* grew up in an agro-pastoral tradition that, after permeating the Sardinian and Mediterranean society for millennia, has been relegated to the margins with dazzling speed (Manai, 2006, p. 61).

The expression “dura madre”, in Italian, means both “hard mother” and “dura mater”. The latter, in anatomy, corresponds to the name of the outermost meninges, a thick and resistant

fibrous membrane, one side of which is attached to the skull while the other adheres to the next meningeal layer. It surrounds the brain and spinal cord as protection for the central nervous system and facilitates the supply of blood. Starting from this analogy, evoked in the novel from the title, the reader cannot be mistaken about the role of the mother as tenacious protector of the very centre of life: the backbone, the brain, the honour of the family and the blood. The fictional theatre of the assassination, on the other hand, is the symbol of modernity's race to cover all the landscape with concrete.

Formulae for success.

The opening crime investigation scene described in *Dura madre* has become a sort of formulaic *incipit* in both literary and audio-visual crime fiction²⁵. In the same years as Fois, the *Gruppo 13*'s founder, Carlo Lucarelli, also exploited it in both his fictional and non-fictional works. In *Scena del crimine* [Crime Scene], he explained how the real procedure takes place:

gli investigatori della scena del crimine e gli scienziati forensi che li affiancano non possono contare sulle scoperte casuali e inattese per risolvere un delitto. Conoscono le più moderne tecnologie, sanno come utilizzarle. Studiano metodi sempre più precisi e veloci per raccogliere un'impronta, decifrare un indizio, estrarre il Dna da una traccia invisibile. Loro, gli investigatori e gli scienziati, la verità vogliono provarla al di là di ogni dubbio. E non solo per esclusione. Quindi eccoli fianco a fianco a dare risposta a tutti quegli interrogativi che una scena del crimine propone: "five W and one H" dicono gli americani, e vogliono dire "when, where, what, who, why and how". (Lucarelli & Picozzi, 2006, p. 6)

crime scene investigators and forensic scientists, who work alongside them, cannot count on random and unexpected discoveries to solve a crime. They know the most modern technologies, they know how to use them. They study increasingly more precise and faster methods to collect a fingerprint, decipher a clue, and extract the DNA from an invisible trace. They, investigators and scientists, want to prove the truth beyond all doubt. And not just by exclusion. So, here they are, side by side to answer all those questions that a crime scene proposes: "five W and one H", say the Americans, and they mean "when, where, what, who, why and how".

²⁵ Fois is also a screenwriter and he is familiar with scenes that are easily adapted for screenplays. For television, he worked on the screenplays of *Distretto di polizia* [Police Precinct] (2000-2012) and of *Crimini* [Crimes] (2006-2010).

Over time crime fiction writers have invariably embedded this genre-specific cliché in their texts, compelling their detectives to consider the data brought to light by pathologists and scientific technicians. Sometimes, it appears a bit artificial, other times it is expertly calibrated in the pages. Most of the time, however, it is reproduced like a formula that recurs in the hundreds of works released every year. The forensics arrive at the scene with their detecting traces-kit in a case, following a (more or less) accurate mimesis of what would happen in a real crime scene in Italy.

This happens also in non-fiction narrative, for which true crime seems to have become the “black fairy-tale” of contemporary times (Braschi, 1998, p. 91)²⁶. In newspapers and magazines dedicated to crime, cinema and anything else, in documentaries and essays, the science-crime story catches the public eye, whether it is invented, inspired by the news, or disguised as true fact.

For example, in one of the many articles published on this topic, a lieutenant, head of the scientific investigations department in Rome, illustrated how a typical investigation is carried out. Detectives come first, together with a team of technicians specialized in first response. The *RIS* (*Reparto Investigazioni Scientifiche dell’Arma dei Carabinieri*) [Unit of Scientific Investigations] is the forensics unit of the Italian gendarmerie, *Carabinieri*. On the occasion of serious crimes, *RIS* arrive at the scene, only upon request and in support of the Territorial Authority, in order to acquire evidence that will help in the reconstruction of the dynamics of the crime and support the eventual charges. The crime scene is examined directly and also indirectly, by analysing the documentation sent by the judicial police, such as inspection reports, photographic files, films, floor plans, etc. It is crucial to get to know the places, going back to the scene several times and, perhaps, involving more specialists

²⁶ Massimo Picozzi edited the series *True Crime*, launched in 2005 by Mondadori and purchasable together with *Panorama* magazine at a low price.

(Sarzanini, 2011, p. 38). *RIS* has four departments with several sections: ballistic, biological, dactyloscopic, chemical, explosive, video-photographic, phonic and graphic, telematics, criminological, etc. They are assisted by the *SIS* (*Sezioni investigazioni scientifiche*) [Scientific Investigation Sections], specializing in preliminary inspections. Today the forensics – sometimes known in jargon as *tute bianche* [white overalls] and *agenti guantati* [gloved police officers], among other labels – are considered a fundamental apparatus of the investigation (Sarzanini, 2011, p. 36). In fiction, they became protagonists of the TV series *R.I.S. – Delitti imperfetti* [*R.I.S. – Imperfect Crimes*] (2005-2009), an Italian version of *CSI*. The series was inspired by *Delitti imperfetti. Sei casi per il Ris di Parma* (2004) [*Imperfect Crimes: Six Cases for Parma RIS*], written by the forensic biologist and toxicologist Luciano Garofano.

In addition to the *RIS*, in Italy there is also the *Polizia Scientifica* [Scientific Police], established in 1902, which intervenes when biological, physical, dactyloscopic and chemical skills are required during police investigations. The Central Scientific Police Service directs and coordinates the decentralized offices in the area, called *Gabinetti* [Cabinets]. It includes technologically advanced analysis laboratories and highly specialized State Police officers. Its preliminary intervention at the crime scene is evaluated as essential.

Italy has also a national database, *AFIS*, in which the fingerprints collected at the crime scene are entered for comparisons with those already present in the system. Since November 2016, there has also been a national database for DNA.

Whereas, in the real world, the forensic investigation is always a fundamental, but never substituting, support to traditional detection, in the most recent crime fiction it has been exalted as a hyper-technological, super-specialized and omnipotent way to resolve mysteries and murders. Thus, alongside the detectives, the number of doctors, scientists and technicians involved in crime detection is increasing. Films, books and TV series have created a new myth in the collective imagination, that of the scientific investigator (Picozzi, 2006, pp. 90-93). Even

though the alliance between science and investigation is more than a hundred years old, never before has *noir* literature been so saturated with it. As noted by the young forensic Alice Allevi, protagonist of *L'allieva* (2011) [The Pupil]²⁷, by medical examiner and writer Alessia Gazzola:

Ah, i Ris. Scienziati prestati alla giustizia. Giustizieri prestati alla scienza. A me sembrano i templari della genetica forense. Distinti, intrepidi, ultraspecializzati, finemente addestrati, custodiscono i loro tesori, arrivano alla verità. Che invidia! (Gazzola, 2011a, p. 37)

Ah, the Ris. Scientists lent to justice. Executioners lent to science. They seem to me the Templars of forensic genetics. Classy, intrepid, ultra-specialized, finely trained, they guard their treasures, they come to the truth. I envy them so much!

Also essay-style books, which, in the wake of the North American trends, spread the notion of the highly specialized job of these new sacred warriors, the forensic experts, sell precisely thanks to captivating covers and titles that transform the scientific work into fashioned gruesome fiction. This is the case of a book such as *Corpi, scheletri e delitti. Le storie del Labanof* [Bodies, Skeletons and Crimes: The Stories of Labanof] by Cristina Cattaneo (2019), dedicated to the Forensic Anthropology and Forensic Odontology Lab of Milan.

In work after work, standardized descriptions of crime scenes, autopsies and analysis of biological traces have become a trademark that immediately identifies the text as being in the category of crime fiction. It also has become a vehicle for a power of normalization of people, according to the social tendencies and mores. These narrative moments reassure the public, firstly by the familiarizing effect of the reiteration and, secondly, because they reflect the people's expectations of an event such as death (and especially a murder), which trigger an inevitable "crisis of the presence". A doctor will arrive, technicians will arrive. The experts will take care of death. Each minutia will be seen, immortalized, catalogued, collected and then analysed, fragmented and compared, in the hope of a trace that reveals the truth. Science plays

²⁷ The novels inspired the TV series *L'allieva* [The Pupil] (2016-2018).

a religious part: science reveals the truth about death, performing an ancient religious duty. These are, nowadays, the true weapons of the detective, who, over one hundred and fifty years of crime fiction, has returned to resemble the acute observer, avant-garde scientist and physician Sherlock Holmes. And so, the consumers of crime fiction feel renewed in their belonging to the paradigm of medicalized Western civilization, confident in the heuristic power of science. However, it is always essential to remember that the consistency of facts and the truthfulness of the evidence are also ideological constructs. Often ideological beliefs (for example racism) carry more influence than science in judging if there is enough evidence to convict a defendant, or if that evidence is sufficiently objective (Lucarelli & Picozzi 2006, p. 18).

The members of *Gruppo 13* were the forerunners of an Italian crime fiction rich in detailed medical-scientific references, although often imprecise and characterized by metaphors with a daily flavour, such as the corpse being compared to pasta during the autopsy in *Dura madre* (Fois, 2001, p. 96). This does not appeal to Lucarelli, who has been more convincing in simulating the *CSI* lexicon from the beginning, thanks to his commitment to popularizing both the possibilities and the limits of forensic sciences. At any rate, with the 1990s *neo-noir* authors we were still maintaining an ethically committed writing, which used the body as a means of denouncing the multifaceted injustices of the world.

Inspector Montalbano

The scientific-medicalization of crime has largely affected the contemporary Italian fiction panorama. The mechanism of the investigation, widely borrowed from cinema and television, is based on medical-scientific discoveries and technological innovations and is often generous in offering truculent details. We can mention the anthology *Medical thriller* (2002), written by Eraldo Baldini, Carlo Lucarelli and Gianpiero Rigosi, and *La soluzione finale* [The Final Solution] (2005) by Andrea Novelli and Gianpaolo Zarini (Moscati, 2006, p. 95).

Moreover, a visual shift has pushed the depiction of the dead body towards an increasingly detailed and medicalized aesthetic that fetishizes the scientific gaze. The massive and global diffusion of this way of representing, which is accommodating the public's taste, has gone beyond crime fiction and entered other genres, from the news to Disney films, from Reality television programs to young adult fiction. Morbid attraction and necro-aesthetic addiction are well exemplified, for example, in the latest work of Niccolò Ammaniti, *Anna* (2015). This post-apocalyptic coming-of-age novel, does not have the structure of a crime story, but a highly reified death, both thematically and lexically, dominates the entire narrative space.

This necro-medicalized representative trend has been absorbed by an increasingly globalized mainstream literature, including that of one illustrious writer, Andrea Camilleri, perhaps the best known and translated abroad, capable of offering quality writing to millions of readers (Sorgi, 2000, p. 13). The "Camilleri case" broke out in the late 1990s, when all his works jumped to the top of the ranking of best-selling fiction books, simultaneously with the boom of *neo-noir* and *Young Cannibals*. Suddenly, hundreds of thousands of copies of his books were purchased weekly in bookstores, translations were made all over the world, ranging from Japanese to Gaelic, and prizes, awards, invitations to collaborate in newspapers and magazines, and honorary academic titles followed (Capecchi, 2000, p. 9).

At the core of Montalbano's stories lies a cultural, linguistic and geographical microcosm defined by a distinctive hybrid *Sicilianity*, made up of both fantasy and reality. The language itself, which contributed to the popularity of the works, expresses an original mix of the language spoken in Agrigento and invented words, explained by the narrator when necessary (Pistelli, 2003, p. 22). Most of the critics believe that the strength of Camilleri's style derives from the invention of this multilingual writing, which gives vigour to the conventional

prose of thrillers and amuses the reader, who, after a while, feels at ease in the story's unique world.

Montalbano's saga also led to a series of television adaptations, directed by Alberto Sironi and aired on Rai beginning in 1999, with an extraordinary and long lasting success with the public, always engaged and participating in the detective's adventures. Today *Inspector Montalbano* is the most watched series on television in Italy and it is also broadcast in many foreign countries. The television popularity provoked an increase in readers and magnified Camilleri's literary profile (Scarpetti & Strano, 2004, p. 34). Montalbano, with his catchphrase "Montalbano sono!" [I am Montalbano!], became a serial character and an imaginary figure, crossing the boundaries of the literary text and films and circulating in an intertextual network of media (Marrone, 2003, pp. 14-21).

The main influences that shaped Montalbano's character are linked to the tradition of European and Italian crime and mystery literature, and to other famous investigators, such as Jules Maigret by George Simenon and Commissioner De Vincenzi by Augusto De Angelis. He is not so much a man of action as of reflection, capable of immersing himself in the criminal milieu. There is little action in his investigations, but also little detection. The police plot is limited, while the psychology of the characters is deepened and provides insight into their private lives. Moreover, Montalbano is one of numerous incarnations of the figure of the loyal and fair detective. He is obedient to the rule of law or, more often, to a higher "natural law", which surpasses the positive law when certain injustices oppress the weakest and most disadvantaged. Despite some weaknesses and *farafanterie* [lies], mostly used to thwart obtuse and oppressive representatives of the established power, he is a champion of justice and truth. In the first novels of the series, Montalbano spoke of his belonging to a democratic and transparent police, at the service of citizens, opposed to a violent and unjust state that held the power. With time, the character acquired moral ambiguity, becoming increasingly a lone wolf

(Franchini, 2002, p. CLXVIII) and acting more often as a “fight & fuck” tough guy against corruption, voracious exploitation and the entanglement of crime and politics, even if with little explicit violence and sex.

In addition to these influences, Montalbano’s character is also closely related to a series of morally strong, libertarian and tolerant detectives who appeared in the *neo-noir* novels, such as Pepe Carvalho by Manuel Vázquez Montalbán²⁸, Fabio Montale by Jean-Claude Izzo, Héctor Belascoarán Shayne by Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Kurt Wallander by Henning Mankell. Yet the fundamental graveness of these characters, who see very few happy endings, contrasts with Montalbano’s investigations, whose outcomes are usually quite reassuring. Perhaps they are not always cathartic solutions, with justice completely done, nevertheless the reader closes the book with the final certainty of understanding everything, having discovered the truth, no matter how bitter it is, and with the awareness that society is fundamentally corrupt and evil with organized crime and individual nastiness. The Sicilian inspector appears less cynical and less melancholic, but also more aligned with the social status quo.

A harsh short story.

On rare occasions Montalbano bitterly surrenders to the impossibility, or the futility, of pursuing the crime. It happens, for example, in the short story *La rottamazione* [The Scrapping] (2011), from which the film *Come voleva la prassi* [As per Procedure] (2017, Mar. 6) was made. Both the short story and the movie are characterized by a detailed and intense bodily violence.

The plot starts, as usual, with Montalbano sleeping. He is dreaming of a human auction, where young immigrant girls are put on display, naked, to be sold as sex slaves and later, having exhausted their freshness, as whores to be disposed of when disobedient. The plot continues

²⁸ The surname Montalbano was an explicit homage to Montalbàn.

with the discovery, no longer dreamlike, of the female corpse of a beautiful girl, completely naked except for a terry towelling bathrobe, which had opened when she fell, showing that she had been tortured with a blade from the throat to the feet (Camilleri, 2011, p. 24). Similarly, the first minutes of the film show, without many filters and indeed with a certain indulgence of the camera, the naked and massacred body of a young woman who survives just in time to get into the car and die in a place that can help to find her murderers.

The autopsy conducted by the medical examiner, doctor Pasquano, reveals a list of rough details. She was raped in every way and by many men, tied by the wrists and hung on a hook, systematically tortured for hours and silenced with her own bra, the hook of which she had swallowed. The level of violence that is reported increases in the interviews broadcast on TV to the extent that the journalist Nicolò Zito, friend of Montalbano, complains about the excess of horror. Both the pathologist, who teases the inspector when he jumps while listening to the report, and Zito, who wants to soften the interview, point out the exceptional cruelty of this short story.

Behind the crime, Montalbano's team discovers a ferocious and perverse reality. As in the initial nightmare, there is an underground trade in human females, where ever-changing *picciotte mischine* [unfortunate girls] are not only raped, tortured and massacred, but also filmed. These abominable shows sell in dizzying numbers, while those responsible are so powerful that the investigation is sabotaged and silenced. On the one hand, there are the Eastern-European traffickers, who act with the approval of the local mafia, while on the other hand there are the wealthy customers, politicians and notables of the area.

The bitter ending sees Montalbano storing the evidence in a safe place, hoping for better times (p. 46). In the television adaptation, it is positively turned. The same evidence is delivered by hand to one of the culprits (the mayor) and sent to the prosecutor. The scene ends with the

inspector, satisfied with having done his inconvenient but just duty, walking in the sun (2017, Mar. 6, 1:47:27-1:48:37).

Such a harsh short story as *La rottamazione* is quite atypical in the Montalbano saga and, not surprisingly, was published, not in the Mondadori and Sellerio' series, but in the *MicroMega* magazine for which Camilleri wrote as a columnist. The stressed and explicit brutality of the murder communicates an incisive social and political denunciation. However, the author generally favoured less disturbing plots, with an optimistic resolution and positive characters, who shine in a rotten world dominated by meanness, greed and overwhelming stupidity. This stupidity, in particular, is seen as the prime motive of every murder (Camilleri, 2006, May 26, 4:52-5:19). More than mental obtuseness, it is seen as a smallness of mind, an inability to take responsibility in life. In the game of exchange between truth and appearance, which distinguishes most of the investigations, the crimes are usually dictated by individualistic motives and not, as it may seem at the beginning, by the Mafia. Despite his own historical roots in the place where Mafia originated, Camilleri intentionally relegated it to the background. Only occasionally, both the traditional and old-fashioned Mafia, and the new generation of organized crime, trafficking in drugs, human organs and new slaves, are brought into the story.

Rounding the mark.

As we mentioned in Chapter II, in the short story *Montalbano si rifiuta* [Montalbano Refuses], Camilleri made fun of the Young Cannibals, who were coming to the fore in the same years, and for the first time, somewhat in the style of Hannibal the Cannibal, described things never previously addressed (Lodato, 2002, pp. 375-376):

Lì ci stavano due picciotti in jeans, barbe lunghe, orecchini. Erano a torso nudo. (...) preparavano la cena. Era proprio quella normalità a squietarlo. (...) Nell'unica càmmara illuminata del piano di sopra, la picciotta, o almeno quello che ne restava, era stinnicchiata in terra, completamente nuda. Sempre quateloso, ma in parte assicurato dal fatto che continuava a sentire le voci dei due nel piano di sotto, si avvicinò al corpo. Avevano tagliato di fino col coltello doppio averla violentata macari con un manico di

scopa che stava insanguinato vicino a lei. Le avevano cavato gli occhi, tagliato intero il polpaccio della gamba mancina, amputata la mano destra. Avevano macari cominciato ad aprirle la pancia, poi avevano lasciato perdere. Per tagliare meglio, si era accoccolato e ora gli veniva difficile isarsi in piedi. (Camilleri, 1999a, pp. 166-167)

There were two guys in jeans, long beards, and earrings. They were shirtless. (...) they were preparing dinner. It was that normality that worried him. (...) In the only lighted room upstairs, the girl, or at least what remained of her, was lying on the ground, completely naked. Still cautious, but partly reassured by the fact that he kept hearing the voices of the two downstairs, he approached the body. They had cut her up with a knife, after raping her even with a broomstick, which, bloodied, was next to her. They had taken out her eyes, the whole calf of the left leg was cut, her right hand amputated. They had also begun to open her belly, then they had given up. To take a closer look, he had crouched down, and it was now difficult for him to stand up.

At this point Montalbano refuses to continue on this splatter-pulp line and stops doing his duty. Instead, he calls an old gentleman, intent on writing in the Roman night, and tells him that he does not like the story, does not want to enter it, that the story of the removed and fried eyes and the slow cooked calf is ridiculous, real bullshit. The author defends himself, replying in this way to the accusations of bleeding-heart and repetitiveness raised by the critics, and explains that he tried to modernize a bit. A little blood on paper doesn't hurt anyone.

In the matter of violence *Il giro di boa* [Rounding the Mark] represented a turning point in the inspector's saga, as the title suggests. From here on, stories got darker and more brutal. In this novel, Montalbano is troubled and disgusted both by the behaviour of the police toward the anti-global protesters during the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa, and by the new immigration laws. He is ready to resign. During a swim, suffering cramps on the high seas, he finds a decomposing body:

Quel morto certamente non era frisco, da tempo che doveva trovarsi in acqua, perché carne attaccata alle ossa ne restava picca e la testa era addiventata praticamente un teschio. Un teschio con una capigliatura d'alghè. La gamba dritta si stava staccando dal resto del corpo. I pisci e il mare avevano fatto minnita del povirazzo, un naufrago o un extracomunitario che per fame, per disperazione aveva cercato di emigrare clandestinamente ed era stato gettato in mare da qualche mercante di schiavi più fituso e carogna degli altri. (2003, p. 24)

The corpse certainly wasn't fresh. It must have been in the water for quite some time, since there wasn't much flesh left attached to the bone. The head looked practically like

a skull. A skull with some seaweed for hair. The right leg was coming detached from the rest of the body. The fish and the sea had made a shambles of the poor wretch, probably a castaway or non-European who'd been driven by hunger or despair to try his luck as an illegal immigrant and been chucked overboard by some slave trader a little slimier and nastier than the rest. (Camilleri, 2006, p. 16)

It is the corpse of a migrant, who was cruelly killed, soaked in salt water and finally thrown overboard to mislead any eventual investigations. After a while the body of a child arrives at the morgue. He is the same child that the inspector, unknowingly, had previously returned to the slave traffickers, from whom the child had tried to escape. He was killed by a moving car that hit him from behind, breaking his back. The connection between the two crimes is dreadful: a monstrous network of slave and organ trade. Montalbano, thus, turns into a solitary executioner to punish those responsible. He becomes violent, although always justified by the need to defend the right to a childhood and the most basic human values. He loses his usual sense of irony, almost even his appetite, while mulling over injustice and barbarism in contemporary Italy. The increased violence of the murders goes along with the harshness of social criticism, which brings to the attention of the reader the duplicity of a legal system that divides migrants into legal and illegal and grants them only a theoretical, and rhetorical respect for their fundamental human rights.

A matter of translation.

Camilleri returned to this most pressing issue in *L'altro capo del filo* [The Other End of the Line]. As background to the investigation, there are the never-ending landings on the Sicilian coasts of illegal immigrants, exhausted by fatigue and suffering, and the efforts of Montalbano's men in helping them night after night, assisted by a few cultural mediators. Here, too, the writer drew attention to the people's anxiety about invasion and obsession with security, which, manipulated by mass media and politicians, resulted in laws, not only inconsistent with the principles of democracy and with the globalization of the economy, but

also with little effectiveness in the long run. In this novel, the inspector investigates the bloody murder of a female tailor.

The crime scene is immediately described as “orrore” [horror] and “mattanza” [slaughter] (2016, p. 108). It offers a preliminary panoramic view of the corpse, seen through Montalbano’s eyes, as he slowly approaches and, then, it is as if he is zooming in on the details (pp. 109-120). This type of narration, in fact, is a cinematographic technique and gives an indication of what the camera would film, if it were a screenplay (Manai, 2002, p. 269). It is also a good mimesis of how the filming of the crime scene, in reality, works. As Lucarelli and Picozzi (2006, pp. 29-30) explained to the readers, it starts from the surroundings, capturing the scene as a whole, then records the precise location where the evidence is. It goes always from a wide-angle view to the smallest details, rather than jumping from one element to another, even if that single detail is decisive in the dynamics of the crime. The scene must also be recorded from the victim’s point of view, by placing the camera close to the body and moving the frame in every direction

This image recalls a scene from Giorgio Scerbanenco’s *I ragazzi del massacro* [The Boys of the Massacre] (1968/1999, pp. 7-16), when Duca Lamberti observes the crime scene of a young teacher massacred by her students. Both Duca and Salvo examine the scene, following the physical traces left by the victim and killers. Blood, splatters, weapons and other objects suggest what happened. The hypothetical reconstruction of the crime is meticulously marked by the description of bodies and things, with a multitude of visual details that we would expect in a TV series script of:

Il corpo di Elena s’attrovava ‘n terra allato al granni tavolo. (...) il sangue l’aviva completamente assammarato.
E sangue c’era macari tutto torno torno sui tappita di cocco e ‘na poco di schizzi era ghiuti a finiri macari sulle stoffi dintra allo scaffali.

Elena giaceva supina, la mano mancina supra alla panza, il vrazzo destro stinnicchiato fino a sutta al tavolo. Arriniscì a fari ancora tri passi avanti, con Fazio sempri muto alle so spalli.

Po' si calò a taliare meglio.

Era stata ammazzata con una gran quantità di colpi d'arma da taglio. (Camilleri, 2016, pp. 109-110)

Elena's body was on the ground beside the large table. (...) the blood had completely drenched it.

And blood was also all around on the coconut rugs and a few splashes had also ended up on the fabrics inside the shelf.

Elena lay on her back, her left hand over her belly, her right arm stretched down under the table. He managed to take three more steps forward, with Fazio always silent behind him.

Then he bent down to look better.

She had been killed with a large number of stab wounds.

Both investigators observe the tormented corpse of a young woman, with a scientific eye, which at the same time is humanized by their comments, full of both empathy towards the victim and anger at her butchers. Camilleri's representation of violence has become harsher and more pulp-like than in his earlier works, when he was so reluctant to use horrific descriptions and made fun of the Young Cannibals' style, at least in the softened saga of Montalbano. In this sense, influences on his writing can be found in the field of international crime fiction, such as the aforementioned Nordic series of commissioner Kurt Wallander by Henning Mankell (Macleod, 2014) and the related television adaptations, along with *Bron/Broen* [The Bridge] (2011-2018) by Hans Rosenfeldt and the French *Engrenages* [Spiral] (2005-2019) by Alexandra Clert and Guy-Patrick Sainderichin.

The inescapable medicalized and techno-scientific tendencies of the genre are also found in this novel, with Montalbano clearly expressing his doubts, providing a good summary of the current situation indeed:

E po', come mai, pur disponenno di tecnologie avanzatissime, che ai so tempi sulo James Bond possidiva, 'sti novi mezzi finivano per complicari le cose 'nveci di farle cchiù facili? 'Nzumma, era come per la midicina: i dottori avivano pirduto l'occhio clinico e s'affidavano all'analisi, la polizia stava pirdenno l'intuizioni e accittava passivamente i risultati scientifici. (Camilleri, 2016, p. 104)

And then, how come, despite having very advanced technologies, which in his time only James Bond had, these new means ended up complicating things instead of making them easier? In short, it was like medicine: the doctors had lost the clinical eye and relied on the analysis, the police were losing intuition and passively accepting the scientific results.

However, despite mourning the disappearance of the clinical eye in the investigation work, Montalbano cannot forgo scientific evidence, primarily the autopsy reports of the medical examiner, the grumpy Doctor Pasquano, whose sharp gaze, actually, performs very well without technological apparatus. Eventually, the evidence provided by forensics helps in identifying the culprit. The crisis of the clinical gaze has been afflicting the detective for a long time. As early as 1999 Montalbano complained:

E il commissario, con “occhio clinico” aveva voluto intendere proprio la capacità dei medici di una volta di rendersi conto, a colpo d’occhio appunto, se un paziente era malato o no. Senza bisogno, come oggi fanno tanti medici, di sottoporre uno a cento esami diversi prima di stabilire che quello è sano come un pesce. (Camilleri, 1999b, p. 247)

By “clinical eye”, the inspector precisely meant the ability of the doctors of the past to realize, at a glance, if a patient was ill or not. Without the need, as so many doctors have today, to undergo one to one hundred different tests before establishing that he is as healthy as a fish.

His investigations have always required presumptive abilities. Montalbano is not only skilled in grasping the imperceptible anomaly not fitting with the whole, but he is also prone to epiphanies and sudden strokes of genius that light up like light bulbs in his mind. His inductive and astute intelligence works according to a number of overlapping mechanisms: flair, reasoning, serendipity and glare. Along with these, the unconscious plays a decisive role and manifests itself in different forms, such as dreams, suggestions, doublings of the personality and *dejà vu* (Bonina, 2012, pp. 28-30).

Nevertheless, in the novels published between 2017 and 2018 the emphasis on the relevance of scientific investigations equalled, if not exceeded that placed on police instinct. The success of Camilleri, in fact, needs to be analysed in local/global terms. He would hardly

have become so famous – so much so that an asteroid has been named after him! – if the extremely local charm of his stories had not been inserted in a highly recognizable and translatable frame, ready for both the most disparate languages and television. Alongside the classic detection structure, enriched with typical *neo-noir* themes, it is the visualization of the body, the insertion of some sadistic and brutal violence and the medicalization of the crime scene that make Montalbano's series belong to international crime fiction. Camilleri's Sicilianity, so peculiar and loved by the affectionate public, is balanced, not only by the repetition and predictability of plots, characters, linguistic expressions, etc., but also by the display of the current conventional crime fiction features.

This is true also for a novel such as *La rete di protezione* [The Safety Net], which narrates an investigation different than usual, mainly in that it is devoid of the daily-fresh dead person, so to speak, and, consequently, of all that necessary *circolo questri* [equestrian circus], consisting of public prosecutor, forensics and coroner. Nevertheless, science is not missing. The solution of the mystery is made possible by a home-made scientific experiment. With a saucepan, boiling water and a sieve, the inspector analyses the traces left by a bullet in a sixty-year-old handkerchief and manages to clarify the dynamics of an old crime, until then only guessed at (Camilleri, 2017, pp. 280-283).

The matter is directly addressed in *Il metodo Catalanotti* [The Catalanotti Method], which stages, in a theatrical-cinematographic frame, the inquiry of the bizarre death of a good-hearted usurer and theatre director. The true and the false overlap several times, starting from the body itself. The real twist, however, is related to the personal life of the inspector. On the threshold of old age, he falls in love like a teenager with the new head of forensic science, a beautiful and intelligent woman. Mutual attraction alternates with mutual dislike between the independent young woman, who claims to have no need of the detective, and the enthusiastic Montalbano, who is willing to leave everything (his longstanding fiancée, his job, even Sicily)

just to be with her. In their metaphorical final hug, in front of a departing train, the narrator ironically alludes to the surrender of the traditional presumptive detection to the objectivity of the technological and scientific investigation, or rather to the bitter evidence of their necessary cooperation: “Non restava che accettari la rialtà. Ah, l’evidenza di questa fottuta rialtà!” [There was no other option than accept reality. Ah, the evidence of this fucking reality] (2018, p. 256).

Montalbano superstar.

As previously mentioned, Montalbano’s adventures have been successfully translated into television films. In fact, a number of factors made the texts ready for adaptation, such as the cyclical nature of the plots and characters, based on elements of structural continuity and links between crime cases (Porcelli, 1998, pp. 79 -81), the multitude of comedy elements, and the style of writing. The writing, in particular, is similar to a television script. It seems to be made of a set of narrative blocks (Bonina, 2012, p. 621), rhythmmed as a story told by images and full of dialogue (Scarpetti & Strano, 2004, p. 36), with cutting edge descriptions and self-introduced characters (Demontis, 2001, pp. 108-111).

Although the films do not divert too much from the novels, nevertheless they offer a palatable and beautified version of Montalbano and his world. The scenography communicates the image of a baroque, bright and embellished Sicily (Scarpetti & Strano, 2004, p. 33; p. 117) where building speculation has not yet devastated the territory. It is a utopian version of the island, which captures readers and spectators in a fictitious reality, beloved by the large audience. This aestheticizing also affected the inspector, played by Luca Zingaretti, who has become a true icon, not only younger and more attractive, but also less morally ambiguous than the narrative character. His political incorrectness has been mitigated and barely hides the overwhelming goodness, typical of the Italian TV series’ protagonists. Despite the little use of disturbing and critical elements, when compared to the novels, the most recent TV adaptations – such as *Una faccenda delicata* [A Delicate Matter] (2016, Feb. 29), *Un covo di vipere* [A

Nest of Vipers] (2017, Feb. 27), *Come voleva la prassi* [As Per Procedure] (2017, Mar. 6), and *La rete di protezione* [The Safety Net] (2020, Mar 16) – opted for more explicit rendering of bodies and violence. For example, in *L'altro capo del filo* [The Other End of the Thread] (2019, Feb. 11), the discovery of the murdered tailor is faithful to the text, which, as we have seen, was already very close to a script, even if the truculence evoked by Camilleri's words has been softened a little.

Power of Confirmation

Almost from the beginning crime fiction evolved simultaneously in literature and in audio-visual narratives. During this evolution the relationship between literary texts, technologies and (old and new) media, from stage to screen, has always been productive, so that, despite the wide public's preference accorded to television, in the new millennium, paperback crime novels still rank highly in the weekly charts. It is sufficient to think of bestseller crime novels, such as those of Stieg Larsson and Patricia Cornwell (Glover & McCracken, 2012, pp. 1-3). Moreover, e-commerce is constantly growing – more than ever in a time of worldwide lockdown such as that experienced in 2020 – and the digital version is particularly popular for thrillers. In Italy, in 2018, four out of ten works were also available digitally, and digital version was produced for 82.1% of adventure and crime fiction books (Istat, 2019).

Another aspect to consider is the relationship of crime literature to seriality. Indeed, it has survived as a popular genre thanks to the ability to compete, initially, with the real crime cases of weekly and daily press, and, more recently, with the success of TV series, especially the American ones, which have captivated the audience. For this purpose, it exploited some typical features, such as the repetition and iteration of storylines and characters, the high predictability of the plot, the centrality of adventure (crime) and the ability to arouse the public's expectation with suspense (Bordoni & Fossati, 1985, pp. 138-142). During the last

seventy years, as with other forms of popular entertainment fiction, it has become part of a global and profitable cultural industry that produces a transoceanic commercial flow, made up of both texts and visual narratives, which circulate from one medium to another and find in seriality one of the most appreciated platforms (Glover & McCracken, 2012, pp. 6-10).

In the current mass-production of fiction – crime fiction included – the dynamics between invention and repetition are faster than in the past (Ferretti, 1983, pp. 50-56). Among many stereotyped products and the infinite repetition of formulae that the contemporary cultural industry lets us consume, from niche literature to prime time, there are also innovative ideas and attempts to update cultural and social models. Elements of respect for conservative values and roles coexist with those of disrespect, so that fiction can reach a larger audience (Ross, 1989, pp. 1-14). However, in this constant dialogue between adherence to accepted practice and innovation, some characteristics have emerged as an expression of a widespread and shared mentality, increasingly reinforced rather than questioned by fiction. In particular, both crime serial novels and TV serials constantly transmit that specific representation of the body (alive and dead) that has been endorsed, to the point of being normalized, by Western medicine, along with the scientific monopoly of knowledge. By these means, crime fiction ends up reinforcing dominant ideas in the public consciousness, instead of criticizing, subverting and awakening, as *neo-noir* did. Not only does the trust in science and in its ability to give meaning to existence, death, crime and madness appear unchallenged, but other issues are also less and less frequently questioned.

Not-so-global circulations.

In the 2000s the spectator's eye has been largely homogenized by television programming that has aired the most successful American TV series, both on prime time and on dedicated channels, such as Fox Crime and, particularly, those of forensic medical fiction:

not only the world-renewed *CSI*, and spin-off, but also *Bones*, *NCIS*, *Law & Order*, *Rizzoli & Isles*, *Dr House*, *Body of Proof*, etc.

Since 2013 the company Netflix²⁹ has entered the production sector and revolutionized the television landscape, by distributing films, TV series and other entertainment content via Internet. Within three years it has reached a global dimension, releasing about 126 original series and films, surpassing all cable networks and channels and now counting a hundred million users all over the world (excluding China). The spread of such a service, relatively cheap and easy to interface, has enlarged the public's access to a very broad offering. New consumption modes, such as "binge viewing" of all the episodes of a series at one time, have become common. The possibility of immediately enjoying a constantly updated range of crime series, in the original language, traveling virtually across the globe, has been realized.

There are examples of *Nordic Noir*, such as the Finnish *Sorjonen* [Bordertown] (2016-2019), the Danish *The Rain* (2018-2020), the Swedish *Störst av allt* [Quicksand] (2019) and the Icelandic *Brot* [The Valhalla Murders] (2020). Series attributable to the *Mediterranean Noir* include the Spanish and Cuban co-production *Cuatro estaciones en La Habana* [Four Season in Havana] (2016), *La casa de papel* [Money Heist] (2017-2020), which has become cult, *Élite* [Elite] (2018-2020) and *Fugitiva* [Fugitive] (2018). One can enjoy works from countries and regions usually less represented, such as the Basque *La víctima número 8* [Victim Number 8] (2018), the Galician *O sabor das margaridas* [Bitter Daisies] (2019-2020), the Belgian *Tabula Rasa* (2017), the Polish *1983* (2018), the Japanese *Bokudake ga inai machi* [Erased] (2017) and *Giri/Haji* [Duty/Shame] (2019), the Philippine *AMO* [Boss] (2018), the

²⁹ Since 2016 it has covered the entire planet, over 200 countries, with the exception of China. With a huge number of subscribers, it is the first *Svod* (subscription video-on-demand) that, with an online streaming service at a very low monthly cost (from 8 to 12 euros), offers mainly, but not only, films and series. In the United States, where it started, it had an impact on the audio-visual industry such as to undermine cable and pay TV channels like HBO. Today it negotiates exclusive distribution rights for films and series with the Hollywood majors. The major European broadcasters, such as the BBC, but unlike Sky and Amazon Prime Video, are no longer able to compete (Preta, 2017).

Australian *Glitch* (2016-2019) and *Secret City* (2016-2019), the Canadian *The Indian Detective* (2017), and the already mentioned Amazonian-Colombian *Frontera verde* [Green Frontier] (2019). Germany is also well represented, with series such as *Babylon Berlin* (2017-2020), *Dark* (2017-2020), *Parfum* [Perfume] (2018), and *Dogs of Berlin* (2018). The United States remains the country that produces and spreads the most TV series globally, with, to a lesser extent, Great Britain and France.

Netflix, along with the digital media and the web, is changing the forms of production and reception of fiction. We focus our analyses on the representation of the dead body. Numerous series released between 2015 and 2019, and not exclusively those dedicated to crime, have embedded the necro-aesthetic turning point that changed the way corpses and death are depicted. Apart from the *CSI*-like American serials, in Europe this change was already visible in several successful series of good quality, such as the aforementioned French *Engrenages* and the Swedish-Danish *Bron/Broen*, which did not spare close-ups of naked, tortured or torn-to-pieces bodies, Y-incisions, internal organs and splatters of blood, scientifically spread on the walls.

The new series, produced and/or distributed by Netflix, have exploited such an exuberant medical iconography, as well as a renewed praise of technology and medical science. Their aesthetic of death is, at the same time, amplified and sanitized. As opposed to the past, the corpse no longer remains covered or hidden by sheets, while strategic lighting exalts embellished cadavers and sterilized work surfaces, surrounded by shimmering equipment. Now the majority of the bodies are depicted as perfectly healthy, brand new corpses. They are beautiful, young, attractive, athletic and solid, just a bit ruined by scars and Y-cuts. Doctors treat them as if they were still alive. They talk to them, they clean and cover them, quite unlike what would happen in reality or in a documentary, where corpses are marked by age, barely covered, moving and sliding, while long and slow procedures are performed on dirty and wet

tables. The most shocking details of mutilated, decomposed, swollen, fragmented, dissected and burned cadavers, are unlikely to be shown for more than two minutes (Weber & Timmermans, 2010, pp. 63-64).

Dead-toolkit.

The display of a set of ever-present elements characterizes the most recent TV series. By examining them, we have noticed in particular: close-ups of some of the more macabre details of the corpse; undressed, overexposed and sexualized bodies (mostly feminine, but increasingly also masculine), operations of both torture and surgery with and without anaesthesia; crime scenes dominated by the white-dressed forensics; operating tables surrounded by experienced doctors and attentive detectives; crime illustrative boards; collections of photographs, ballistic reports, fingerprints, blood splatters, organic samples, etc. A few examples follow.

First of all, the preferred setting for forensic medicine and science is the morgue, the pathologist's operative headquarter. Wherever it might come from, a dark alley or a dumpster, the body is quickly repatriated to the morgue, its natural habitat. Unlike in the past, it is no longer represented as a macabre and gloomy place, often located in strategic places, like near the river (great location for the fishing for corpses). Now the cinematographic fashion displays the body in a lab-style mortuary. It is a place dominated by cold lights and white colour, antiseptic and dry, despite the butchery procedures that are carried out. When the characters gather around the surgery or the anatomical table, positioned at the centre of the room, it is the moment of unquestionable information that the detective receives from the doctor, the representative of Knowledge, to be matched with the investigative hypotheses. The corpse is usually framed whole and, then, zoomed in on some detail. It is clean, stitched, and shows a compactness as if it were always in rigor mortis or just extracted from the freezer. It has little of the organic substance and much of the object. The body is also naked and, very often,

overexposed and sexualized, even if there is no inherent reason, such as explaining a wound by showing it up close. The examples are innumerable. To illustrate a few, in the episode *Nukkekotit Osa 2* [The Dolls' House – Part 2] of the Nordic *Bordertown*, both male and female bodies, lying without covers on either the torturer's or the anatomical table, are examined (2018, July 15). Massacred bodies of young revolutionaries, and in particular a nude male, in *Requiem*, the final episode of the Polish *1983* (2018, Nov. 30).

Disproportionately more widespread, female corpses are represented in a similar fashion to a scene in *Ambra* [Amber], the first episode of the German *Parfum*, where we see a young woman, naked with open arms, partially skinned and mutilated (under her armpits and in her groin), her stylish face with makeup that stands out against her shaved skull, with two cuts on her throat. Her face remains stylish and with makeup even after the pathologist's Y incision and, finally, in the coffin (2018, Dec. 21). The composition of images of the female body, sexualized by languid poses, anatomical details (such as the breast or buttocks, shot in the foreground or repeatedly), makeup, skimpy clothes and underwear that suggest ante-mortem sexual activities, summons a gaze on the body other than scientific.

Almost three centuries have passed since the female anatomical wax models, such as Giovanni Clemente Susini's *Venerina* (with removable abdomen, 1789), the *Florentine Specola* and the various other Medici *Venuses*, the Bolognese Ercole Lelli's *Scorticata* [Skinned] (1751) and the obstetric collection by Gian Antonio Galli, lying down sensually although gutted for the anatomical lesson. Naked, open, with their down hair, a string of pearls and a foetus in the womb, they embodied the male 17th and 18th century paradigms of femininity. Despite the study of corpses, which opened up the knowledge of the interior of the human body, for a long time its representation remained anchored to the classical canons, and so did the anachronistic illustrations in the anatomical and obstetric treatises. Inside the scientific gaze over the female body, an anatomical aestheticism has been long lived,

ambiguously contemplating and interpreting it with desire (Pancino, 2006, pp. 315-318). Those waxed Venus models were directly connected to the 14th and 15th century *Venus pudica*, whose beauty was both shown and hidden at the same time. Carrying both bloody organs and miniatures of children inside, they appear as the model of a collective unconscious that has persisted in the Western imagination over centuries, without having much to do with the progress of science (pp. 321-322). The sectioned woman, yesterday as today, can only be beautiful while the artifice of the anatomical representation overlaps the effects of death with those of sexual pleasure, magically making the traces of human liquids disappear (p. 324). The corpses are displayed in unrealistically bloodless poses, even if they are fresh from lacerations, bruises, disembowelments and various mutilations. The female corpses, staged and visualized in the lab, are today's wax models.

In the vast majority of the crime fiction works examined, the television – but also cinematographic and narrative – depiction of the dead body is suggested as medical-scientific by the construction of the image. Placed inside the morgue, or in the space delimited by the police tape that prohibits non-experts from accessing the crime scene, it is perceived as a sort of realistic representation of how science would work in a real investigation. Actually, the public is looking through a filter that has sexualized and reified the body.

Furthermore, the cadaver appears sanitized. It is clean and dry, since the images exclude those cadaveric traits that, in reality, affect other senses besides sight. Corpses stink. Death is putrefaction. Nevertheless, this material aspect of death is only evoked by the cliché of the detective (or more often of inexperienced collaborator) who vomits and moves away, while the pathologist is perfectly cool and could have a sandwich while removing the contents of the just extracted stomach. This vomiting testifies the hideous reality of the body and shows its effects on witnesses, while avoiding direct images of putrefied corpses in bad shape. Thus, the rhetorical devices of image composition have made a certain representation of the body seem

as though it is scientifically realistic, uncovered, as if the spectators were there, looking at a dead person, who has just been killed or examined. However, the reality is, at least, less similar to what TV series put on the screen, and certainly less transparent. But, as Andrea Camilleri affirmed, sometimes the reality of a scene is much less convincing than those seen so many times in the American films: “Guarda il sangue, com’è scuro, mi dicevo. E guarda la polvere della strada, come spegne i colori” [Look at the blood, how dark it is, I said to myself. And look at the dust of the road, how it fades the colours] (Sorgi, 2000, p. 94).

Less exposed, in the TV series, are the corpses of children, a kind of remaining taboo, whose rawness is diluted by graceful poses and sheets rolled up as covers to protect what remains of a ruined innocence. We have an example in the second episode, *Lügen* [Lies], of the German *Dark* where the face of a disfigured boy, with burnt eyes, appears a little inclined, making him look more like a macabre portrait than a body returning from an autopsy (2017, Dec. 1). In episode *Il primo dovere dei vivi* [The First Duty of the Living] of the dramatic Italian TV series *Il miracolo* [The Miracle], conceived and curated by the writer Ammaniti (2018), we find an even less common image: old dead meat. It is the naked body of an elderly woman, just examined by a pathologist. In this case there is no trace of sensuality except in its cancellation. Lying naked and rigid, white as bones from the hair to the toes, she exhibits her protruding ribs and kneecaps and her flat breasts (2018, May 15, 00:17:08-00:17:20).

The shots in the morgue are not very different from those set in hospitals and improvised medical camps. They are places where the medicalization of the image dominates, even when the story is far from medical-forensic fiction. For example, in the Spanish series *Money Heist* we see several times the protagonist group of masked robbers dealing with emergency advanced surgical operations, such as in *A contrarreloj* [Against the Clock] (2017, Dec. 20) and in *Game Over* (2020, Apr. 3).

Whether it is a hospital or a morgue, close-ups of medical details recur, such as countless samples of epidermal tissue from a bloody hand, especially in the first episodes: *Glitch* (*The Risen*, 2016, Oct. 15), *The Sinner* (*Part I*, 2018, Feb. 4), *Quicksand* (*Maja*, 2019, Apr. 5), and *Élite* with *Bienvenidos* [Welcome] (2018, Oct. 5). There is no lack of syringes, scalpels, sutures, thermometers and bloody gauze.

With time, more and more diverse macabre details of the corpse occur. For example: burned eyes, as in the aforementioned episode of *Dark*; an infected limb that miraculously heals and fingers that grow back, in the episode *There Must Be Rules* of *Glitch* (2015, Aug. 13); greenish skin surrounding a deep cut that is stitched in the episode 1.10 of *Mindhunter* (2017, Oct. 13); the rotting face of a dead man, fished from the sea, in the episode *Paisaje de otoño* [Autumn Landscapes] of *Four Season in Havana* (2016, Dec. 9). Actually the representation of the body has increasingly adopted those modalities used in the horror genre, for which limbs and severed heads, splashes of blood up to the ceiling and rotting corpses that come back to life are primary visual material. We find a young woman slaughtered and artfully skewered in the episodes *Apéritif* (2013, Sep. 12) and *Potage* (2013, Sep. 19) of *Hannibal*; a detective touching, with a pen, the head of a decapitated man, placed on a table, and a skull in advanced ossification in, respectively, episode 1.1 (2017, Aug. 28) and 1.3 (2017, Aug. 28) of the French *La Mante* [The Mantis]; axes stuck in the body of a woman who tried to escape in episode 1.1 of the Japanese *Erased* (2017, Dec. 15), and ossified corpses exhumed in the aforementioned episode of *The Sinner*.

Apart from the morgue, the other inevitable setting is that of the crime scene. Delimited by the classic police tape, a sort of border that separates the professionals from others, it is nevertheless disclosed to the gaze of the public, who trespasses and closely follows the work of the technicians, as in a documentary. Here then, behind the tape, there are cameras shooting, numbered cards marking the evidence, the white silhouette of the dead person drawn with

adhesive tape, sketches and bloodstains, mortuary bags being closed on the corpses, gloves on the hands of doctors and agents. Such a scene is displayed at least once in every episode of any contemporary crime series. It's a pointer, a marker of the genre that ensures its recognisability, just as the investigator's raincoat, the *femme fatale* or the strip tease nightclub were for many years before³⁰.

Going beyond crime fiction.

Despite the specialization of crime fiction into a multitude of sub-genres, a broad similarity of the visual results has brought a reified and medicalized body to the fore, exaggerating the outcomes of an omniscient science and infallible technologies. These representative clichés have gone beyond the genre and have been shared by heterogeneous products, such as those mentioned above.

Moreover, an explicit praise of the medicalization of existence and imagination can be found in a number of TV series set in the past. Sometimes it is just a few scenes, but more often it is the main plot that is affected. For example, in *The Alienist* (2018-2020), the protagonist is an odd team, formed by young Roosevelt, the first woman hired by the New York police (NYPD) and an alienist with a modern spirit, in search of the serial killer of a number of homosexual children, who are found torn to pieces and maimed.

Along the same medical-psychiatric line is *Alias Grace* (2017), taken from the work of Margaret Atwood, which featured two crimes that occurred in Western Canada in 1843. The maid of Irish origin, Grace Marks, was sentenced to life imprisonment for the crime, but her guilt was much debated. The series gives much attention to her conversations with Doctor Jordan, which are commissioned by the Methodist Church to establish whether the young

³⁰ See also Delanoë-Brun (2014), who examined the increasing number of corpses on television shows in relation to the representation of death in Western societies, the tendency of technology and science to reduce death to neurobiological processes and behavioral automatisms and the resurgence of the *memento mori* in televised form.

woman is suffering from hysteria and are staged as though they are sessions of psychoanalysis. There is no shortage of spiritualists and neuro-hypnotists. In the first episode (2017, Sep. 25), for example, we see the dazed face of Grace as she is measured with a Lombrosian device of dubious efficiency.

The above mentioned *Mindhunter*, on the other hand, is set in America in 1977, when the word “serial killer” was coined and criminal psychology and profiling were in their infancy at the FBI. The three protagonists (two agents and a psychologist) form the *Behavioural Science Unit*³¹ in Quantico and visit the prisons of the United States in order to interview the most notorious incarcerated multiple killers.

The *Frankenstein Chronicles* (2015-2017), vaguely inspired by the famous 18th century novel by Mary Shelley, tells of corpses of children being disjointed and reassembled in Great Britain at the time when the Anatomy Act was being discussed in Parliament. Signed in 1832 and later adopted by the Commonwealth and the United States, this law licensed doctors and anatomists to dissect corpses received as donations and banned their illegal trade, in order to stop the body-snatchers. They were times when the medical and surgical profession had to acquire technical, manual and clinical skills, which for too long had been separated from the acquisition of philosophical and theoretical scientific knowledge. It had to gain professional prestige and absolute authority in the field, modernize itself through the practice of anatomy and of a new clinical method, closer to the body of the patient. Medical doctors also had to stand out in a plethora of other healing professionals, from charlatans to midwives, and from barbers to surgeons and apothecaries (Pancino, 1984, p. 43-44). The moral climate, in the 1820s, was dominated by anxiety about accidental burials of seemingly dead bodies and their possible subsequent resurrection, along with a taste for the marvellous anatomical and

³¹ The *BSU* is an investigative unit established between the late 1970s and early 1980s that employed special agents, instructors and technicians to develop new approaches and techniques for solving crimes through the study of the attackers, their behaviour and motivations.

abnormal exhibitions of monsters at birth, deformed fetuses, syphilis sufferers, etc. In this series, the ambiguous characterization of the scientist, halfway between a medieval alchemist and a butcher, clearly emerges. The 19th century Gothic spirit is accompanied by a more modern taste for graphic and anatomical detail. Tributes to the dawn of modern medicine can be also found in the non-crime series *Outlander* (2014-2020), whose protagonist is a time-traveling female surgeon, alternating between post-WWII England and late 1700s Scotland, who performs astonishing and anachronistic medical procedures.

The Australian *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (2012-2015) features a doctor (female and lesbian) engaged in tasks such as examining the deterioration of a criminal brain (*Deadweight*, 2014, Sep. 24), or giving a lesson in legal anatomy (*The Blood of Juana the Mad*, 2014, Nov. 5), while detectives reconstruct the dynamics of a crime by using rudimentary display boards (*King Memses' Curse*, 2013, Sep. 4). In this series, we find a further example of how the female body appears consistently sexualised, with perfect makeup, even when it has been fished out of the water half putrefied (*Unnatural Habits*, 2013, Nov. 22) or slaughtered (*Death Defying Feats*, 2016, Aug. 10).

Crime fiction not only offers infinite repetition and infinite metamorphosis of pseudo-scientific representations of crimes and corpses, but also provides some parody which, blandly, employs the trite material to amuse the public who, by now, has had perhaps enough of *CSI* and splatter style. We see, for example, an exaggeration of the classic crime scene in the first episode, *Horizons*, of *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency* (2016, Oct. 22). There are huge splatters, bloody handprints left by a severed limb that stand out on the white carpet, giant tapes and yellow cards, marking a surreal explosion of violence, fire, blood and destruction. In episode 1.4 of *The End of the F***ing World* (2017, Oct. 24), the viewer may find the protagonist girl amusing, in her green gloves, too big for her, as she erases all the traces of the murder just committed. Later, she also stages a crime scene by surrounding the corpse of a

sinister serial killer with photographs of his victims. Also, in the opening frames of the Disney-themed crime movie *Zootopia* there is a violent murder that immediately reveals itself as false. It is a theatrical play, in which the splatter killing of a bunny girl is clearly shown as made-up of coloured ribbons and ketchup (2016, 00:01:00-00:03:06).

Zombies.

Also relevant, in terms of injecting humour into crime fiction, is the TV series *iZombie* (2015-2019), based on the comics series of the same name by Chris Roberson and Mike Allred. It opens with the protagonist, a doctor, in the emergency room treating a patient in a critical condition by sticking a tube in his chest (*Pilot*, 2015, Nov. 4). In the following minutes, her voiceover relates the story of her transformation into a zombie. From an ambitious, beautiful, vital and soon to be married surgeon, she has become a pale and hungry monster, professionally and sentimentally broken. Nonetheless, she has found a place in the world. She is now an assistant medical examiner, she feeds on human brains, extracted from the corpses that end up on her autopsy table and, through them and she has turned into a detective.

Here the figure of the pathologist-investigator, typical of forensic fiction, the “doctor of the dead”, is a dead doctor, or rather, an undead. The *hunger* for knowledge of the pathologist, who effectively analyses and questions the corpse, during the autopsy, looking for answers, has transformed into a literal hunger, a desire to ingest the brain of the corpse. The discovery of truth appears as definitely *incorporated*. There is no longer a corpse telling its own story during the autoptic exam, but visions triggered by the ingestion of the victim’s brain. The metaphor of the saying “you are what you eat” seems to be taken literally here. In each episode, an accelerated sequence shows the daily-fresh brain, cooked and consumed as normal food, with the obvious effects of cultural domestication of the cannibal image. Precisely this image produces a difference, when compared to the classic horror-movie zombie, who feeds wildly on the brains of the living. Here, the protagonist is a person not very different from us.

We often see human brains in other episodes, on the plate but also in assembly lines (*Are You Ready for Some Zombies?*, 2018, Feb. 26), and human parts tidily labelled on the anatomical tables (*Mac-Liv-Moore*, 2018, Apr. 30)³², representing the trivialized relationship with death, and its marketing.

In addition, an atmosphere of “phantom cannibalism”, the shadow of early and long forgotten European cannibalism – that is, of the repressed, erased memory of Western cannibalism (Courtine, 2015) – is floating over many of these scenes, and present in a number of these TV shows. That’s why Hannibal the Cannibal keeps returning as a character, as well as so many zombies.

Liv, the cannibal doctor of *iZombie*, is both one of the numerous variations of the mad doctor³³ and an incarnation of the popular figure of the undead. Together with corpses, zombies (walking cadavers) testify to the pervasion of death and bodies in popular fiction: not just in their elective genres, such as horror and science fiction, but in crime fiction too. As millennial and cross-cultural figures, zombies come to us, today, through a long literary and cinematographic history that passes from the Gothic novel to the latest horror film (Collins, 1993, p. 29). They embody both the grotesque representation of putrefaction and the problematic perception of the boundary between life and death. After being, for years, the lower-class citizens of the monsters’ world and the trashiest characters of a trashy genre, they are now losing their monstrous appearance. They have become increasingly indistinguishable from humans, even sexy, to the point that “they are us” (Botting, 2011, pp. 36-37).

The medical-soft horror appearance of these trendy new zombies is another outcome of the transformed gaze over the body, both at the epistemological and the aesthetic levels. As we

³² In this episode a young girl expresses her gruesome enthusiastic curiosity in front of the inventory of corpse pieces arranged on the anatomical table with a tag, while the zombie doctor explains how, in the medico-legal procedure, they read the fingerprints to be able to reconstruct the body (2018, Apr. 30, 00:17:08-00:17:19).

³³ Along with the mad doctor, we have the mad anatomist, the mad bone collector, the mad surgeon, the mad gynaecologist, the mad psychiatrist, of course, and even the mad dentist, though this one is too painful to be even mentioned (usually an ex-Nazi torturer still busy practising his skill after the war).

argued, the contemporary anatomical gaze is not anymore the pathologist's gaze, but the gaze of the doctor, of the technician and, insofar as the technological decipherability increases, ours. The growing transparency of the interior of the body, as a result of the development and subsequent trivialization of medical technologies, is pushing the line between life and death to new levels. And this tendency is mirrored in fiction.

The Italian Panorama

For almost ten years the Italian TV series panorama and production sector has been polarized between prolific family entertainment and the few works of higher quality and international distribution. In fact, it is more correct to define three different models: the pedagogical approach of Rai state-channels, with its hagiographic miniseries, socially engaged fiction and comedies; the legal and procedural detective films and romantic soap operas of Mediaset private channels, inspired by the American commercial model; and the high budget, quality and target-oriented productions of Sky Italia (Barra & Scaglioni, 2015, p. 65). Furthermore, the spread and ease of access of a streaming platform such as Netflix, has also changed the Italian crime fiction market.

The two poles.

Over the years Rai has maintained an educational mission, with a preference for quality miniseries and historical serials dedicated to exemplary figures, important in the popular representation of an idealized citizenship. The format of the short series, divided into two parts, generally has only slightly adventurous plots, with good and evil clearly distinguished, and is targeted to an early evening family audience. It has also produced a lot of Italian detection, setting the canons: for example, the use of the comedy element and the attention to the private lives of the protagonists. Crime stories – such as *Il maresciallo Rocca* [Marshal Rocca] (1996-2005), *Don Matteo* [Father Matteo] (2000-2020) and *Che Dio ci aiuti* [May God Help Us] (2011-2020), with religious figures in the role of detective – are set in idealized small towns,

while comic subplots lighten the vision of a crime unfailingly punished. Other examples of lasting success are the aforementioned world-famous *Il commissario Montalbano* [Inspector Montalbano] (1999-2020), *L'ispettore Coliandro* [Inspector Coliandro] (2006-2018), inspired by Lucarelli's novels, *Provaci ancora Prof!* [The Teacher] (2005-2017), *La Narcotici* [Anti-Drug Squad] (2011-2015), *Un passo dal cielo* [*One Step from Heaven*] (2011-2019), and others.

Rai shared the market with the imported series broadcast on private channels which, being less expensive, provided an invasion of American police squads and couples, such as *The Street of San Francisco* (1972), *Starsky & Hutch* (1975) and *Most Wanted* (1976). Alongside the imported ones, action series of North American and European inspiration were also produced, made up of many episodes over several seasons and, often, with spin-offs. This foreign format, actually, was Italianized by creating longer episodes of ninety minutes and inserting comic storylines into the dramatic main line. The Taodue Production Company, owned by Mediaset, founded by Pietro Valsecchi in 1991 and specializing in television fiction, developed its own style. Stories of criminal heroes or mafia clans challenge the representatives of the law within a plot that grips the viewer with peaks of tension and emotions. It is a type of low brow cultural product, which established itself in what Umberto Eco called the “neo-television”, dominated by advertising, channel surfing and the distraction of the viewer. It has an open structure and is rich in cliff-hangers (emotional peaks), which are melodramatic moments, whose outcome is uncertain until the last moment, in order to engage the audience beyond the commercial interruption and the end of the episode. These *feuilleton*-style dramatic episodes, which inflate the plot, are particularly enjoyed by the public (Runcini, 1979, p. 176). For example, in the many seasons of *Distretto di polizia* [Police Precinct] (2000-2012), the horizontal story line focuses on organized crime, while more animated stories show the daily life of the police team as if it were a family. After the conclusion, it continued with the spin-

off *Squadra Mobile* [Flying Squad] (2015-2017). Other series are: *Carabinieri* [Gendarmerie] (2000-2008), *Squadra Antimafia* [Anti-Mafia Squad] (2009-2015), the aforementioned *R.I.S. - Delitti imperfetti* [*R.I.S. - Imperfect Crimes*], *Valeria medico legale* [Medical Examiner Valeria] (2000-2002), *Il capo dei capi* [The Boss of the Bosses] (2007) and *Il clan dei Camorristi* [The Camorra Clan] (2013). These series, aired on prime time and targeted to a younger, wider and more attentive audience than those screened on Rai, introduced innovative elements in the arena of generalist television, such as female leadership and casts made up of unknown actors.

Under the influence of the commercial competitor, the sentimental family style of the public service slowly welcomed more action, brutal tones, the point of view of the criminals and teamwork. If it is still true today that the good guys always win, at least they do so in a more nuanced way (Barra & Scaglioni, 2015, pp. 67-70). Among the most recent experiments, we can mention *La porta rossa* [The Red Door] (2017-2019), born from the collaboration between Carlo Lucarelli and the film director Carmine Elia and aired on Raidue, which experimented with crime that includes a hint of paranormal, according to an unpublished formula in the Italian panorama. The fantasy component and the presence of a co-protagonist female figure have been designed, among various other reasons, for a stronger connection with the female audience (Carducci, 2017, pp. 22-23). As a matter of fact, female protagonists also find more and more space in the conservative national-popular television, as in the aforementioned *L'allieva* [The Pupil] and in *Non uccidere* [Thou Shalt Not Kill] (2015-2018). Another example is *Crimini* [Crimes], the anthological series conceived and edited by the writer Massimo De Cataldo. Each episode, independent and set in a different Italian city, is taken from the short story of a well-known *neo-noir* author. The list goes on: *Sotto copertura* [Undercover] (2015), *La mafia uccide solo d'estate* [The Mafia Kills Only in Summer] (2016-2018), *Rocco Schiavone* [A Rocco Schiavone Mystery] (2016-2019), *La Catturandi*

[Catturandi Squad] (2016) and *I Bastardi di Pizzofalcone* [The Bastards of Pizzofalcone] (2017-2018).

All these generalist fiction Italian-made TV series are characterized by a very simple and only slightly disturbing plot, both in the script and in the visual images. They are divided into episodes but conceived of as units which, following the conventions and expectations of this type of serial product, respect some standardized formulae. In each episode, similar events are told through different perspectives. In general, the episodes avoid or limit the vivid, graphic and detailed representations of the body that began to come into fashion in the early 2000s in the North American series, visible on paid channels such as Sky or others dedicated to the genre. During crime scenes, and in those set in the morgue, the camera does not linger on the corpse and its wounds, while the viewer is immediately distracted by the continuation of the narrative. The happy ending, with the culprit brought to justice and the order re-established, according to the most classical detective fiction, reassures one of the (after all) healthy constitution of society, only momentarily put in crisis by the crime.

Good for Sky.

Recently the emergence of the Italian pay-tv series has introduced a new era. Following the United States, we have seen the arrival of the TV series associated with cable channels, such as Canal+ and Sky, and the productions of new operators such as Netflix. Because it rests on direct subscription, as the most important resource, with no state fees or commercial advertising, the pay-tv model has positioned itself as a direct, radically different competitor of generalist broadcasters. Sky's motto, since 2008, has been: "If it works for Mediaset and Rai, it ain't good for Sky". The contexts of production have also changed, with ambitions that only a few Italian productions had, such as *Inspector Montalbano*, and openings to the international market and co-production opportunities. This editorial policy gave Sky an original brand and some specific traits.

Between 2008 and 2013, Sky established its own precise aesthetic visual style in its choice of direction, cast, script, marketing strategies and logo. Writing has leaned towards a cinematographic complexity in the development of the plot, both in the script and in production and post-production. The portrayal of reality is not marked by Manichaeic divisions or edifying moralism (Barra & Scaglioni, 2015, pp. 71-73; Scaglioni, 2016, pp. 13-15). For example, both *Romanzo criminale – La serie* [Criminal Novel – The Series] (2008-2010) and *Gomorra – La serie* [Gomorra] (2014-2019) broke into the crime-thriller market, and assigned a privileged, if not exclusive, perspective to the bad guys. The portrayal of criminal protagonists and their violence is no longer mediated or counterbalanced, as happens in Rai and Mediaset TV series. Irony is mixed with a graphic and visually detailed realism. In *Gomorra*, in particular, there is no longer any representative of the law, only the underground world of the Camorra, with its hierarchies, its rituals and its slang. This style, which refers to the models of North American cable television, such as the HBO *The Wire* (2002-2008), sanctioned the foreign appreciation of this series and their transition as a true phenomenon of national custom.

Romanzo criminale – La serie series, based on Giancarlo De Cataldo's novel (2002) and conceived and directed by Stefano Sollima, took inspiration from the real events of the Magliana gang, a criminal group operating in Rome since the late 1970s. In terms of success, it outclassed both the novel and the film, of the same name, which was made earlier (Placido, 2005). It encouraged new publications, such as the sequel *Nelle mani giuste* [In the Right Hands] (De Cataldo, 2007), the spin-off *Io sono il Libanese* [I Am the Lebanese] (De Cataldo, 2012) and *La verità del Freddo* [The Truth of the Ice] (Abbatino & Fanelli, 2018), which dramatized the testimonies, told in the first person by one of the gang leaders, called *Freddo* [Ice]. In the wake of the success, we can also mention the recently released movie, *Dogman*

(2018), inspired by the harsh murder committed by a poor and bullied member of the Magliana gang in the 1980s.

Even more successful has been *Gomorra – La serie*, which appeared in 2014 after the popularity reached by the non-fiction investigative book, *Gomorra*, by Roberto Saviano (2006), who infiltrated several Camorra-ruled businesses, and the film directed by Matteo Garrone (2008). This crime drama is set in the Neapolitan suburb of Secondigliano and narrates the life events and power struggles of a Camorra family, both within the family and against other criminal groups. In particular, it focuses on the attempt of some of the young ones to challenge the “old authority” and make new alliances within the ferocious system-market of this regionally-specific mafia, which seems to have an uncontested influence on Italian society. It has been one of the most discussed and original series of those made in Italy. Its peculiar language and some characters, such as Genny Savastano, Ciro and Patrizia, have attracted a sort of cult following (Scaglioni, 2016, pp. 9-11). It can perhaps be compared to both a series such as *The Wire*, created by David Simon, produced by HBO and broadcast in the United States between 2002 and 2008, and the French *Braquo* (2009-2016) created by Olivier Marchal.

Both *Romanzo criminale – La serie* and *Gomorra – La serie* are based on successful novels that revealed the environmental and anthropological degradation caused by the criminal power, intertwined with the political one. The two texts share more than one characteristic, starting from the story they tell and the way they tell it, which has been influenced by literary journalism models, such as Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1966) and James Ellroy’s *My Dark Places* (1996). The struggle of a gang of criminals to conquer and maintain a seat of power and the heinous violence carried out by them are the very engine of the events. They are described with extensive use of suggestions taken from both the audio-visual media and other narrative genres, such as news, procedural evidence, lists, statistics and anecdotes. These texts,

according to the definition of Wu Ming, are exemplary of the so-called *New Italian Epic* (Wu Ming, 2009, pp. 14-45).

Thanatopolitics.

In the case of *Romanzo criminale* and *Gomorra*, the epic narration concerns a vicious criminal group that escalates its power. This theme is among the preferred subjects of the *Mediterranean neo-noir* authors, who, especially between the 1980s and the 1990s, produced politically and ethically committed novels in order to expose the global transformations of organized crime and its collusion with corrupted institutions, finance and the business world (Carlotto, 2006, pp. 11-12).

Without examining De Cataldo and Saviano's novels, we want, nevertheless, to stress the relevance of the vivid representation of a specific criminal violence. This violence is part of the functioning of the so-called "powers of death" (Mbembe & Meintjes, 2003). *Thanatopolitics*, or *necropolitics*, are contemporary forms of government and subjugation of life that makes it possible to exercise brutal forms of violence in the name of a declared willingness to safeguard the vital interests of the community. The people, who live confined in these death-worlds, such as refugee camps, prisons, *banlieues*, slums and *favelas*, are exposed to everyday deadly dangers and risks, to the point that they acquire the status of the living-dead. These strong death powers are found particularly on the margins, both outside and within the centres of Western power, as in the case of the Campania region described in *Gomorra* (Palumbo, 2009, pp. 41-43).

In both the degraded neighbourhoods of Secondigliano (Naples) and Magliana (Rome), criminal or mafia organizations make extensive use of a necro-scientific know-how that has, as its object, the disarticulation and annihilation of the body of a very large number of victims. The extreme and symbolic ways in which corpses are manipulated serve to inscribe power relations into their flesh (Palumbo, 2009, pp. 44-54). Often murders are carried out as symbolic

and ritual performances, with implicit meanings and precise communicative intentions. The extreme violence inflicted is not caused by the mere will to punish and annihilate the victims but has also semantic functions. The body is used as a rhetorical tool to emphasize the absolute domination over life and death, exercised by criminal powers. It is acted out by a devastating violence that emerges as a constitutive element of the territorial governance of criminal groups. Violence also marks the daily and family existence of the persons, both as an ordinary mode of social relationship and as an instrument of control and self-affirmation within the community. In these culturally and socially degenerated contexts, marked by an informal and brutal economy, violence appears as a resource for social climbing, while the ethics of easy money, individual profit, abuse of power, astuteness and male chauvinism are the norms to which one conforms (Jourdan, 2010, pp. 81-110).

Necro-aesthetic shift.

The representation of this brutal form of violence has been portrayed in both *Romanzo criminale* and *Gomorra*, the TV series inspired by the novels, which were expressions of a new generation of television, as we have discussed. However, there is a significant difference between the two series. In fact, within Sky's crime fiction production, there has been an intensification and medicalization of the brutality shown.

The second (and most successful) season of *Gomorra* is characterized by the deployment of close-up shots on rough details, to a much larger extent than occurs in the first season. At the very beginning of the first episode, *Vita mia* [My Life] (2016, May 10), even before the image appears on the screen, the viewer hears the sound of a medical reanimation supply unit and the voice of a nurse. The initial shot is a close-up of the massacred face of one of the protagonists, Genny Savastano, son of Secondigliano's boss. The body, furthermore, is clearly medicalized. Thus, the script writers preferred, as an opening scene, the stereotype of a forensic medical series instead of the gangster-classic initial fight. The same happens in the

closing scene of the final episode, set in the delivery room of a hospital. Graphic representations like these are common in all the other episodes, for example, in the episode *Mea culpa* [My Fault] (2016, May 17), when one of the most powerful rivals of the Savastano family is slaughtered, and in the episode *Profumo di iena* [Scent of Hyena] (2016, May 17), when the young woman Patrizia, intermediary of the fugitive boss of Secondigliano, de-fleshes her own arm with a scorching spoon in order to remove a tattoo.

This necro-aesthetic shift, adopted by Sky productions and based on innovative writing, directing and photography choices, was significantly less marked both in the first season of *Gomorra* and in all of the previous Sky series, including *Romanzo criminale*. This shift was even less evident in the productions on Rai and Canale 5, which have always preferred a softer representation of violence and corpses. The display of graphic and pitiless brutality has not derived from the desire to make the social denouncement harsher, as in *neo-noir* narrative, but rather for commercial reasons. Sky put in the foreground what both the generalist broadcasters and cinema had long left outside, tailoring a product suitable for the public's taste and successfully selling it.

Netflix.

Recently the platform Netflix has changed the Italian television panorama as it has also done in other countries. In addition to the first two seasons of *Gomorra*, it launched, in 2017, the first original Italian TV series distributed by Netflix, the aforementioned *Suburra*, later broadcast by Raidue.

The story has been inspired by the novel by De Cataldo and Carlo Bonini (2013), published in the wave of the success of *Romanzo criminale*, and it constitutes the prequel to the film of the same name, directed by Stefano Sollima in 2015. The plot of the TV series, which does not spare gritty and explicit brutality and sex, focuses on organized crime in today's Rome, experienced through the life stories of three young men, Aureliano, Lele and Spadino.

Again, it is the precarious alliance of a new generation of criminals that is being portrayed. They consider themselves to be prophets of a new era of crime, in which the old rules – such as the code of honour and the respect for family roots and older leaders – no longer count. They challenge traditional and patriarchal authority through a violence that does not spare even their own fathers and brothers. Besides them, there are also some prominent female figures who, unlike in the majority of the Italian TV series, have independent and powerful roles. Sara is engaged in the Vatican affairs, Livia, for a short time, takes the leadership of the Ostia crime gangs and, finally, Angelica, a young Sinti bride, skilfully manipulates the patriarchal traditions of her family clan to her own advantage.

In 2018 *Nero a metà* [Carlo & Malik] was conceived by the *neo-noir* author and screenwriter Giampaolo Simi with Vittorino Testa, co-produced by Rai Fiction and Cattleya, in collaboration with Netflix, broadcast in prime time on Raiuno and, finally, added to Netflix. Although the investigative plot is closer to an action-comedy for families than to crime fiction, it shows a moderate, but repeated, use of detailed shots of corpses and skeletons, and footage in the morgue. The disturbing effect is mostly downplayed by the reassuring visual and narrative frame in which they are inserted. The lack of plot twists and the unusual photographic and directorial choices, along with the exasperated goodwill that is displayed by the police officers, has ensured its success among a wide public. The viewers, indeed, can satisfactorily identify with the protagonists, everyday heroes who fight against the racist and male chauvinist face of Italy. Political correctness and graphic bodies, naked or broken into pieces, have been joined together, with the aim of bringing into prime time what, for a few decades, has been for sale in global crime fiction.

Conclusions

Nowadays crime fiction circulates in a globalized world, along multidirectional pathways among diverse cultures, genres and languages. In this context of intertwined flows and fluid connections among literature and audio-visual products, we have noticed that a global filter has made every crime story similar to each other. Even if the emphasis is apparently all on the newest technique, the first edition, the originality and the local flavour, there is a programmatic search for translatability and cultural homogenization, driven by the neoliberal globalization of the publishing and film industry. Let's call it "global *noir*".

Our research has revealed that at the very centre of this uniformity there is a specific, almost crystallized representation of the crime and its by-product, the corpse, which is both an integral part of this genre's worldwide popularity of, and, more importantly, the result of the change in Western mentality of its relationship with medicine. By "mentality", we mean a way of thinking peculiar to a certain historical moment, widespread and shared by a whole society. It enters into daily gestures and interactions between people, in representation and fiction, in the relationship between high and popular culture. Made up of beliefs, rites, attitudes, behaviours, hopes, fantasies and ideas, this way of thinking immediately normalizes their meaning in our eyes (Le Goff, 1974).

Today the *exquisite corpse* is a fundamental dish in our everyday diet of images and narrations. People are fed with vivid representations of naked and butchered bodies, dead or dying, which are put in the foreground, not only in crime fiction, but also in newspapers, bestsellers, movies, television programs, web pages, etc. The corpse has become so good (to think about) that we are never satisfied. Like the zombie pathologist in the TV series, we have become cannibals (of representations) who must eat human corpses in order to think about the world.

Morbid sensationalism catches the public's attention by exploiting its never dormant voyeurism. However, the spectacle of an objectified and gruesome body has changed over time, becoming more and more virtualized, visualized and medicalized: one now looks at it on the screens rather than in the public squares, museums and morgues.

Visualization and medicalization are the crucial points in the current depiction of the body in our society and, as a result, in crime fiction. Firstly, everything, including our body, must end up on a screen to be regarded as real. An omnipresent and detailed visibility has us living in a gigantic *panopticon*. Secondly, this allegedly realistic representation of the body is framed by the increasingly popularized cinematographic and computer techniques of visualization and is deeply medicalized. No matter how broken it is, the body is clean. It is sanitized by the gaze of science. The representation of the cadaver, especially in its most macabre aspects, can only be captured within a medical-scientific framework, which has established itself as the acceptable perspective to show what, otherwise, would belong in the domain of perversions.

There is no crime fiction without a good body/corpse. There never has been. However, now the corpse, rather than the magnifying glass, or the gun, has become the real tool of the detective, and the international hallmark of recognisability of the genre. Medical dominance has become the current standard of crime fiction and one of the factors of its growing exportability. The visual/medical culture, which has permeated and transformed contemporary society and has been called upon to answer crucial questions about human existence, has entered the genre as a recognisable background, needing almost no translation, eroding local features and rewriting the dynamics between local and global. Science, and the dead body, have become the main dish, while the rest is served as a side.

We have seen how crime fiction and medicine have been interrelated from the beginning and by their very essence, since detection and clinical method share the same

paradigm of reasoning and discovering the truth – from imperceptible clues to solution. However, the recent return of the genre to praising of science is profoundly different from its origins. Today all stories must stage, at a certain point (usually at the beginning), medicalized techniques for crime scene analysis, evidence collection, autopsy examinations and the most disparate lab tests. Detectives of the new millennium face crime, mystery and death equipped with scientific procedures and tools. They are surrounded by a multi- gender/colour/ability squad of technicians, scientists and doctors (or they may be one of these themselves). The investigation starts from the body of the victim, which is the most precious clue to be analysed. After being collected at the crime scene, the cadaver is usually displayed in the lab, an aseptic and dry space despite the butchery procedures that take place. In reality, the dead body is not just in the lab, it is everywhere and extends its limits all over the places it has touched, contaminating all the surfaces with its liquids and cells. For this reason, it constitutes the fundamental evidence for identifying and, possibly, framing the murderer. This body is also fragmented in pieces, which are treated as objects, sometimes by the killer and, definitely, by the pathologist who performs the autopsy. Moreover, the more technology advances, the more this body also becomes transparent, visible in its interior and in its ultimate components.

The conjectural model of the first investigators has made way for an anatomical/biological approach to knowledge and detection. Truth is searched for in the cells and in the genes, under the microscope. Finding truth has become a matter of looking deeper and deeper into the material substance of things. Even when detectives deal with minds, rather than bodies – for example, when examining the motives and fantasies of a serial killer – we have the impression of seeing an “autopsy of the mind”, which aims to put on a screen the neural images of perverted and criminal acts. The sagacious epiphanies of Dupin and Holmes have not totally disappeared, but they have been reduced to moments of intuition and unconscious suggestion that constitute a sort of “police instinct”. The solution of the mystery

– and let’s not forget that the mystery at the core of crime fiction is nothing but death – has gone from being a *jurisprudential* truth, based on the deciphering and interpretation of the clues and the dialogue with people, to a *scientific* truth, based on the *objective* study of material evidence. Evidence itself has increasingly replaced hypothesis, while science has replaced justice. In fact, in contemporary society, as well as in fiction, science tends to become the ultimate judge. Truth discovered in the lab is a quiet repository. Science mediates between the brutality of death and the human need to attribute to it some meaning. Displaying the crime and the corpse in a medical frame, perceived as familiar and reassuring by the public, whose gaze has been saturated by the constant repetition of medical imagery of corpses, is the effect of the global spread of Western medical and scientific culture. Science works in fiction because it works for us in real life and it is part of everybody’s experience.

Yet notwithstanding the diffusion in crime fiction of a necro-aesthetic of corporal dismemberment, fetishism of pieces and organs has not always been isomorphic to a culturally hegemonic discourse, neither has it always been reassuring for readers and spectators. On the contrary, the same body, resulting from the progressive medicalization of Western society, was also the means of a discourse dissonant with that of science, medicine and socio-cultural models of compliance. As we have illustrated, the inception of the American Tough Guys’ stories, successfully exported to and translated in Europe as *noir* fiction, paved the way, in crime fiction, for the loss of rational certainties and the growth of disillusionment toward a deeply rotten and criminal society. Those new features went along with the intrusion of an increasingly realistic and sadistic display of violence. Another type of *exquisite cadaver* came to light. It is a corpse that hardly finds a happy ending, because the tangle of corruption, silence, bad politics and mafia is too strong to be unravelled. It is a corpse that testifies to the moral ambiguity and the impossibility of justice intrinsic to the described society and, at the same

time, the necessity of exposing the most hidden causes of crime and denouncing its collusion with politics and the neoliberal economy.

This task of social criticism and the search for truth was inherited by the 1980s and 1990s *neo-noir* genre and emerged almost from the beginning as an international phenomenon. Our examination focused, in particular, on a series of Italian authors, grouped as *neo-noir* and Young Cannibals/Pulpers, who renewed the literary panorama with works overflowing with extreme and detailed violence and assigned the role of protagonists to murderers, madmen, suicides and monsters. Our research has highlighted how their protest against the status quo and the dominant ideology was inscribed in bodies that are represented as battlegrounds. Tortured, killed, dismembered and commodified bodies are graphically portrayed in their texts in order to challenge the exclusive and marginalizing models of corporal, moral and mental perfection. They denounce the detrimental influence of consumerism on our desires and at the same time they denaturalize the power relationships embedded in social and gender inequalities.

According to our interpretation, Young Cannibals did not just disclose a living zoo of human sadomasochist perversions to feed the public's voracity with their grotesque and detached excesses of horror, shaped on Quentin Tarantino's cult movies, such as *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*. Their representation is similar to Pasolini's depiction of Fascism in his film, *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* [Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodoma] (1975). In the Cannibal poetics we find all the themes represented by Pasolini: consumerism's degradation, capitalism's perverse manipulation of bodies and the obscenity of the media's spectacularization of violence that degrades victims to captivate the public.

Female Pulpers, instead, put the representation of both feminine *eros* and violence at the centre of their stories and showed, through extreme forms of destruction and self-destruction, their rebellion against the dominant male-chauvinist models. The recurring theme

of a primal castration, accompanied by the pleasure of the woman who inflicts it and her indifference towards the results of this act, embodies the writers' rupture with *noir* and pulp tradition, the necessary, narrative emasculation of the genre to base the writing on new foundations. The authors played with images of sacrifice and punishment of men by reversing the roles of both men and women in horror and slasher films, in mythologies, in sadomasochistic fantasies and in crime stories, with the aim of expressing a form of narrative catharsis. They also appeared as the literary counterpart of the radical edge in the political fight for women's rights.

With respect to male sexual organs, we have argued that the protagonist of Ferrandino's *Pericle il Nero* is the penis itself, almost disconnected from the male body and showing independent qualities. With a parodic intent, this novel made explicit and literal the fantasy of masculinity which recurs in crime fiction. Previously manliness was symbolized by the features of punches, knives and guns used by the hero (whether he was an outlaw or a detective) against his enemies, while here it is hyperbolized and subverted. Thus, in a way, this novel represents the lost innocence of detective stories.

Another criticism of the 1990s writers concerned the commodification of the body, increasingly conceived of as a container of organs, parts and substances that acquire an independent existence and value on a very black global market. With their stories full of *Grand Guignol* and horror style descriptions, they emphasized a crucial question for contemporary society: is the body a thing? Transplant medicine, organ commodification, television spectacles, crime narratives, etc., all of these continually represent bodies that travel, in one piece or fragmented, objectified, on an international market of goods and images. This constant commercial and cultural flux leaches humanity from corpses and tends to impose the image of the corpse as a thing. Is there anything human left or is it just dead meat for sale? The long history of the commodification of the body in the West suggests that treating corpses as

commodities to dismember, measure, tag, pack, buy and sell, deliver, steal, trade, recycle and eventually dispose of is not a brand-new practice. Thus, the answer is yes. The body is a thing, but like no other (Courtine, 2015). It is a human thing and, even in death, the image of the body retains human qualities. In fact, it is never totally dead. Watching cadavers in the medical lab or on the TV screen is not the same as watching a piece of flesh because these corpses could be us. The viewers of a crime show can identify with the victim's body and feel relief for not being that body.

Finally, we have examined the reappearance in Italian *neo-noir* of ancient monsters, shapeshifting creatures, *Doppelgänger* and walking dead, rewritten within the framework of the psychiatrization (another form of medicalization) of the abnormal, which is more than ever understood as a deviation from a presumed moral and social norm. Both the abused abusers portrayed by Lucarelli and the schizophrenic detective of Dazieri contrast with the growing popularity of the most fashionable criminal monster, i.e., the sadistic and perverted serial killer. Today's ogre, Hannibal the Cannibal – as a representative of the category – has extended the narrative motive of the “Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde” split personality and transformed the killers into complete psychopaths. We no longer see their inner struggle between normality and madness, the alternation between daytime respectful activities and nocturnal heinous crimes, but only their mental illness, fully and anatomically disclosed. Their madness is no longer a metaphor for the alienation of the modern, lonely and self-contradictory individual.

Twenty years have passed since *neo-noir* flourished in the world. Pornographic and gore motives have invaded crime fiction and are now expected. The current medicalized and detailed representation of a reified body fosters an allegedly scientific realism, a growing and routinized depiction of sadism, extreme violence and trivialization of psychiatric literature and its concept of psychosis. The constant reiteration of bodies torn to pieces and served to the public has eroded its disturbing effect and domesticated our perception. Indeed, behind the

sensationalist and graphic representations of violence and corpses, writers no longer question, expose or denounce the social, political and economic causes of crime, which has its roots in the very functioning of the neoliberal society. Thus, today's crime fiction is both pornographic and prudish at the same time. It is spectacular, standardized by the cultural industry and sanitized by a scientific and medical imagery.

Present day crime fiction is conservative in this sense. Not because it returned to being a vehicle for ultraconservative ideas, such as in the times of G. K. Chesterton, Maurice Leblanc, Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, but because it is more and more uniformly coloured by techno-medical representations, i.e., it conforms to neoliberal cultural hegemony. The patterns of normativity and the asymmetrical power relations that 1990s *neo-noir* and pulp writings deconstructed precisely through an exasperated representation of corpses, appear nowadays definitively incorporated in the hegemonic discourse.

Umberto Eco (1984) distinguished between those texts that aim to reveal readers to themselves and those that satisfy ready-made desires according to models for serialized products. As an antidote against this cultural anaesthesia that has affected recent crime fiction, we hope that there will be texts that escape the current structural homogenization and become a fermenting agent of anti-normative processes that oppose scientific reductionism and the reifying tendency of global medical culture.

Therefore, after answering the questions we initially posed in this research, we can only conclude with new questions. In the next few years will all crime stories be as similar to each other as they are now? Will the representation of the body be increasingly affected by medicalization, science and technology? Will some non-standardized author or group of authors upset the status quo of the genre? Perhaps the task of investigating human affairs and questioning death on a narrative level will pass to a new form of expression, such as an interactive Holodeck in which readers can become active characters in the story.

Certainly there is the need to investigate more closely and broadly the current trends of the genre at global level with a philosophical and anthropological perspective in the analysis of the representation of the corpse and the epochal changes of mentality that have affected society and crime fiction.

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