

# Sulle tracce del crimine. Viaggio nel giallo e nero Rai

## Hot on the Heels of Crime. A Journey into the World of Detectives on Rai

(Roma, Museo di Roma in Trastevere, October 7, 2020 – March 31, 2021)  
Exhibition and Catalogue Roma: RaiLibri, 2020

DOI [10.13130/2036-461X/16422](https://doi.org/10.13130/2036-461X/16422)



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The Italian Giallo and the noir: these are not merely two (of the best known) types, two possibilities among the various forms of that macro-genre that today is often labelled *crime*, which features gothic atmospheres or detection, legal cases or conspiracy theories, seductive criminals or sprawling mafia intrigues. The terms also denote a forcefield that stretches between the two extremes of escapist and subversive power; to quote two famous reflections, they intercept, on the one hand, that naive amusement, that 'fresh and straightforward impressionism' that Antonio Gramsci envied in his friend's reading of GK Chesterton's novels, but also, on the other, that 'curious and nonconformist' style, as radically modernist as the avant-garde, of 1940s film noir, which fascinated Marcel Duhamel and the French surrealists.<sup>1</sup>

The itinerary of the exhibition *Hot on the Heels of Crime* offers a similar experience. It leads through the multiple formulas of crimes and investigations that television has been able to create, activating the same emotional and intellectual dialectic: the pleasure of recognizing and rediscovering what is familiar, together with the amazement at seeing well-known icons in an unexpected way. The exhibition unveils and investigates

Rai's extraordinary television production, proposing various chapters of this history: the halls of the exhibition accommodate different sections devoted to figures, trends and forms of crime. This includes 'Gothic', 'Laura Storm and Other Female Detectives', 'Detectives Stories Meet Noir' and 'The Dark Heart of Italy'. Meanwhile — following the narrative of the genre itself — this tour of 'detection' leads the visitor to different, possible cross-roads, thanks to the strong multi-sensorial dimension of the exhibition: our attention is suddenly called to a noise or to the cover of a book, to the sound of music or to press clippings. Thus, we find ourselves bewitched by a monitor, eye-to-eye with Alida Valli and enchanted by her plea to have her son returned to her, trying to tell reality from fiction (*I figli di Medea*, Anton Giulio Majano, 1959). Or we can take a detour, attracted to the aural evidence of shots and screeching tires, whispers and creaks, screams and verbal orders emanating from the installations, acknowledging the sound of TV crime and its dialogue with cinema, as well as with radio broadcasts, comics and animation. We can also find pages of literature written by Carlo Emilio Gadda but also try to detect Ingravallo in Flavio Bucci's countenance (*Quer pasticciaccio brutto de*

via Merulana, P. Schivazzappa 1983), or investigate Dürrenmatt in Paolo Stoppa's role as chief of police Bärlach (*Il sospetto*, Daniele D'Anza, 1972). A map on the wall allows us to identify several secret and unusual corners of Rome, made famous by *Il segno del comando* (Daniele D'Anza, 1971), or we can be carried away by 'The Rhythm of a Thriller' room and its famous crime drama theme tunes (from those of *Le temps file ses jours* by Luigi Tenco and *Le nuove inchieste del commissario Maigret*, 1964, to the sound of trumpets by Nicola Piovani for *Linda e il brigadiere*, 1997). Finally, we can be tempted to decipher the contents of the glass cases — excerpts of minutes, judgements, renowned front pages of newspapers, and so forth, together with scripts and props — to try to understand more about 'Shadows and Mysteries in Italy' in this final room creating connections between reality, its narration and fiction.

A collaboration with the Fondazione Arnaldo e Alberto Mondadori and the Institut National de l'Audiovisuel (INA), the 'synaesthetic and multi-sensorial' Rai exhibition — to borrow Peppino Ortoleva's definition of the 2000s thriller in the exhibition catalogue<sup>2</sup> — offers rich intermediality, as TV dialogues with radio, the print and recording industries, *loisir* and visual cultures, along with fashion and geography, in Italy and abroad. What emerges is the absolutely central role played by television in reworking and confirming the plural expressions of crime fiction, in the rich array of inspired and multimedia detectives, including Sheridan (Ubaldo Lay) and Nero Wolfe (Tino Buazzelli), De Luca (Alessandro Preziosi) and Don Matteo (Terence Hill).

Not only do the iconographic and audiovisual resources presented here offer a precious moment 'of synthesis, collection, an overall glance'<sup>3</sup> at crime narratives and at the priceless heritage of the Teche Rai archives, the exhibition also provides evidence of their wealth of implications. The large number of

on-set photographs — selected by Stefano Nespoli — capture a relevant snapshot of past technologies and, above all, at TV production, something that is constantly central — as Emiliano Morreale and Luca Barra recall in their essays in the catalogue — to a full understanding of television crime fiction. At the same time, the exhibition and catalogue also provide many lessons in visual culture: the pictures of the New Millennium crime hero force us to reflect on this icon and its actions, just as how 'the revolver which becomes in his hands an almost intellectual weapon, the argument that dumbfounds', as André Bazin wrote of Humphrey Bogart.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the exhibition offers further insights into how 'the immanence of death, its imminence as well' is epitomized by police chief Cattani (Michele Placido) or inspector Coliandro (Giampaolo Morelli), by the 'hunter' judge (Francesco Montanari) or the cop Rocco Schiavone (Marco Giallini).

*Hot on the Heels of Crime* provides many attractions for the visitor as well as for readers and passionate scholars: the journey through detective stories is intertwined with an important piece of national/television history; it presents its wounds and the different ways of fixing or shunning them. As writers and showrunners such as Carlo Lucarelli (*Blu notte, Inspector Coliandro*) and Giancarlo De Cataldo (*Crimini, Romanzo criminale*) recall in the catalogue, crime fiction certainly does not provide a superficial mirroring of the times. Rather, as stated above, the giallo gives shape to the complexity of the contemporary world, and it tends, even metaphorically, to 'go on the road',<sup>5</sup> and — as in exhibited film stills — to reread and rewrite national geography. As Todorov pointed out, detective fiction always invokes a question about time: the past (the resolution of a past crime is typical of the whodunit), the present (the thriller where everything is potentially about to happen) and finally the future (the curiosity

about the events which will take place after the discovery of the truth, as is typical of suspense).<sup>6</sup> Here, the journey into crime interacts with Italian socio-cultural history and its narration, stimulating questions and traversing different time frames. It does all of this without ever betraying the desire and the memory that make every piece of evidence, every element of suspense, every sound and every television frame and film still in the exhibition 'the stuff that dreams are made of', as Humphrey Bogart defined *The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1946).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Marcel Duhamel's preface to Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton, *Panorama du film noir américain 1941-1953* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1955), first publ. *A Panorama of American Film Noir. 1941-1953* (San Francisco: City Lights Book, 2002), pp. XXIII-XXV. See also James Namemore's introduction to the English edition 'A Season in Hell or the Snows of Yesteryear?', pp. VII-XXII.

<sup>2</sup> Peppino Ortoleva, 'La morte, il mistero, la poltrona: i segreti del giallo televisivo', in *Sulle tracce del crimine. Viaggio nel giallo e nero Rai. Il catalogo*, ed. by Maria Pia Ammirati and Peppino Ortoleva (Roma: Rai Libri, 2020), pp. 17-34 (p. 21).

<sup>3</sup> Maria Pia Ammirati. Rai Teche Director, 'La storia del giallo Rai come archeologia della serialità moderna', in *Sulle tracce del crimine*, pp. 12-14 (p. 13).

<sup>4</sup> André Bazin, 'The Death of Humphrey Bogart [1957]', in *Cahiers du cinéma. The 1950s. Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*, ed. by Jim Hillier (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Maurizio De Giovanni, 'Nella pelle dell'assassino', in *Sulle tracce del crimine*, pp. 51-60 (p. 53).

<sup>6</sup> Tsvetan Todorov, *The Typology of Detective Fiction* [1966], in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. by David Lodge (London and New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 137-144.