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Stephen Gundle, Lucia Rinaldi, eds. *Assassinations and Murder in Modern Italy: Transformations in Society and Culture.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. vii + 256 pp. $74.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4039-8391-6.

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Italy Painted in *Giallo* and *Noir*

Assassinations and Murder in Modern Italy is a collection of seventeen chapters originally presented as papers at the 2003 conference of the Association for the Study of Modern Italy. The volume aims to explore some of the most famous cases of murder and analyze them comparatively in their historical, cultural, and political contexts. Arguing that often unresolved cases of murder or assassination have both marked key moments in modern Italian history and served as primary sites for the construction and contestation of historical memory, the pieces do, indeed, provide a cumulative sense that Italy has a unique relationship to the crime mystery. Such recurring terms as *misteri italiani* (Italian mysteries), *dietrologia* (the science of what is behind it all–seeing ulterior motives and conspiracies behind events), and *giallo* (yellow, the catch-all term for crime and detective fiction, but also now for real cases and more generally for the atmosphere of mystery) in colloquial Italian to describe this particularity demonstrate this further. Although, perhaps, inevitably uneven in quality given its basis of seventeen conference papers, as a collection the book also provides a model of the methods and sources of Italian studies scholars as a group. As practiced by the best of them, this involves a deft and intellectually wide-ranging marshalling of historical, journalistic, legislative and judicial, cinematic, and literary materials read as both primary and secondary sources, and woven together to produce convincing reconstructions of "the linkages between public events, and the publicity they receive, and the broader changes that they somehow crystallize or inadvertently reflect" (p. 5). In contemporary mass society, this is just the kind of complex reading multiple texts and images that creates consensus and the "true story" of events.

The book is divided into six sections, each a type or area of murder "Italian style." Part 1, "Fascism and Anti-Fascism," begins with a very good piece by Stanislao Pugliese. Based on his extensive study of Carlo Rosselli, his essay provides a recounting of the murder of the Rosselli brothers in France in 1937. Although it is far more straightforwardly historical an account than most of the other contributions, it introduces many of the themes that reappear elsewhere in the book: an apparently straightforward crime quickly becomes overlaid by multiple and conflicting narratives in which the involvement of the state and/or its quasi-legal secret agents are suspected; and the political and cultural meanings of the crime and its representation become more important than any fact-based investigation by police and the legal community, seen, in turn, as either unwilling or unable to arrive at any truthful final conclusions. The other two authors included in this section are even more concerned with these resonances as opposed to the actual murder. Indeed, as the editors, Stephen Gundle and Lucia Rinaldi, remark about Elizabeth Leake's "Fascists and Fetishes: Clara Petacci and the Masochistic Scene" and Philip Cooke's "What Does It Matter if You Die? The Seven Cervi Brothers," not everyone would agree that the circumstances of Petacci's or the Cervi brothers' deaths were murder at all. Both authors examine, instead, the ways that these deaths were received and mythologized by artists, politicians, and a public struggling to reconcile memory and responsibility after the Fascist regime. While Leake's reliance on Slavoj Zizek's theory of the masochistic relationship overshadows the historical relevance of her topic, she deserves credit for being one of the few authors here to consider the public as an active creator of these "Italian mysteries." It is precisely the Italian people who invite and collude with the murderers in creating these crimes as spectacle, and who then gratify their distrust of public institutions and the state by refusing to consider any case closed, indulging every new conspiracy theory. Cooke, though mischaracterizing and oversimplifying the debate about the Resistance as having an "essentially fascist" side by seeing it as a civil war as opposed to the "second *Risorgimento*," creates a valuable case study of how events from the Resistance have

been instrumental in the culture wars for collective memory (p. 40). In describing the evolution and "symbolic status" of the Cervi museum, Cooke casts a critical eye towards the explosion of the tourism industry into memory politics, with Jewish, Risorgimento, Resistance, and, yes, Fascism museums proliferating across Italy and Europe as a whole.

Part 2, "State Killings," moves directly into the realm of murders by the state or with the complicity of it, or its "repressive apparatus" (p. 6). Mary P. Wood, in "Rosi's Il caso Mattei: Making the Case for Conspiracy," examines Francesco Rosi's 1972 film about the death of Enrico Mattei in 1962; John Foot contributes "The Death of Giuseppe Pinelli: Truth, Representation, Memory"; and Duncan McDonnell conducts a close reading of the famous photograph of "the Genoa G8 and the Death of Carlo Giuliani" of 2001. Foot's chapter is one of the best in the entire book; it is exemplary in both its form and content. Foot moves in an explicitly structured path from a literal list of selected events in the saga of Pinelli, an anarchist arrested after the bombing in Piazza Fontana in 1969 who died in police custody by falling from the fourth floor of the office in which he was interrogated, to a multifaceted examination of each of many layers of the cultural representations, political fallout, and historical legacy of his "suiciding." Foot rightly calls attention to the role of language, too, as the Pinelli case was a key radicalizing moment for the young left after 1969 and led to the slogan "The massacre is by the state" (*la strage e' dallo Stato*). The balance between history; the art, books, and plays inspired by that history; and the influence those cultural products then have on subsequent history in their own turn is masterful in Foot's study. This balance is sadly unmatched by McDonnell, who conducts a perfectly competent analysis of the representation of Giuliani's death without managing to draw important conclusions or linkages to the larger topic of the book, or especially by Wood, who loses coherence and relevance in her overlapping descriptions of various aspects of Rosi's film, and seems not to have a guiding structure or argument.

Parts 3 through 5 have much greater coherence, perhaps as a virtue of their topics: "The Moro Affair," "Mafia Murders," and "True Crime," respectively. Both Tobias Abse and especially David Moss provide informative and critical syntheses of the sources and interpretations of the Moro case as they have developed over time. Abse gives an overview and evaluation of the many competing interpretations of the kidnapping and murder of the Christian Democrat leader by the Red Brigades in 1979, and evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, and likely partisans of each. Moss uses the specific history of the parliamentary inquiry committees from 1979-94 to illustrate "the diversity of the factors that shaped the efforts to establish public memory," and the way that, as in all these cases, the "goal of establishing a definitive history turned into the … instrument for the manufacture of a mystery" (p. 111). Salvatore Coluccello uses the murder of Emanuele Notarbartolo in 1893 to examine the opening moments of the deeply divisive debate over the mafia and Sicilian identity in both Sicilian and national society. This particular case was significant because it was the first of the mafia's so-called excellent cadavers (elites murdered because they were preventing the mafia's penetration of financial and political institutions). Daragh O'Connell provides another of the book's most excellent pieces in his "Mafia and Antimafia: Sciascia and Borsellino in Vincenzo Consolo's *Lo spasimo di Palermo*." Here, one of the guiding spirits of the whole enterprise, Leonardo Sciascia, finally gets his due. Throughout the book, he appears, sometimes explicitly and sometimes obliquely, as the father of the enterprise of mixing history, politics, and fiction through the genre of the *giallo* and the model for how (and whether) such an enterprise constitutes *impegno*, political activism or commitment. O'Connell's treatment of Sciascia is largely positive, convincingly so. Several contributors continue this concern with the postmodern mixing of fiction and history and its relationship to truth, as well as with the validity of detective fiction and investigative film as social commentary and/or political activism. Karen Pinkus addresses this concern in her reprisal of some of the themes from her book on the Wilma Montesi case, as does Robert S. C. Gordon in his piece on the virtual industry of representing and interpreting Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1975 murder as symbolic of Italy's "years of lead." Most directly, Giuliana Pieri examines the explosion of the genres of *giallo* and *noir* in contemporary Italian fiction, particularly as represented by Carlo Lucarelli and his self-promotion as detective and historian rather than as fiction writer. Pieri is rightly skeptical of the claim that his career or his writing constitute *impegno*. Also, in this fifth "true crime" section are Ellen Nerenberg's intriguing and informative "Making a Killing: The 'Monster of Florence' and the Trial(s) of Pietro Pacciani," and the editors' "Fashion Victims: The Gucci and Versace Murders." I was puzzled by the banal and obvious conclusion that "fictional narrative easily structured reception and coverage of the two murders," given the imaginative conception of the work as a whole and the excellent framing and analysis Gundle and Rinaldi provide in the introduction to the volume (p. 191). There, they have written an appreciative and subtle ex-

planation of the influence and importance of Carlo Emilio Gadda and Sciasica as writers, users of genre to explore and comment on contemporary Italian history and society, and examples of *impegno*. Those introductory pages are both a model of and a thematic guide to the collection as a whole.

The final section, "The Legacy of Anarchism," contains Carl Levy's overview of "The Anarchist Assassin and Italian History, 1870s to 1930s" and "Failed Anarchists and Anti-Heroes in Lina Wertmuller's *Amore e anarchia*" by Dana Renga. They are nearly opposite in style, Levy giving a wide-ranging historical accounting and Renga focusing on one film in a close reading of metaphor, music, camera angles, and directorial philosophy straight out of a film studies course lecture. Perhaps, both would have appeared in a more favorable light if they had been better integrated into the rest of the volume. Here, dangling at the end, they seem a bit orphaned.

Overall, this volume succeeds best when the authors make it clear that they are both practicing and examining the intertextuality of history and art in the creation of these Italian mysteries. In the end, I was quite convinced that there is an Italian specificity to making crimes into mysteries, since it is true and important to Italian history that the weakness and corruption of judicial and governmental figures, and the mistrust on the part of Italian people for their state institutions, make it very likely that "more or less arcane or paranoid narratives [can be] built on the silences and lacunae of public history and power" (p. 162). The Italian insistence on considering such cases permanently open and unsolved is a product of the awareness of the "deep fractures and illicit power mechanisms at work beneath the surface of Italy's modern history" (p. 158).

I was less convinced, however, that we should be distressed or disturbed at the way that "textual webs" and multiple narrative levels created by "mediatization" of the events "smother any rooted sense of truth, history, and ethical or ideological responsibility" (p. 162). The truth is precisely in that gathering and structuring of multiple texts, images, and sources that we all practice in making sense of experience. Why should we be surprised that judges, investigators, and the public do it as much as crime writers, or, ahem, postmodern cultural studies scholars? Such distress would presume, in a very simplistic way, the existence or importance of pure truth in history as opposed to other scholarly pursuits; and it is just that sensibility on the part of some authors here that makes it clear this is not a history book. It is certainly entertaining reading for exactly that benefit of historical information on partially known scandals and vaguely remembered conspiracy theories, but the book is not really suited for history courses. Rather, it will be quite useful for film and cultural studies courses, and equally so for a general audience interested in modern Italy or the links among mass media, the political sphere, and culture in all our contemporary societies.

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