



***Investigating Italy's Past through Historical Crime Fiction, Films, and TV Series: Murder in the Age of Chaos.* By Barbara Pezzotti. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. 270 pages.**

Barbara Pezzotti's research-rich and cleverly argued study investigates Italian historical crime fiction with a keen eye to its political function. Far from being an act of escapism or nostalgia, delving into the past through the framework of a popular genre such as crime fiction has become a form of engagement for a number of Italian authors whose ultimate goal is "to make sense of what Italy is today" (242).

In the last fifty years, Italian crime writers have explored the hermeneutic power of fictions—their ability to investigate everyday life, like microhistory—with a focus on three main historical periods. The first, chronologically, is the *Risorgimento* (1815-1870), when Italy became a unified nation; the second is the Fascist *Ventennio* (1922-1943); the third is the so-called *Anni di piombo* (Years of Lead, 1969-1988). This post-1968 period was marked on the one hand by street protests on the part of university students and workers, and on the other by terrorism, notably at the hands of the extreme left-wing *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades), but also by neo-Fascist terrorism, whose potential alliance with the Italian secret services has been explored by important crime writers. Leonardo Sciascia's foundational *L'affaire Moro* (1978) comes to mind, together with Giancarlo De Cataldo's more recent *Romanzo criminale* (2002), which sheds light on the deeds of a notorious Rome-based criminal organization called *Banda della Magliana*.

Pezzotti discusses both the revisionist power of crime fiction—which underlines the "colonialist" dimension of the Italian unification process, deconstructing traditional State propaganda—and its ability to contrast forms of revisionism that are perceived as dangerous, such as the debate on Fascism that ignited in the 1980s, when the *Ventennio* was presented "as a period of modernization for Italy" (65). As we can see, this study tackles multiple complexities, also in the attempt to understand how literature conveys its historical commentaries through form. Those writers who stigmatize Fascism, for instance, tend to opt for an open ending, as a trope for the lack of justice that marked those years, while Andrea Camilleri's controversial *La presa di Macallè* (2003) pivots on a sexual trope to signify the symbolic rape of Italian society at the hands of Fascism.

In the space of a review, I cannot even attempt to render the wealth of literary works this study insightfully discusses, with the aim to comprehend both their specificity and their contribution to a wider debate. In addition to the authors I have mentioned, Pezzotti covers books by Carlo Lucarelli, Marcello Fois, Maurizio De Giovanni, Simone Sarasso, and others, not to mention films by Elio Petri, Damiano Damiani, and Marco Tullio Giordana, and even recent TV series, in the attempt to understand whether historical crime fiction contributes "to a 'regenerative' or, rather, 'innovative' recollection of the past" (6). Pezzotti's masterful inquiry into the multiform crime narratives that tackle the Italian past amply demonstrates this, once more proving the need to discard any simplistic view of popular genres as formulaic and commercial.

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