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# **Gender, Genre and Sociocultural Change in the *Giallo*: 1970-1975**

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MA, MLitt

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy



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## Abstract

This thesis examines representations of gender in the Italian *giallo*, a short-lived but tremendously popular, lucrative and prolific body of films in the murder-mystery thriller tradition that enjoyed their heyday in the early-to-mid 1970s. Traditionally, both academic and populist responses to these films have focused on the output of a small number of maverick directors that have been elevated critically above their peers. Conversely, this thesis aligns itself with a more recent trend towards eschewing auteurist readings in favour of examining the *giallo* as a broad ‘*filone*’ (cycle) defined by shared iconography, narrative conventions and underlying anxieties. Building on the typological approach of this body of literature, I place the *gialli* within the historical context of their initial production and release, relating the anxieties they exhibit in their depiction of gender and sexuality to the seismic sociocultural changes that occurred during this period. Drawing on the methodologies employed in criticism of the American *film noir* movement of the 1940s and 1950s, I explore the *gialli* not as straightforward allegories of real world events but rather as discursive texts that engage in a refracted form with contemporary sociocultural concerns.

As its central hypothesis, this thesis asserts the *giallo* uses the generic conventions of the ‘whodunit’ thriller to negotiate a crisis of norms in which traditional notions of masculinity and femininity have been destabilised. In exploring the ways in which this crisis manifests itself across a corpus of sixty films, I adopt the unique approach of restructuring the *giallo* into two distinct subcategories – ‘M-*gialli*’, focusing on male protagonists, and ‘F-*gialli*’, focusing on their female counterparts – and examining the differing ways in which they negotiate the same anxieties about gender and modern sociocultural transformation, and the differing solutions (or lack thereof) that they propose. I also examine the portrayal of gender/sexual minorities, children and teenagers as further articulations of concerns relating to the transformation of society. I argue that the *gialli* are characterised by a marked sense of ambivalence towards the upheavals of this period, precluding these films from being straightforwardly pigeonholed as either reactionary or progressive in their overriding ideology. This manifests itself in a plethora of uncertainties and contradictions in their narratives, *mise en scène* and the portrayal of the aforementioned characters, and an inability to provide credible solutions to the problems posed by the changing face of society.

This thesis moves criticism of the *giallo* beyond merely describing its conventions to actively explaining them, and highlights the value in reading popular filmic movements as articulations of the prevalent anxieties, attitudes and worldviews of their era.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>List of Figures</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Author’s Declaration</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>1 Introducing the <i>giallo</i>: Critics, corpus and conventions</b> .....	<b>11</b>
1.1 Origins .....	11
1.2 Thesis aims and research questions.....	14
1.3 What is a <i>giallo</i> ?.....	15
1.4 Internationalism, co-productions and <i>filoni</i> : The <i>giallo</i> in the context of 1960s/1970s European cinema.....	18
1.5 Summary of existing <i>giallo</i> literature.....	22
1.6 Corpus of study .....	29
1.7 (Re)organising the <i>giallo</i> .....	31
1.7.1 M- <i>gialli</i> and F- <i>gialli</i> .....	34
1.7.2 Queer characters, children and teenagers.....	39
1.8 Core texts and thesis structure.....	41
1.9 Conclusion.....	43
<b>2 Making sense of the <i>giallo</i>: Sociocultural context and critical frameworks</b> .....	<b>44</b>
2.1 Film and the ‘real world’ .....	44
2.2 Italy and Western Europe 1945-1970: An overview.....	46
2.2.1 Recovery and prosperity .....	48
2.2.2 Unrest and agitation .....	53
2.2.3 The end of the dream.....	57
2.3 Establishing an appropriate framework.....	59
2.4 “Scenarios of maladjustment”: <i>Film noir</i> as a critical framework.....	63
2.4.1 ‘Decoding’ the <i>femme fatale</i> .....	65
2.4.2 <i>Noir</i> masculinity in crisis .....	69
2.4.3 ‘Decoding’ the <i>giallo</i> .....	73
2.5 Conclusion.....	75

<b>3</b>	<b>“Keep[ing] individualism alive”: The M-giallo protagonist in crisis.....</b>	<b>77</b>
3.1	Introduction .....	77
3.2	Defining the M-giallo protagonist.....	78
3.3	Urban spaces and ‘outsiderness’ in <i>The Fifth Cord</i> .....	82
3.4	Freedom and the individual in <i>Short Night of Glass Dolls</i> .....	92
3.5	Trophy girlfriends and monstrous women in <i>The Bird with the Crystal Plumage</i> .....	100
3.6	Conclusion.....	108
<b>4</b>	<b>Central women and fatal men: “Degradation and vice” in the F-giallo.....</b>	<b>111</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	111
4.2	Conceptualising the F-giallo central woman .....	112
4.3	Pathologising the central woman in <i>A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin</i> .....	116
4.4	‘Passifying’ the central woman in <i>The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh</i> .....	126
4.5	Broken windows, broken rules: Valentina in <i>Death Walks at Midnight</i> .....	135
4.6	Conclusion.....	141
<b>5</b>	<b>“Perverts – filthy, slimy perverts!”: Queer sexuality in the giallo.....</b>	<b>144</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	144
5.2	Contextualising ‘queer’ .....	145
5.3	Women .....	150
5.4	Men.....	156
5.5	Case studies .....	165
5.5.1	Case study 1: <i>The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion</i> .....	165
5.5.2	Case study 2: <i>Four Flies on Grey Velvet</i> .....	171
5.5.3	Case study 3: <i>Deep Red</i> .....	176
5.6	Conclusion.....	181
<b>6</b>	<b>“The stirrings of the flesh”: Children and teenagers in the giallo .....</b>	<b>184</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	184
6.2	Conceptualising the child in film .....	186
6.3	Children and the family in the giallo: An overview.....	189
6.4	Masculinity in crisis revisited: The father in <i>Who Saw Her Die?</i> .....	192
6.5	Young boys and their priests: Children in <i>Don’t Torture a Duckling</i> .....	199
6.6	Innocence lost: Teenagers in <i>What Have You Done to Solange?</i> .....	206
6.7	Conclusion.....	212
<b>7</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>215</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	215
7.2	Findings .....	215

7.3 Future research .....	221
7.4 Parting thoughts.....	225
<b>Appendix A: Corpus of study.....</b>	<b>227</b>
Pre-boom <i>gialli</i> .....	228
The <i>giallo</i> boom .....	229
Post-boom <i>gialli</i> .....	231
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>232</b>
<b>Filmography .....</b>	<b>248</b>

## List of Figures

- Figure 1.1** – A selection of *giallo* DVD covers.....32
- Figure 3.1** – Collage of M-*giallo* protagonists: Giancarlo Giannini in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula*, Tony Musante in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Jean Sorel in *Short Night of Glass Dolls* and Fabio Testi in *What Have You Done to Solange?* .....79
- Figure 3.2** – The recurring motif of horizontal and vertical bars.....86
- Figure 3.3** – Franco Nero as the eponymous antihero in the spaghetti western *Django* (left), and as another roaming outsider in *The Fifth Cord* (right). .....88
- Figure 3.4** – Andrea’s cramped, austere kitchenette (above) contrasted with Helene’s expansive and inviting living room (below). .....91
- Figure 3.5** – Greg’s fragmented memories, displaced in space and time.....95
- Figure 3.6** – Figurative statues: the establishment, like the living dead. ....98
- Figure 3.7** – Literal statues, part of the city itself, never to escape.....98
- Figure 3.8** – Giulia’s first appearance: sexualised but passive. ....101
- Figure 3.9** – The personal made public: Sam and Giulia’s apartment. ....107
- Figure 4.1** – Collage of F-*giallo* central women: Barbara Bouchet in *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times*, Edwige Fenech in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, Dagmar Lassander in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* and Nieves Navarro in *Death Walks at Midnight*. .....114
- Figure 4.2** – Carol’s coat, indicative of her dual nature and a ‘skin’ to be shed.....120
- Figure 4.3** – The two Carols: black (top) and white (bottom).....121
- Figure 4.4** – *Mise en scène* emphasises Julia’s passivity. ....129
- Figure 4.5** – Western iconography re-appropriated in the *giallo*. .....131
- Figure 4.6** – Valentina’s likeness dominates her apartment.....137
- Figure 5.1** – Collage of queer female characters: Barbara Bach in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula*, Femi Benussi in *Strip Nude for your Killer*, Nieves Navarro in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* and Anita Strindberg in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin*.152
- Figure 5.2** – Two examples of Dominique’s revealing outfits (left in both images) contrasted with Minou’s more conservative attire. ....153



<b>Figure 5.3</b> – Collage of queer male characters: Gabriele Lavia in <i>Deep Red</i> , Werner Peters in <i>The Bird with the Crystal Plumage</i> , Elio Veller in <i>Death Walks at Midnight</i> and Eugene Walter in <i>The Black Belly of the Tarantula</i> . .....	157
<b>Figure 5.4</b> – Alex, Dorsey’s “naughty boy” companion. ....	160
<b>Figure 5.5</b> – Massimo, the transvestite in <i>Deep Red</i> . ....	163
<b>Figure 5.6</b> – Dominique’s seduction of Minou. ....	167
<b>Figure 5.7</b> – Peter, the oblivious cuckold in the middle. ....	169
<b>Figure 5.8</b> – The heterosexual coda subverted. ....	169
<b>Figure 5.9</b> – Nina’s masculine silhouette. ....	174
<b>Figure 5.10</b> – Roberto and Nina, the androgynous couple. ....	175
<b>Figure 5.11</b> – Marc (left) and Carlo as inversions of one another. ....	178
<b>Figure 5.12</b> – Femininity as performance: the killer (top) and an unnamed extra. ....	180
<b>Figure 6.1</b> – Misdirection: the intrusion of a child disrupts a conventional adult heterosexual pairing. ....	185
<b>Figure 6.2</b> – The unusually low-key reveal of Roberta’s body. ....	195
<b>Figure 6.3</b> – Religious imagery as a harbinger of death. ....	200
<b>Figure 6.4</b> – Adulthood as pantomime. ....	202
<b>Figure 6.5</b> – Patrizia as an adolescent fantasy. ....	204
<b>Figure 6.6</b> – The same girls shown in the first and second shower scenes. ....	210

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## **Author's Declaration**

This thesis represents the original work of Michael Mackenzie, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which it is based was carried out in the Theatre, Film and Television Studies Department at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Professor Karen Boyle and Professor Dimitris Eleftheriotis during the period of October 2007 to August 2013.

# 1 Introducing the *giallo*: Critics, corpus and conventions

## 1.1 Origins

I can vividly remember my first encounter with the world of Italian popular cinema. It was the early hours of a chilly morning in January 2002, and Channel 4 was screening a series of cult horror films, most of them relegated to the ‘graveyard slot’ when most civilised people would be in bed. I had already experienced the visceral thrills of *Wes Craven’s New Nightmare* (Craven 1994) and Takashi Miike’s *Audition* (1999) on previous nights, but the film scheduled for this particular night was from a director I had never heard of. The director was Dario Argento, the film was *Suspiria* (1977), and over the next two hours I was transported into a world unlike anything I had encountered before. It was a world of richly saturated primary colours, extravagant sets, brutal violence, screaming synthesiser music and a truly otherworldly ambience.

I did not simply watch *Suspiria*, I *experienced* it, and that experience inspired me to seek out as many similar films as possible. As I explored the rest of Argento’s back catalogue, it quickly became clear that the supernatural fairytale world of *Suspiria* constituted something of an exception in his filmography. The majority of his films turned out to be dramatically different, embracing the ‘whodunit’ murder-mystery tradition and set in the real world – albeit a highly stylised, at times almost hyperreal variant. While superficially reminiscent of other films, television series and novels I had encountered in the whodunit tradition, these Italian whodunits had their own unique atmosphere, conventions and sensibilities, and offered an array of exotic delights and thrills for a viewer such as myself, raised primarily on Anglo-American cinema. As I began to read up on these films, I quickly discovered that they had a name – ‘*gialli*’, derived from the singular ‘*giallo*’ – and that Argento’s *gialli* constituted a mere fraction of the total output in this strange new (to me, at any rate) genre. Italy, it seemed, had gone *giallo* mad in the early 1970s, turning out *giallo* after *giallo*, as if its filmmakers were in a race to see who could fully saturate the market first. These *gialli*, I found, often lacked the craftsmanship, skill and imagination present in Argento’s films, but they all offered something not present in most of the UK and American horror films and thrillers with which I was familiar: a tantalising glimpse into a world that seemed both alien and at the same time vaguely familiar.

As my interest in the *gialli* grew, I read on them widely and began to take seriously the prospect of studying them in a more ‘formal’ capacity. I had already begun to observe a variety of conventions running through the *giallo* as a whole: various recurrent trends that through their inclusion or absence determined whether a film was a *giallo* or not. Chief among these was a curious incongruity which became increasingly apparent the more of these films I watched: the more liberal they were in terms of exploiting violence and sexuality, the more reactionary their underlying morality seemed to be. Women in these films would disrobe and engage in sordid sexual encounters with gleeful abandon, but would nearly always be punished (literally or figuratively) for their supposed indiscretions. So too would minority characters – particularly homosexuals – regularly be portrayed mockingly or as sinister deviants, while female characters were invariably depicted as weaklings who, when confronted by the killer, would either pass out or huddle in a corner and wait for their (male) protectors to save the day.

Almost from the beginning of my association with the *gialli*, therefore, I was interested in their complicated and often contradictory depiction of gender and sexuality. I was already acutely aware of the popular (if not always accurate) perception of the horror and slasher genres, elements of both of which abound in the *gialli*, as hotbeds of rampant misogyny and reactionism, and yet it seemed to me that something considerably more nuanced was occurring in the *giallo*.

A couple of years after my discovery of these films, a friend observed to me that, although the most strident condemnations of violent and/or sexually explicit films tended to originate from the conservative, right-wing press, the reactionary values they espoused – including their veneration of heterosexual pairings, suppression of ‘aberrant’ behaviour, suspicion of social change, and perception of right and wrong as moral absolutes – were often remarkably consistent with those of the very movies they sought to condemn. This theory went some way towards contextualising the often conflicting characteristics I had observed in the *giallo*’s portrayal of female and minority characters, religion, modernity and the family, among other subjects. A desire to explore and explain the reactionary ideology that seemed to prevail in these films led me to undertake an MLitt degree at the University of Glasgow in 2005-2006. In my dissertation, I examined the representation of gender in the *giallo*, contrasting the often celebrated films of Dario Argento, viewed by many critics as more nuanced and progressive in his portrayal of women and homosexuals, with those of his less well-regarded contemporaries, which I initially perceived to be radically more reactionary in terms of their overall ideology (Mackenzie 2006). By the

time I completed my dissertation, I had rejected such a straightforward Argento/non-Argento binary, my analysis having concluded that both the Argento and non-Argento *gialli* contained elements that were both progressive and reactionary, establishing the *giallo*'s tendency towards ambivalence in place of a single overriding ideological stance. That the *gialli* could be so reticent to commit to a singular viewpoint – sometimes to the point of being infuriatingly self-contradictory – strengthened my desire to probe deeper into the nuances of their representation of gender and sexuality.

My specific interest in gender and sexuality in the *giallo* has grown out of a long-held fascination with the considerable sociocultural changes that took place throughout the Western world in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These changes were not limited to but to a large extent dominated by matters of gender and sexuality, including men and women's roles in society, women's emancipation, attitudes towards homosexuality and the evolving role and character of the family. During this time, *giallo* production was at its peak, and I have long been intrigued by the possibility that there might be a connection between real world changes in attitudes towards gender and sexuality and those expressed in the films themselves. The *gialli* often acknowledge, to varying degrees of directness, contemporary concerns regarding gender and sexuality. For instance, women's emancipation and its supposed pitfalls are engaged with via the recurring depiction of women forsaking their conventional role as housewives and the resulting horrors that befall them. Similarly, at least two *gialli* – *Strip Nude for your Killer* (Bianchi 1975) and *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Dallamano 1972) – feature back-alley abortions as major plot devices, acknowledging the growing battle over women's reproductive rights. Sex is ubiquitous in these films, with passionate affairs, sexual jealousy and psychosexual trauma among the most frequently recurring scenarios. As such, the *gialli* emerged and rose to popularity at a time when gender roles and attitudes towards sexuality were in a state of considerable flux in society, and the films' storylines and characters betray an awareness of, or perhaps even an obsession with, these concerns.

At this early stage, it would be unwise to speculate too much on the precise nature of the relationship between the films and the society from which they emerged. Instead, I aim to reveal this relationship over the course of the next two chapters as I work towards identifying a more formal framework through which to examine the *giallo*, providing a basis for the main body of analysis in Chapters 3-6. While it is my intention to devote as much space as possible to the films themselves and my analysis of them, it seems sensible

to first clarify both the scope and aims of my investigation and the body of literature from which my critical approach is derived.

While Chapter 2 will focus primarily on the ‘real world’, examining the aforementioned sociocultural changes and aiming to establish a link between them and the preoccupations exhibited by the *gialli*, the concerns of Chapter 1 remain firmly rooted in the *giallo* itself and, in a broader sense, popular European cinema in the 1960s and 1970s. To that end, after setting out the thesis’ primary aims and research questions, this chapter then proceeds to more precisely define the *giallo* and establish the structure and role of Europe’s film industries during the 1960s and 1970s. This is followed by a review of existing criticism of the *giallo*, identifying its strengths and weaknesses, successes and oversights. These sections serve as a basis for the establishment of a corpus of study for the thesis, its scope determined by both the period of study and a more precise definition of the word ‘*giallo*’. Having established the corpus, I will then summarise my observations regarding the recurring conventions and points of interest noted during the research process, in the process of which I will establish a suitable structure for the remainder of the thesis and set the stage for the formulation of a working methodology in Chapter 2.

## 1.2 Thesis aims and research questions

Tempting as it is to claim that the main aims of this thesis were clear in my mind from the very beginning, the truth is that they revealed themselves to me more gradually, emerging through the process of viewing the various *gialli* in my corpus of study and reading the texts from which my critical models are drawn. Details of these aspects of my research follow in subsequent sections of this and the next chapter, but I feel that it is prudent to clarify the aims of the thesis upfront, even if it means presenting my research somewhat out of sequence. In doing so, my intention is to summarise my goals in the form of a concrete set of key questions which can be referred back to easily, as well as to provide these introductory chapters with a clear sense of purpose, rather than replicating the uncertainty that defined the initial months of my research.

The primary goals of this thesis are twofold. First and most significantly, I wish to examine the *giallo*’s portrayal of and attitudes towards gender and sexuality more rigorously and in greater detail than has been afforded by existing literature on these films. I believe that the films and the attitudes they exhibit are fascinating in their own right and that this

investigation into them will reveal a great deal about the nature of the *giallo*, in addition to providing scope for future research into these films. At the same time, however, what makes this project unique in terms of analysis of the *giallo* is my desire to properly contextualise the films and the attitudes that they articulate, relating them back to the sociocultural milieu from which they arose. Through this, my aim is to enrich our understanding of the *gialli*, offering explanations for the presence of the various recurring concerns and conventions observed in them instead of merely recognising and acknowledging them.

To that end, I have identified the following overarching questions to be considered during my analysis of the films:

- 1. How are the sociocultural circumstances and the popular concerns of late 1960s/early 1970s Italy and Europe conveyed through the way gender is represented in the *giallo*?**
- 2. How do the *gialli* use their recurrent conventions and iconography to reinforce or destabilise the *status quo* and conventional notions of gender?**
- 3. What stance(s), if any, do the *gialli* adopt regarding these concerns, and how is this manifested in the films?**

Throughout this chapter and the next, my intention is to illustrate the thought process that led to the formation of these questions. As a vital first step, I wish to more precisely define what I mean when I refer to a film as a *giallo*, both to provide those unfamiliar with the films with an understanding of their defining characteristics, and to establish my own criteria for what makes a *giallo* a *giallo* – an important task, given the differences of opinion that exist as to the word's scope.

### **1.3 What is a *giallo*?**

Rarely has David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson's assertion that "a genre is easier to recognize than to define" (2001: 94) seemed truer than when attempting to explain what is meant by the term '*giallo*'. The word itself is Italian for 'yellow' and was initially used to refer to translations of detective thrillers by the likes of Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allen Poe and Agatha Christie. First published in Italy by Mondadori in the late 1920s



(Bondanella 2009: 372; Met 2006: 195; Wood 2007: 236), the name ‘*giallo*’ was a reference to their distinctive yellow jackets in much the same manner as the black-jacketed French *série noir* (McDonagh 2010: 10). The popularity of these books flourished throughout the 1930s and 40s, while the post-war period saw a proliferation of Italian authors writing home-grown imitations of their Anglo-American counterparts, often using anglicised aliases (Needham 2002). As a result, ‘*giallo*’, in its original Italian context, is a label of considerable breadth, encompassing everything from the detached, ‘rational deduction’ mysteries of detectives like Sherlock Holmes to the troubled anti-heroes of American hard-boiled *noir* thrillers, and everything in between. The wide-ranging applicability of the term is exemplified by the fact that works as diverse as Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (*Il nome della rosa*, 1980), as well as translations of novels by authors such as Patricia Cornwell, are regarded by Italians as *gialli* (Needham 2002).

Outside Italy, however, the term has acquired a more specific meaning. Within this context, ‘*giallo*’ refers to the body of violent and often highly sexualised murder-mystery films that first emerged in Italy in the mid-1960s and enjoyed a brief but extremely successful heyday during the first half of the 1970s. Despite the shared naming convention, these films often bear only a passing resemblance to their literary predecessors, largely eschewing Holmesian rational deduction in favour of their own “peculiar Italian mixture of thriller, sexploitation and horror/terror conventions” (Hardy 1985: 294, quoted in Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010: 113).

According to Stephen Thrower, the *giallo* film

crossbreeds the murder mystery with horror. It’s a form where murder and intrigue, those staple features of popular drama, are taken to baroque extremes, frequently bordering on the ridiculous. Suspicion in the *giallo* is ubiquitous because *everyone* is hiding something. The general tone is one of moral decay and cynicism, with ever more convoluted plots emphasising morbid details in a Janus-faced world of paranoia and betrayal. (2002: 63)

Peter Bondanella characterises the world inhabited by the *gialli* in strikingly similar terms, describing it as “one of cynicism, greed, sexual depravity, and violence [where] everyone, not just the murderer, probably has something to hide”, with the films exhibiting “ample evidence that human behavior rests upon irrational and frightening foundations” (2009: 375). These descriptions highlight the principal characteristics for which the *giallo* is most widely known: a ‘cross-breeding’ of the whodunit narratives characteristic of literary *gialli* with the graphic violence and salacious sexuality of horror cinema. Indeed, it is precisely

this crossing of generic boundaries and the lack of a single definitive set of traits common to every film that make the *giallo* so difficult to define (Bondanella 2009: 374). Many of the recurrent conventions have been widely documented: the instantly recognisable black gloves, hat and trenchcoat that disguise the killer's identity and gender; the modern urban locales and baroque architecture which provide a backdrop to the carnage that unfolds; the 'whodunit' investigative narratives with their high body counts and multitude of suspects and red herrings; the amateur detective who is often a foreign tourist in a major European city; the jaunty, atonal scores provided by Ennio Morricone, Bruno Nicolai and other composers; the allusions to animals in the titles, which often bear scant relation to the content of the films themselves. Also significant, and particularly relevant to the concerns of this thesis, are the oft-repeated charges of misogyny (Bondanella 2009: 409; Totaro 2006; Wood 2005: 53). Indeed, one of the most enduring images of the *giallo* is that of a scantily-clad woman being murdered in a highly sexualised manner by the aforementioned black-gloved assailant.

Other equally significant conventions have received less attention. While murder, sex and duplicity are the themes most commonly visible on the *giallo*'s surface, these films also exhibit a preoccupation with the changing landscape and social mores of contemporary society, a facet that critics have only recently begun to acknowledge. As noted by Gary Needham (2002), the concept of national identity is problematised in the *gialli* by the ubiquity of travel, tourism and the presence of foreigners (either Italians abroad or non-Italians in Italy), while Bondanella observes "the fundamentally contemporary and cosmopolitan nature of the genre itself, which is clearly displayed in the typically contemporary and cosmopolitan locations, architecture, interior furnishings, fashion, automobiles, and a variety of non-Italian names" (2009: 387). Similarly, Stefano Baschiera and Francesco Di Chiara identify a tension between local and global spaces as one of the *giallo*'s primary characteristics (2010: 116), while Mikel Koven explores the *giallo*'s ambivalent relationship with modernity in its numerous manifestations (2006).

Acknowledging these conventions helps paint a relatively broad, if somewhat superficial, picture of the *giallo*. In due course, I will return to the question posed in this section's title as I attempt to refine my own definition of the word '*giallo*' and establish more concretely the aspects of these films that are of primary interest to me. First, however, I wish to briefly turn to the nature of the European film industry at the time when the *giallo* emerged, exploring the realities of producing popular cinema in the late 1960s/early 1970s Europe and the impact this had on the *giallo*'s form.

## 1.4 Internationalism, co-productions and *filoni*: The *giallo* in the context of 1960s/1970s European cinema

As will be shown in Chapter 2, much of the literature on which this thesis draws refers primarily to Anglo-American cinema. While such an approach is not incompatible with a European movement such as the *giallo*, it is important to emphasise that many of these films' characteristics are a result of conditions specific to the film industry in Europe during the *giallo*'s heyday. Most literature on the *giallo* describes it as an exclusively Italian phenomenon. To view it solely in these terms is, however, overly reductive, since it fails to take into account the extent to which the *giallo*, like many filmic movements that emerged in Europe in the post-war years, relied on transnational co-production and was shaped by influences from many different European countries and the policies of their film industries.

European cinemas have, since their inception, “emerged out of cultural hybridization processes” (Bergfelder 2005b: 329), although these processes became particularly pronounced in the years following the Second World War, during which time the film industry experienced a surge in co-productions involving two or more countries. Ostensibly, this came about as a means to combat declining ticket sales and American dominance at the box office, and to share production costs against the backdrop of the costly post-war reconstruction effort, while at the same time taking advantage of exposure to a wider international audience (Bergfelder 2005a: 53; Wagstaff 1992: 249-250). However, it should also be framed within the context of a broader European culture of integration and cooperation that developed in the post-war years (Bergfelder 2005a: 54). Tax credit schemes introduced in various countries, among them Italy, Spain and West Germany, helped lessen the risk of commercial failure, since in the event of losses the bill would be paid for at least in part by the taxpayer (Wagstaff 1992: 250-251; Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010: 102-103).

The need for a reliable supply of cheap product gave rise to legions of low budget, formulaic, mass-produced ‘copycat’ films in the 1960s as economic realities prompted an “assembly-line mode of production” (Bergfelder 2005a: 64), rewarding the ability to successfully ape a particular formula as cheaply as possible. In Italy, where the demand for films was particularly ravenous, overshadowing the rest of Europe in terms of films produced and tickets sold (Eleftheriotis 2001: 105), this approach was embraced with great gusto. Bondanella describes the rise in Italy of a variety of “faddish film genres” during

this period resulting from “numerous and rapid imitations of a single and often quite excellent pioneering work” (2001: 161; see also Wagstaff 1992: 251-252). Perhaps most famous among these from an international perspective is the *western all’italiana*. Commonly known as ‘spaghetti’ westerns, these films were widely derided by critics as inferior imitations of their American counterparts. This notion of imitation to the point of plagiarism is vividly illustrated by an oft-quoted statement by *giallo* director Luigi Cozzi: “In Italy, when you bring a script to a producer, the first question he asks is not ‘what is your film like?’ but ‘what *film* is your film like?’” (Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010: 106). These imitations were released in a relatively short space of time, tending to exhaust their potential (and their audience’s patience for constantly being subjected to more of the same) in the space of a few short years. As such, each of these movements is tied not only to a specific set of generic conventions but also to a specific period in history.

In the case of the *giallo*, the “pioneering work” upon which subsequent examples were primarily modelled is Dario Argento’s 1970 film *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, the popularity of which is widely acknowledged as having prompted a deluge of imitators seeking to capitalise on its success (Koven 2006: 4; Shipka 2011: 91; Thrower 2002: 65). For a few years after the release of *Bird*, dozens of *gialli* were produced in rapid succession, until their creativity was exhausted and the public began to tire of them, at which point their output dwindled and eventually all but ceased. It seems somehow fitting that this *giallo* craze both began and ended with Argento: his 1975 film *Deep Red*, regarded by many as the pinnacle of the *giallo* and of his career, was also one of the last to be produced before audiences and producers alike turned their attention to other formats such as *poliziotteschi* (police thrillers) and sexy comedies (Smith 1999: 6). Koven refers to this period of 1970-1975 as that of the “classical *giallo*” (2006: 8).

The *giallo* boom was therefore all but over by the mid-1970s, and while films that adhere to the conventions of *gialli* have been made since then (most notably by Argento), they exist as individual curiosities separate from the original ‘wave’. It is therefore unhelpful to think of the *giallo*, and similar movements like the spaghetti western, as enduring genres in the sense meant by Bordwell and Thompson: forms such as the musical, a staple since the advent of sound, and the comedy, still thriving today despite being as old as cinema itself. A number of critics writing on the *giallo* and other Italian popular filmic movements have turned instead to the Italian term ‘*filone*’ (plural: *filoni*), described by Needham as referring to “genres and cycles as well as to currents and trends” (2002). Alexia Kannas defines ‘*filone*’ as meaning “vein” or “streamlet” (2007), emphasising the notion of the different

cycles coming together and diverging at different points, much like forks in a river. Donato Totaro argues that the concept of *filone* is more flexible than that of genre, since it allows for cross-pollination with different cycles (2011). This point is echoed by Newman, who refers to the “intriguing hybrids” that result from the overlap in production between cycles (1986: 20), and by Dimitris Eleftheriotis, who points to the limitations of conventional genre criticism when applied to ‘hybrids’ such as the spaghetti western (2001: 93). This can be framed within the broader context of the nature of European cinema during this period, the films of which often defy generic categorisation. For instance, Bergfelder points to adventure films, which can incorporate *pepla* (Italian sword and sandal epics), historical swashbucklers, biblical epics and contemporary adventures set in exotic locales, as a prime example of the “fluid” nature of European popular cinema (2005a: 66). Often, there was scope for appealing to the audiences of more than one country by drawing on influences from other national *filoni*. Certain *gialli* could, for instance, also be marketed as part of the West German ‘*krimi*’ movement, as was the case with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Brown 2004).<sup>1</sup>

The national market was not, therefore, the only one at which the popular European films of this period were aimed. Indeed, in many cases it was recognised that there might be little to no market potential for a film in its country of origin; in Italy, for example, there is no real horror tradition, and horror films were therefore made primarily with international export in mind (Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010: 103-104, 119). The internationalism of the *gialli* is abundantly clear: the majority are co-productions with one or more other European countries (most often France, Spain and West Germany), and a significant number are set partly or entirely outside Italy. In several *gialli*, the specific location is never explicitly stated, or contradictory information is provided. For example, in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (Ercoli 1970), characters’ names include Peter, Frank and George, and “dollars” are used as currency, in spite of the obviously Mediterranean character of the architecture that provides its backdrop. As Baschiera and Di Chiara note, in such films “the national character is played down or else it completely disappears in order to give way to a cultural landscape that is not clearly identified and that is vaguely Anglophone” (2010: 104). To that end, much like the spaghetti western (Eleftheriotis 2001: 107-108), attempts were on occasions made to pass off the *gialli*, their casts and crews as American or British: regular *giallo* actress Nieves Navarro was usually credited as “Susan Scott”, while *The*

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<sup>1</sup> The same was also true in reverse; see the Italian posters for *krimi* films reproduced at <http://giallo-fever.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/italian-krimi-poster.html> and <http://giallo-fever.blogspot.co.uk/2008/12/another-giallokrimi-locandina-poster.html>, which carry the respective legends “*un giallo classico di Edgard [sic] Wallace*” and “*un giallo di Edgar Wallace*” (accessed 20<sup>th</sup> August 2012).

*Case of the Bloody Iris*' (1972) director Giuliano Carnimeo was identified as "Anthony Ascott". Whether such acts of deception were successful is unclear; Eleftheriotis points to a lack of evidence supporting the notion that audiences "watched spaghetti westerns as if they were genuine American movies" (2001: 108), and one can be similarly sceptical about the *gialli*. Nevertheless, this process of Anglicisation, however unconvincing, adds to the air of cosmopolitanism with which the *gialli* are infused. In a sense, the true nationalities of the films and the people responsible for them cease to matter. Even in *gialli* that take place in Italy there is a tendency to incorporate an air of 'foreignness' into the locations: Dario Argento often uses "a patchwork of different spaces from different [Italian] cities" in his films (Baschiera and Di Chiara 2010: 115), rendering what would be familiar settings to Italian spectators alien and exotic.

A similar tendency can be observed in the decision to make many of the *gialli*'s protagonists foreigners adrift in an unfamiliar (either to the character or the audience, or both) city, with even the films that do take place in Italy being imbued with an international quality as a result. Even when the setting and main character are both ostensibly Italian, an element of exoticism can occur in the form of a non-Italian actor – for example the Australian George Lazenby playing the Italian Franco Serpieri in the Venice-set *Who Saw Her Die?* (Lado 1972). Primary and secondary roles are frequently fulfilled by non-Italian actors: Barbara Bouchet (Czech; born Barbara Goutscher), Edwige Fenech (French-Algerian), Nieves Navarro (Spanish), Ivan Rassimov (Serbian-Italian) and Anita Strindberg (Swedish) are among the regular troupe of *giallo* actors, their characters' nationalities varying from one film to the next (if stipulated at all). The Italian industrial practice of post-synchronisation also adds to the confusion: given the array of different nationalities represented in the cast of any given film, a significant amount of dubbing is a certainty regardless of the language in which it is viewed. As such, there is no guarantee that the actor on screen is speaking with his/her own voice, even if the dub is in his/her own native language. For instance, in *Who Saw Her Die?* Lazenby, a native English speaker, is dubbed on the English-language track by another actor speaking with an American accent – despite the character being Italian!

The *giallo*, therefore, does not fit comfortably within the labels of either 'national cinema' or 'genre'. As a product of the European film industry in the 1960s and 1970s, it draws on influences from numerous countries and appeals to audiences of multiple nationalities, subsuming its own national characteristics and embracing its cosmopolitan, hybrid nature – a tendency that is typical of Italian *filoni* of this period. Thus, like the spaghetti western

before it, its Italianness lies in its ability to “weaken (if not erase) the national as its referent” (Eleftheriotis 2001: 126). Having provided an indication of the character of the *gialli* and the industry out of which they emerged, I will now explore existing criticism of these films, identifying the prior work upon which this thesis draws and the oversights it aims to correct.

## 1.5 Summary of existing *giallo* literature

Existing analysis of the *giallo* is somewhat sparse, although the extent of this can and has been overstated: from the sheer number of publications that open by myopically lamenting the shortage of other writing on the *giallo*, it is self-evident that this dearth is largely a false impression. While the *gialli* were ignored in academic circles at the time of their original exhibition, the last twenty years have given rise to a small but growing body of literature which takes the films considerably more seriously than their contemporary critics did. These texts can broadly be divided into two camps: those that provide in-depth and exhaustive analysis of the work of a specific *giallo* director, and those that consider the *giallo* in a more all-encompassing sense, largely eschewing the idiosyncrasies of individual directors in favour of reading the *giallo* as a broad movement united by a set of shared characteristics.

The roots of *giallo* criticism can be traced back to Maitland McDonagh’s *Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento* (1991, revised 1994 and 2010). Though focused specifically on Argento’s output, McDonagh raised the profile of these films and brought the word ‘*giallo*’ to the attention of non-Italian readers. In addition, through her close analysis of Argento’s filmography and comparisons between it and the work of more conventionally revered directors like Michelangelo Antonioni and Alfred Hitchcock, she showed that it was possible to take these films seriously in an academic context. McDonagh progresses chronologically through Argento’s films, providing a historical account of his career, albeit one interspersed with commentary of varying degrees of depth. While the book, a reworking of the author’s Master’s thesis,<sup>2</sup> is evidently aimed at a critical audience, it is also clearly the work of a professed Argento fan and subject to certain value judgements. As such, while the centrepiece is a meticulous 28-

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.filmthreat.com/interviews/21085/>, accessed 12<sup>th</sup> February 2013: “The very first version of ‘Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds’ was my Columbia University master’s thesis, which I wrote in 1985. It was very academic, but at the same time I was writing I was collecting stills, posters, lobby cards, slides and ad mattes – that was fun.”

page analysis of *Deep Red*, the later *Phenomena* (Argento 1985) merits little more than three pages of discussion and is dismissed as “a film that simply marks time” (2010: 186). McDonagh’s privileging of certain films as more worthy of attention than others based on their perceived quality is echoed in much of the *giallo* criticism that followed *Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds*, the bulk of which concentrates on Argento while eschewing the rest of the *filone*’s output. The later *Art of Darkness* (2000, revised 2001) is in much the same mould, with editor Chris Gallant penning a number of essays focused on specific recurring traits in Argento’s work, followed by essays on each of Argento’s films, written by ‘guest’ authors and arranged chronologically.

Gallant’s essays and those of the bulk of the other contributors approach the films from a psychoanalytical perspective, a methodology shared by much of the other published literature on Argento’s *gialli*. This approach is exemplified by the various pieces written by Xavier Mendik (1996a, 1996b, 1997, 2000), in which he draws on the writings of Freud and Lacan to demonstrate that they show a “profound undermining of the positions of spectator security” (1997: iii). The extent to which psychoanalysis has become “more or less the *lingua franca* of the horror film and thus the privileged critical tool for discussing the genre” (Carroll 1988: 157) goes some way towards explaining the eagerness with which it has also been adopted as a tool for understanding the *giallo*. While not horror films in the purest sense, the *gialli* do contain many elements associated with that genre, most notably their graphic violence. These aspects – rather than, for instance, narrative, characterisation or sound design – tend to be the main focus in both academic and populist writing on the *gialli*, and psychoanalysis, with its association with the horror genre, therefore provides an established framework through which to explore these elements. Many *gialli* also feature elements clearly derived from popular perceptions of psychoanalysis (including repressed traumatic memories, psychosexual complexes and on-screen quotations attributed to Freud), which, coupled with Argento’s own willingness to embrace psychoanalytic readings of his films (McDonagh 2010: 241), help to explain why psychoanalysis is in many ways seen as a natural fit for the *giallo*.

In some respects, it is the apparent convenience of psychoanalysis as a tool for understanding the *giallo* that makes me wary of it. So much of the existing literature adopts it as its framework that to do likewise would risk merely reiterating the same arguments and observations, and therefore also the same failings. One criticism often levelled against psychoanalysis when applied to cinema is that it tends to be primarily prescriptive in nature, relying heavily on external references and ultimately saying more about



psychoanalytical theory itself than the content of the films in question (Klevan 2000: 163). This failing is often apparent in psychoanalytical interpretations of the *giallo*, which frequently appear to have been written with the assumption of a lack of familiarity with psychoanalytical theory, and thus spend a disproportionate amount of time attempting to explain it to the reader. Mendik's book on Argento's 1982 *giallo* *Tenebrae* (2000), which combines Todorov's theories on the typology of detective fiction with a Lacanian reading of the film, is a prime example of this.

It is not my intention to completely disavow the validity of psychoanalytic film theory. Nor do I wish to suggest that concepts derived from psychoanalysis are expressly 'forbidden' in this thesis. After all, the work of the likes of Christian Metz (1982) and Laura Mulvey (1975) has had such a fundamental impact on the study of the language of cinema that it is difficult to talk about concepts such as spectator identification and gendered agency, as this thesis does, without at least acknowledging the influence of these theorists. However, as Frank Burke notes in his analysis of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, such readings have a tendency to "dehistoricize by addressing films and their female characters in universalizing Freudian and post-Freudian terms" (2006: 202), thereby failing to address the issues of history and context that are so crucial to this thesis.<sup>3</sup> As such, while the analyses by the likes of Mendik and Gallant unquestionably opened my eyes to the possibilities that exist for 'taking *gialli* seriously', psychoanalysis itself does not offer a framework suited to my aims.

Nor is the primarily auteurist nature of much of the existing criticism of the *giallo* compatible with the aims of this thesis. As established in section 1.4, the realities of the Italian popular film industry in the 1960s and 1970s leave little room for the auteur: the directors who helmed the majority of *gialli* were jobbing craftsmen rather than visionary innovators. In fact, what is often most striking about the *gialli* is not the differences between the films of one director and those of another but rather how *similar* they are stylistically and ideologically. In spite of this, the occasional maverick such as Argento (who managed to maintain creative control of his films due to them being produced through his father's production company) succeeded in distinguishing his films from those of the masses.

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<sup>3</sup> An exception is Maggie Günsberg's study of gender in Italian genre cinema, which harnesses psychoanalytic theory to explore representations of masculinity and femininity in such period-specific *filoni* as the *peplum* and spaghetti western, noting that films shape gender representation "according to an interacting series of factors, which shift and change over time" (2005: 1). In this text, the *giallo* is referred to only in passing as a subcategory of the horror genre and characterised by "oedipal sadism" (2005: 142).

Given the popularity of the romanticised image of the driven artist with a unique vision, it is perhaps not surprising that so much literature has focused on the director who is arguably the *giallo*'s one true auteur. Indeed, much of this writing seems to be built around 'rehabilitating' Argento and his films, justifying them as subjects worthy of study by setting them in opposition to the supposedly 'lesser' *gialli* of other directors. McDonagh even claims that "the only interesting things" about the plethora of *gialli* that had saturated the market by 1971 are their "outlandish titles" (2010: 95-96) while, as Gallant argues, "although inevitably aiming for commercial appeal, [Argento's films] seem also to target a cineliterate audience, one sensitive to context and convention" (2001a: 8). Only two other *giallo* directors, Mario Bava and Lucio Fulci, have been the subject of book-length studies, and these are dwarfed by the number of publications dedicated to Argento. Bava, widely credited with originating the *giallo* film with *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963), has to a certain extent been rehabilitated by Troy Howarth (2000) and Tim Lucas (2007), who highlight his skilled craftsmanship and gift for creating visually stunning films on shoestring budgets. However, both authors stop short of casting Bava as an auteur in the same vein as Argento. Fulci, too, is depicted as a jobbing craftsman by Stephen Thrower, who explicitly rejects any attempt to validate Fulci as 'respectable' in favour of allowing him to remain "deliciously disreputable" (2002: 11).

It is perhaps this perception of 'disreputableness' that has led to academics eschewing the *gialli* of directors such as Fulci, Sergio Martino and Umberto Lenzi, preferring instead to focus on those that can be portrayed as 'good films'. In doing so, a barrier has been created between what are broadly perceived as 'valued' and 'non-valued' films: in other words, the output of Argento and to a lesser extent Bava versus that of everyone else. Such an approach is detrimental, particularly when it means that, consciously or not, these non-valued films have been largely ignored. That is not to suggest that the Argento-centric texts are in some way inherently flawed or dishonest: the majority make clear their focus on Argento from the outset and do not claim to speak for the *giallo* as a whole. However, the predominance of this approach does have knock-on implications for our understanding of the *giallo* as a whole. The non-Argento *gialli* have effectively become the 'silent majority' while a handful of films by a single and often atypical director have, inadvertently or otherwise, been cast as definitive examples of the form.

This thesis does not aim to make value judgements and debate the films' artistic merit or lack thereof, but rather to explore themes and patterns which cut across the valued/non-valued divide. As such, my own approach owes more of a debt to the second of the two

main ‘schools’ of *giallo* criticism: that which focuses on the *giallo* as a whole rather than Argento in particular and adopts a primarily typological approach. This subsection of *giallo* literature is characterised by Bengt Wallman as primarily involving a process of “labelling and listing” (2007: 2), essentially seeking to define the *giallo* within a set of finite boundaries and establish a catalogue of films that can be considered *gialli*. This approach is exemplified by Adrian Luther Smith’s *Blood and Black Lace* (1999), a glossary of *gialli* that provides synopses, cast and crew listings and brief reviews for more than two hundred films.<sup>4</sup> While not an academic text – Smith writes primarily from the point of view of a fan and reviews the films based on their entertainment value – this represents a serious attempt to identify and catalogue every *giallo* known to exist, which constitutes no small feat given the difficulties in obtaining copies of many of these films. Despite this, *Blood and Black Lace* is light on analysis of what it is about the various titles in its filmography that actually *makes* them *gialli*. The book’s unusually broad interpretation of the word ‘*giallo*’ is actually somewhat problematic: in addition to the expected entries like *Deep Red* and *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Smith also includes films like *Blowup* (Antonioni 1966) and *Don’t Look Now* (Roeg 1973) under the *giallo* umbrella. Whether intentional or not, an attempt at rehabilitation is implicit in this act: through the presence of a handful of critically acclaimed and well-known films in a list of *gialli*, the profile of the other titles is raised by association.

While *Blood and Black Lace*’s primary use is therefore as a reference list of films, the identification of their key traits and conventions falls to other publications. Much of the groundwork for this task is laid in Gary Needham’s essay “Playing with Genre” (2002). In addition to emphasising the important distinction between genre and *filone* (see section 1.4) and therefore the *giallo*’s “resistance to clear definition”, Needham identifies many of the “thematic and stylistic tropes” of the typical *giallo*: the unreliability of eyewitness testimony; the evocation of cod-psychoanalytical theory; the casting of ‘otherness’ as something to be uncovered and contained; the ambivalent relationship with national identity. Due to its brevity, Needham’s essay is necessarily impressionistic, hinting at specific points of interest from which future examinations of the *giallo* might take their cues rather than analysing the films in detail.

Such a task is left to Koven’s *La Dolce Morte* (2006), which, seven years after its publication, remains the only book-length study dedicated to the *giallo*. In what is by far

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<sup>4</sup> Not all of these films are, in fact, *gialli*. Smith includes a number of horror and erotic films on the grounds that they “share the same elements of allure, mystique and madness” (1999: v), acknowledging the overlap that exists between the various *filoni*.

the most comprehensive examination of the *giallo* published to date, Koven builds on Needham's work to conceptualise the *giallo* as a *filone* rather than a genre, examining in detail the various recurring conventions while at the same time acknowledging that the very nature of *filoni* means that there are exceptions to every rule. Unlike the Argento-centric critics, Koven draws on a large number of films by a wide variety of directors, presenting a far more comprehensive picture of the *giallo* than is the case elsewhere, while examining the various films in considerably more depth than Needham's sketchier overview. Through this analysis, Koven depicts the *giallo* as having a markedly ambivalent relationship with modernity in its numerous manifestations: for instance, the proliferation of international travel and exposure to foreign cultures, the tension between faith and reason, and the changing role of women in society.

Alexia Kannas describes *La Dolce Morte* as a vital first step in the process of "regroup[ing], reclassify[ing] and critically analys[ing]" the *giallo* (2007). In acknowledging that the *giallo* "was never intended for the art house, but for the grind house" (2006: 19), Koven eschews the sort of value judgements implicit in the Argento-centric texts. Instead, he uses the framework of folklore studies to situate the *giallo* as a form of "vernacular" cinema, characterised by formula and the primal thrill of violent and erotic set-pieces, and subject to the specific viewing conditions imposed by exhibition in Italy's *terza visione* cinemas, whose clientele tended to converse with friends and come and go during screenings (Koven 2006: 27; see also Wagstaff 1992: 253). As such, both Needham and Koven contribute to a much-needed broadening of research on the *giallo*, examining the *filone* as a whole rather than the work of individual directors, while at the same time contextualising the films' conventions as products of specific cultural circumstances rather than merely cataloguing them or imposing meaning on them through abstract psychoanalytic theory.

In recent years, the work of various authors has expanded on that of Needham and Koven, continuing to broaden the scope of *giallo* criticism. Of these, the most prolific is Donato Totaro, writing in the online journal *Offscreen*. In his numerous reviews and analytical articles covering both familiar and lesser-known *gialli*, Totaro demonstrates the scope for uncovering points of interest in even the most 'lowbrow' examples of the form (Totaro 2002; 2006; 2007; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2011). Totaro's broad approach, which contextualises the *giallo* in relation to both other *filoni* and more widely known mainstream films, is echoed in Robert Edmonstone's 2008 PhD thesis, which examines various *filoni*, including the *giallo*, from the point of view of their violent excesses, arguing

convincingly that the appeal of these films lies not in their narrative coherence, which is often lacking, but rather in the more immediate and primal thrill of visual and aural spectacle. In so doing, he advances the debate beyond “labelling and listing”, focusing instead on the way the films are constructed and the pleasures they offer. In drawing on a wide variety of *filoni* and demonstrating the similarities in their approaches, Edmonstone also underscores the hybrid nature of the *filone* phenomenon. More recently, Donna de Ville’s essay on the monstrous mother figures prevalent in Argento’s filmography (including both his *gialli* and supernatural horror films) eschews the psychoanalytical approaches that inform most analyses of his output in favour of considering sociocultural and historical influences (2010). Similarly, Burke’s analysis of Argento’s *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* examines the film’s portrayal of its two principal female characters in the context of “the increasing self-expression and visibility of women in postwar Italy” (2006: 199), effectively prefiguring – albeit on a more concentrated scale – the approach of this thesis.

Lately, interest in the *giallo* and other popular *filoni* has also extended to those whose usual remit is the art films considered to represent the more ‘respectable’ face of Italian cinema, including authors who previously ignored or gave short shrift to these films. Perhaps most strikingly, while Bondanella’s earlier *Italian Cinema: From Neorealism to the Present* (1990, revised 1999 and 2001) is largely dismissive of the *gialli*, relegating them to a broader discussion of horror films, which he disparages for lacking “production values that raise them above the B-movie level” (2001: 423-424), his more recent *A History of Italian Cinema* (2009) dedicates an entire chapter to exploring the *giallo*’s origins, typology and appeal. Bondanella’s conclusion that “the *giallo* was an important force in Italian cinema during the 1970s” whose “daring brushes with the censors” made it easier for later films to exploit themes of “sexuality and corruption in modern society” (2009: 414-415) indicates a substantial reappraisal on his part of the importance of these films. More recently, various *filoni*, including the *giallo*, received entries in the *Directory of World Cinema: Italy* (Bayman 2011), the titles discussed including both the to-be-expected films of the Argento/Bava/Fulci triumvirate and lesser-known titles (O’Brien 2011: 149; Pink 2011: 148). These analyses, though necessarily brief given the book’s broad scope, are indicative of a growing acknowledgement of these films and their significance in the context of Italian and European popular cinema.

In due course, I will explain how my own approach to the *giallo* builds on and differs from this existing body of analysis. First, however, it seems prudent to clarify which films fall within the remit of this thesis and my criteria for their selection.

## 1.6 Corpus of study

As shown by the motley array of titles covered in the literature discussed above, ‘*giallo*’ is an imprecise term, with the films to which it has been applied often proving to be as dissimilar as they are similar. Indeed, one of the problems with the term ‘*giallo*’ is that it can be applied so broadly as to threaten to both become meaningless and make any study of the subject unmanageable. It is my intention to apply the term more narrowly than, for instance, Smith (1999) and Needham (2002), instead referring primarily to the group of films produced during the main boom of 1970-1975, viewing this as a specific *filone* distinct from those that preceded or followed it. Within the context of this thesis, therefore, a *giallo* is not simply an Italian murder-mystery film but rather an Italian murder-mystery film produced at a certain period in history, responding to a specific set of social and cultural conditions.

That is not to suggest that no films produced outwith the 1970-1975 boom can be considered *gialli*. Nor is it my intention to ignore such films completely: my overall corpus of study includes several films produced both before and after the time of the *giallo* boom that exhibit many of the same conventions as the 1970-1975 *filone*. My viewing of these films has informed my understanding of the *giallo* as a whole, as have numerous popular Italian films from the same period that, while not *gialli* in the purest sense, are infused with *giallo*-like elements – a manifestation of the cross-pollination for which the *filoni* are renowned. For instance, *What Have They Done to Your Daughters?*<sup>5</sup> (Dallamano 1974) lacks the typical setup of the amateur detective in a foreign city and is more appropriately situated in the *poliziottesco filone*, but shares much of the *giallo*’s iconography and its attitudes relating to gender roles and sexual (im)morality. Other films, such as *The Black Belly of the Tarantula* (Cavara 1971) and *So Sweet, So Dead* (Montero 1972), share *Daughters*’ focus on professional detectives rather than private investigators. These, however, fit more comfortably under the *giallo* umbrella thanks to their eschewing of the *poliziottesco*’s traditional focus on a team of detectives or police officers battling organised

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<sup>5</sup> The English-language title is an allusion to the earlier *What Have You Done to Solange?*, a *giallo* in a purer sense, providing a further link between this film and the *giallo filone*. The Italian title, *La polizia chiede aiuto* (‘the police seek help’) bears more resemblance to that of a typical *poliziottesco*.

crime in favour of a single maverick investigator hunting a black-gloved killer. For the most part, this detective for all intents and purposes works alone, often operating beyond the law and therefore having more in common with the *giallo*'s quintessential amateur sleuth. Films like *Tarantula* and *So Sweet, So Dead* may therefore be police thrillers in the most literal sense, but in spirit they are fundamentally *gialli*.

With my definition of the *giallo* solidified, I set about obtaining as many corresponding films as possible. The final corpus of study is comprised of sixty films, of which the majority, forty-one, originate from the *giallo* boom years of 1970-1975. The corpus is reproduced in Appendix A, with the films listed chronologically in three separate tables corresponding to the pre-1970, 1970-1975 and post-1975 periods. These do not account for all or even most of the *gialli* that have been released; Bondanella estimates that, by 1982, "more than a hundred thrillers following the generic 'rules of the game' established by Bava and Argento's seminal films" had been produced (2009: 387). Primarily as a result of restrictions on the films' availability, it is simply not possible to be all-encompassing. While the early 2000s constituted something of a 'second life' for the *giallo*, with a large number of titles released on DVD by independent distributors like Anchor Bay, Blue Underground and Raro Video, many other *gialli* are either lost entirely or available only in highly compromised editions, often of dubious legality and quality. Many *gialli* were re-edited or even re-scored by local distributors (Thrower 2002: 67), and while the titles that are readily available on DVD and Blu-ray Disc are for the most part uncut (a major selling point on which the distributors have eagerly capitalised, prominently declaring their uncensored status on the covers), those that have not received an official DVD release are often only available in an edited form. Another caveat with these unofficial releases is that many are cropped from their original aspect ratio, a significant concern given that most *gialli* were photographed in the 2.39:1 ratio and make full use of the widescreen frame. These cropped versions often severely impact the composition of the frame, potentially altering its meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Rather than risk compromising my analysis by watching a version of a film that was incomplete, modified or of such poor quality as to inhibit viewing, I chose to restrict my corpus to *gialli* that had received an authorised and (as far as could be ascertained) uncut release with either English audio or English subtitles. These were sourced from various

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<sup>6</sup> A clear example is provided by the shot of Dominique, Peter and Minou dining together in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, reproduced as Figure 5.7 in Chapter 5. The composition of this shot, which hints strongly at the film's lesbian subtext, would be impossible to properly reproduce in a narrower ratio.

countries, with the majority being American DVD releases, but titles were also acquired from the UK, Italy, France, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands and Japan, resulting in a selection of discs as cosmopolitan as the films themselves. Some *gialli* not included in the corpus, such as *A Quiet Place to Kill* (Lenzi 1970), are available on DVD, but in releases that are not English-friendly. Time was also a factor: while I made a point of acquiring as many *gialli* as possible, I also deemed it prudent to impose some limits and therefore stopped acquiring new titles at the end of 2007. In any event, by this time the *giallo*'s 'DVD boom' had long since ended, and any new DVD and Blu-ray Disc releases since then have tended to be new editions of films already available on DVD.

## 1.7 (Re)organising the *giallo*

The research phase which followed my accumulation of the corpus involved examining the sixty films in detail and producing detailed notes to which I could later refer. During this process, I compiled a database charting various areas of interest, including the gender of the main character, villain and main character's love interest(s); whether the main character played an active role in investigating the film's central mystery; and, when explicitly stated, the nationalities of the principal characters and the city and country in which each film took place. While many of the arguments advanced in the literature discussed in section 1.5 corresponded with my own observations during my viewing of the corpus, it quickly became clear that what I considered to be the most intriguing aspects of the *giallo* were at odds with those emphasised elsewhere. As noted in section 1.5, much of the discourse surrounding these films, both academic and populist, focuses on how luridly violent and sexually explicit they are – a fact that the various DVD distributors have readily exploited with their sensationalised cover art. Many of these covers use artwork that dates back to the films' original theatrical releases, indicating that the distributors of the 1970s were as keen to emphasise these elements as their 21<sup>st</sup> century counterparts. (See Figure 1.1.)





Figure 1.1 – A selection of *giallo* DVD covers.

Additionally, many DVD releases augment their lurid artwork with claims of “explicit sex” and “graphic violence” in the blurbs on the back covers. “*The Fifth Cord* [Bazzoni 1971] has it all,” declares Blue Underground’s release of the film: “kinky sex, shocking violence [...] and much more.” Another Blue Underground release, *The Pyjama Girl Case*

(Mogherini 1977), makes similarly grand promises about the film's sexual content. "Who was this once-beautiful girl found clad only in yellow pyjamas?" it demands. "Why would the authorities put her nude body on public display? What sexual depravity did she endure before her murder?" The word "fun" also appears frequently, implying a degree of lightheartedness to these wanton displays of sex and violence.

While these blurbs do not directly lie about the films' content, they do present a distorted portrait of the attention devoted to these elements. Although these descriptions, the cover art and the reviews widely available on the internet may give the impression that the films are filled with wall-to-wall nudity and gore, in reality many of them are surprisingly chaste, with the sexual scenes largely restricted to a handful of shots of bare breasts and softcore fondling, and the violence occurring sporadically and in brief, unsustainable bursts. What very few academic and populist responses to these films acknowledge is that, for large stretches of their running time, many of them are far less exciting than the gaudy DVD covers reproduced above suggest.<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to see how the perception that the *gialli* are filled with wall-to-wall sex and violence has come about. In addition to the rather deceptive manner in which they are advertised, the tendency of existing literature towards "labelling and listing" has led to an emphasis being placed on those elements that can be easily quantified: we can, for instance, easily count the number of sex scenes and murders in a particular film, and describe in detail the manner in which the various victims are killed.<sup>8</sup> Such an approach is ill-suited to dealing with what many would consider the less 'flashy' elements of these films, such as the scenes of domestic *ennui* and strife so often dismissed as filler between one sex scene finishing and the next murder scene beginning. Just as the Argento-centric nature of much of the existing literature paints a distorted picture of the *giallo*, therefore, the disproportionate emphasis on sexy and violent scenes, both in literature and promotional materials, succeeds in creating a perception of these films that is often at odds with reality. Furthermore, simply cataloguing and describing the sex and murder scenes often fails to account for the tensions that lie beneath the surface of these scenes – tensions that become apparent if one considers these scenes less as isolated set-pieces and more as

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<sup>7</sup> One exception is Chris Fujiwara's essay on *Spasmo* (Lenzi 1974), the title of which, "Boredom, *Spasmo* and the Italian System" (2007), gives a clear indication of the aspects of the film on which he focuses. Edmonstone (2008) and Koven (2006) also acknowledge the tendency of the *gialli* and other *filoni* to bookend moments of arresting visual and aural spectacle with more mundane scenes of narrative progression.

<sup>8</sup> From a populist perspective, the web site Hysteria Lives! (<http://www.hysteria-lives.co.uk>), run by Justin Kerswell, epitomises this approach. Kerswell's *giallo* reviews conclude with a body count which divides the film's victims by gender and lists how each of them dies.

components of the *gialli*'s worldview. It is these aspects of the *gialli* – the hidden anxieties that can be found both in the violent and/or erotic set-pieces and in the more mundane scenes when they are 'unpicked' – that this thesis seeks to explore.

The trends noted during this research are set out below. For the time being they are presented 'as is', listing and describing these conventions rather than attempting to explain how they came to occur or what potential conclusions might be inferred from their presence in the films.

### 1.7.1 M-*gialli* and F-*gialli*

The *giallo* (like the spaghetti western or *poliziottesco*) is a *filone*, but within that *filone*, other *filoni* – or, perhaps, sub-*filoni* – can be observed: veins connected to the main artery, to labour Alexia Kannas' analogy.<sup>9</sup> One of the most striking trends observed through my research, entirely unnoted in the existing literature, is the difference in overall formula between the *gialli* that focus on a male main character and those that focus on a female. The disparity is so marked that I propose to divide the *gialli* along these lines, referring to these two sub-*filoni* by the self-explanatory names 'M-*giallo*' and 'F-*giallo*'. Of the sixty films in the corpus, twenty-six are M-*gialli* and twenty-three are F-*gialli*. A further eleven lack a clear protagonist and instead play as ensemble pieces, with the attention divided between various characters of both sexes. These ensemble films are more common during the early stages of the *giallo*'s life, but become less frequent beyond 1971, after the *giallo*'s format has been fully established. Because they make up the majority, I have opted to focus on the films that can be clearly identified as either M-*gialli* or F-*gialli*. Through the overview of the early years of the *giallo*'s development that follows, I aim to both illustrate how the *giallo* developed into these two distinctive strands and highlight the shared characteristics and differences between them.

As previously noted, it is broadly agreed that the first 'true' *giallo* is Mario Bava's 1963 film *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. The main character is Nora Davis, an American tourist in Rome, but played by the Italian Leticia Román, while her Italian love interest, Dr. Marcello Bassi, is played by the American John Saxon. While visiting an elderly family friend, Nora witnesses the murder of a woman on the Spanish Steps, but when she

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Wood acknowledges this with reference to various subcategories of *giallo*, such as the *giallo erotico* and *giallo politico* (2005: 53; 2007: 236), though such terminology is not widely used by English-speaking critics. It also points to a looser interpretation of the word '*giallo*' than my own: for instance, Wood views the *poliziottesco* as a subset of the *giallo*, the '*giallo poliziesco*', rather than a separate entity (2005: 53).

alerts the authorities no trace can be found of the body. Convinced that what she saw was genuine, Nora pursues her own investigation with Marcello's help, and discovers a connection to a series of murders perpetrated a decade ago by the so-called Alphabet Killer, whose victims were chosen by their surname initial – A, then B, then C. Finally, Nora is brought face to face with the killer – her landlady, Laura Craven (Valentina Cortese), driven to kill by financial greed and apparent madness.

Despite predating the *giallo* boom by seven years, therefore, *Girl*'s narrative establishes the basic format of the *giallo* to a startling degree: a foreign tourist who accidentally witnesses a murder and turns amateur sleuth in the face of police inactivity; the backdrop of a modern European city, photographed 'travelogue'-style; a blurring of national identities; a 'whodunit' investigation involving multiple murders and a killer driven by psychosis. And yet in many respects, *Girl* differs significantly from the films that were to follow. Many of these differences relate to the film's aesthetic, its striking black and white photography at odds with the saturated colours of later *gialli*. It also features whimsical narration by an unidentified male narrator and an abundance of slapstick comedy, neither of which would become *giallo* mainstays, while the repeated use of a song by pop vocalist Adriano Celentano contrasts with the haunting, wordless vocals of Edda Dell'Orso that characterise the typical *giallo* soundtrack. *Girl* is thus best thought of as showcasing in an embryonic form many of the conventions that would become mainstays once the format was better established. One of these is the use of a female main character, making *Girl* both the first *giallo* and the first F-*giallo*. However, as will be seen, Nora has little in common with subsequent F-*giallo* main characters.

Bava's next *giallo*, *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), brings the *giallo* closer to its final form, introducing the rich primary colours, baroque architecture and ultramodern fashion that would come to define these films. It also introduces the notion of the *giallo* as a showcase for a series of graphic murder set-pieces, earning it the reputation for being "the first authentic body count movie".<sup>10</sup> Set in an *haute couture* fashion house, it gives birth to the notion that every character in a *giallo* has something to hide, with illicit affairs, drug addiction and secret abortions among the dark secrets uncovered over the course of the film. This setting also provides the *raison d'être* for the killer's traditional garb of black hat, gloves and trenchcoat (Needham 2002), which would become one of the *filone*'s most enduring characteristics. In contrast to both *Girl* and the majority of later *gialli*, however,

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Lucas makes this claim in the liner notes accompanying the 2001 North American DVD release of the film by VCI Entertainment.

*Black Lace* eschews concentrating on a single main character in favour of an ensemble approach, dividing the running time between several characters, most of whom are dead by the film's end.

With these two early *gialli*, Bava laid much of the groundwork for what would become the 'classical' *giallo*. However, it would take some time for *Black Lace*'s more baroque elements to be adopted as mainstays of the *filone*. Many of the pre-1970 *gialli* eschew *Black Lace*'s 'body count' mechanic, focusing instead on emotionally fragile women and revelling in their psychological torture, often with little to no bloodshed until the inevitable reveal of the perpetrator(s) during the climax. One-time Oscar nominee Carroll Baker stars as the victim/main character in several of these films, of which the quintessential example is Romolo Guerrieri's *The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1968). In this film, Baker plays Deborah, an American recently married to the Swiss Marcel (Jean Sorel). While honeymooning in Marcel's hometown of Geneva, Marcel is accused of murdering his previous lover, Suzanne (Ida Galli), by her brother Philippe (Luigi Pistilli). It is eventually revealed that Suzanne is in fact alive and that she, Marcel and Philippe planned to drive Deborah mad and stage her suicide in order to collect her life insurance policy. However, their plot is thwarted by an undercover detective, Robert (George Hilton), who kills Marcel and rescues Deborah.

In comparison to later *gialli*, *Deborah* places far more emphasis on the relationship between Deborah and Marcel and on the former's fragile state of mind than on any murder-mystery element, giving the film something of the air of a melodrama and indeed shedding no blood until the climax, during which Marcel is quickly dispatched with a gunshot – a far cry from the lurid stabbings and other assorted murders of later films. *Deborah* provides the overall template for a number of later *gialli* featuring female central characters, although later examples of the form would eventually appropriate the multiple gory murders popularised by *Black Lace*. What is most significant about *Deborah*'s contribution to the development of the *giallo* is, however, the role of Deborah herself. Though nominally the film's protagonist and the central component of the conspirators' elaborate plot, Deborah remains a passive force throughout. Although there is a central mystery – did Marcello really kill Suzanne? – Deborah herself makes no attempt to solve it. This is in stark contrast to Nora in *Girl* who, although assisted by Marcello, conducts her own investigation into the Alphabet Murders and proves to be a resourceful heroine, on one occasion booby-trapping her apartment to protect herself from the killer. It is Deborah rather than Nora who serves as the template for the majority of future F-*giallo* main

characters, who with relatively few exceptions are essentially passive forces in their own narratives.

The *gialli* mentioned so far have focused primarily on female characters, including *Black Lace*, which, despite a mixed sex ensemble cast, is mainly concerned with the fashion house's female models and its directress, Contessa Cristina Como (Eva Bartok). *Gialli* oriented around male protagonists certainly existed in the pre-*giallo* boom phase; the corpus includes *Death Laid an Egg* (Questi 1968) and *One on Top of the Other* (Fulci 1969), both focusing on morally and psychologically compromised business professionals who end up in downward spirals as the wealth and privilege they hold dear is stripped away. The most direct point of reference for *One on Top of the Other* and its protagonist, George Dumurrier (Jean Sorel), is in fact *Deborah*, given that both feature narratives of deception and psychological torture, orchestrated by the main character's relatives, in this case George's supposedly deceased wife Susan (Marisa Mell) and his brother Henry (Alberto de Mendoza). As with *Deborah*, the body counts in both films are low and the focus is on melodrama rather than baroque set-pieces. However, these films clearly establish the male protagonist as compromised and fallible, his authority undermined and his control over his own fate severely diminished – defining characteristics for future M-*giallo* protagonists.

It is not until the 1970 release of *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* that the template for the M-*giallo* is properly established. In addition to creating the surge in popularity that resulted in the *giallo* boom, *Bird* establishes what would become the defining characteristics of both M- and F-*gialli*, melding the extravagant production design, black-gloved killer and high body count of *Black Lace* with *Girl's* focus on a single intrepid amateur detective, and situating the action firmly in the modern cosmopolitan world with its backdrop of contemporary urban Rome. *Bird's* protagonist, Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), retains the fallibility and ineffectuality of forerunners such as George Dumurrier in *One on Top* and Marco (Jean-Louis Trintignant) in *Death Laid an Egg*. However, while both George and Marco are part of the old establishment (a doctor and a business executive respectively), Sam is established from the outset as part of the late 1960s/early 1970s counterculture. A young novelist with a taste for modern fashion trends, a glamorous model girlfriend and a Black Power poster on his apartment wall, he brings the *giallo* into a post-May 1968 landscape captivated by ideals of individualism, rootlessness and a bohemian lifestyle.

In terms of narrative structure, *Bird* owes a clear debt to *Girl*. While walking home one night, Sam witnesses what appears to be the attempted murder of a striking woman, Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi), and finds himself powerless to intervene, though the assailant flees and Monica survives. Sam remains preoccupied by the attack, convinced that something was not quite right about the scene he witnessed. As various other women are attacked and murdered, Sam launches his own investigation, ultimately discovering that Monica herself is the killer and that, in the 'attack' he witnessed, she was in fact the aggressor. Once again rendered powerless, Sam is only saved from the deranged Monica by the last-minute intervention of the police. Like many of the M-*gialli* that were to follow, the ending is ambiguous, with Monica's psychosis improperly understood by the psychiatrist who attempts to explain it, implying that the tensions between Monica and the patriarchal order against which she rebelled (and Sam's status within that order) remain unresolved. It is not uncommon for the final shot in many subsequent M-*gialli* to feature the bewildered protagonist staring into the distance, haunted by his ordeal and lacking any certainty that the killer's apprehension will restore order to his world.

It would take a while for *Bird*'s influence to fully propagate, however, and many of the *gialli* released in its immediate aftermath owe considerably more to the pre-boom *gialli* in terms of their aesthetics and overall structure. This is particularly true of the female-centric *gialli*, with films such as *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* continuing the melodrama-centric, largely bloodless approach of *Deborah*. In addition, most of these F-*gialli* eschew the ambiguity of *Bird*'s inconclusive ending, instead offering a return to order and the reestablishment of social norms: virtually every F-*giallo* concludes with the main character under the protection of a male guardian, often the film's love interest or a detective. Fairly quickly, however, *Bird*'s influence on the F-*giallo*'s typology becomes apparent, with Sergio Martino's *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (1971) in many respects serving as the definitive F-*giallo*, for the first time merging the 'paranoid female victim' narrative of *Deborah* and its successors with the high body count and lurid set-pieces of *Bird*. Many of these F-*gialli* resemble morality plays, warning of the dangers that befall women who forsake their expected role as wife and homemaker and become involved with the wrong people.

From this point on, imitations of *Bird* and *Wardh* come thick and fast, attempting to replicate their achievements with varying degrees of success. Despite clear cross-pollination in the early stages of development, however, the M- and F-*gialli* remain largely separate once fully established. In a broad sense, the F-*gialli* are films about emotionally



unstable women victimised by conniving sadists and remain largely passive figures in their own narratives, while the *M-gialli* are about dogged but ineffectual outsiders who launch their own amateur investigations which, while often marred by their own incompetence or failure to understand the true nature of the crime they are investigating, show them playing an active role in the narrative. When their plots are actually broken down in these terms, it is striking to note just how little they actually have in common beyond the broad murder-mystery formula and the presence of the more superficial iconographical elements such as the black-gloved killer and modern urban European locations.

To view the M- and F-*gialli* as completely separate entities would be to disavow the hybridity for which the *filoni* are renowned, and indeed not all *gialli* comfortably fit within the bounds of either category. In addition to the previously noted ensemble pieces, a few move freely between male and female central characters, killing off their initial protagonists in *Psycho*-like twists or simply abandoning them when they are no longer deemed useful. Meanwhile, a minority of F-*gialli* eschew the passivity typical of these films' female main characters and instead take a more active, M-*giallo*-like approach to investigating the murders. Foremost among these is *Death Walks at Midnight* (Ercoli 1972), whose heroine, Valentina (Nieves Navarro), is unusually forthright and resourceful for an F-*giallo* heroine. Most, however, adhere to one of the two distinctive formulae described above, and as such the first two analysis chapters of the thesis examine the M- and F-*gialli* respectively, exploring in more detail the conventions outlined in this section and their implications for our understanding of the films.

### 1.7.2 Queer characters, children and teenagers

While my reorganisation of the *gialli* is derived from their male and female central characters, these films offer a rich cavalcade of secondary characters that are also worthy of investigation. Space precludes me from exploring every single one of these characters in detail. Given the thesis' emphasis on gender, however, I have chosen to devote some attention to a group of characters that I consider particularly interesting. Both M- and F-*gialli* are obsessed with all things carnal, from the early, relatively bloodless melodramas like *Deborah* with their soft-focus scenes of tender canoodling to the later, more violent and explicit *gialli* with their depictions of sadomasochistic sex and back-alley abortions. For the most part, the sexual activity depicted is of a strictly heterosexual variety, particularly when it involves the films' central characters. However, one striking feature of



the *giallo* is the seemingly ubiquitous presence, in minor roles, of those characters with non-heteronormative gender and/or sexual identities, including gay men, lesbians, bisexual men and women, transvestites and transsexuals.

The *giallo*'s portrayal of those traditionally described as queer is fascinating for a number of reasons, perhaps the most significant of which is what they reveal about the *giallo*'s attitudes to gender and sexuality in general. While watching these films, I was repeatedly struck by the high visibility of characters whose sexualities or gender identities diverged from heteronormative conventions. These characters, while often relegated to minor roles with little to no narrative significance, were surprisingly numerous and often considerably more 'colourful' than the films' other secondary characters. Every single 1970s Dario Argento *giallo*, for instance, features one or more gay men, while the seductive lesbian neighbour lingers at the edge of many an F-*giallo*. What is particularly striking about these characters, the functions they perform and the ways in which they are depicted is that they illustrate, in a highly concentrated form, the overall ambivalence of the *giallo* as a whole, exploiting while simultaneously condemning its queer characters and their various proclivities.

Similar anxieties and contradictions can also be observed in the presence and portrayal of children within the *giallo*. During my research, I was struck by the limited age bracket represented by the films' casts. The main characters in *gialli* are almost exclusively adults in their thirties, with older characters invariably relegated to minor roles.<sup>11</sup> Children appear even less than the elderly, and indeed their near-total absence from the *gialli* is striking. One of the aims of the final analysis chapter, Chapter 6, is to explore this absence and to consider potential reasons for it. However, the main goal of this chapter is to analyse the small number of *gialli* in which children and teenagers do appear. Although only three of the films in the corpus feature non-adult characters in significant roles, I wish to examine them in detail because, in adopting a more restrained, contemplative approach towards scenes of violence that is at odds with the films' normally gratuitous approach, they reveal something interesting about the parameters of the *giallo*. Given the *giallo*'s proclivity for exploring sexual matters, it comes as no surprise that intimations of paedophilia are present in all three of these films, with varying degrees of explicitness. Again, the handling of such matters is noticeably more cautious than is characteristic of the *giallo*'s approach to adult sexuality.

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<sup>11</sup> While the actual ages of these characters are almost never explicitly stipulated, certain assumptions about their ages can be made from their appearance and the ages of the actors portraying them, obtainable from web sites such as the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>).

## 1.8 Core texts and thesis structure

As discussed in section 1.2, the aims of this thesis were developed through the process of viewing the corpus. In a similar vein, the overall structure of this thesis emerged through the process of developing my own means of organising the *gialli* in order to take account of the various previously unacknowledged trends I observed during this research process. This chapter concludes with a brief summary of this structure and of the main films to which the following chapters refer.

In **Chapter 2**, I establish the sociocultural backdrop against which the *giallo* boom took place, charting the various developments that occurred in the years leading up to and during the boom, with a particular focus on matters pertaining to gender and sexuality. Following on from this, I identify the critical models on which the thesis draws to bridge the gap between this historical overview and the conventions observed in the *gialli*.

Chapters 3-6 adopt the approach of subjecting to close textual analysis a more limited selection of films derived from the broader corpus of study, all sourced from the boom period of 1970-1975. This decision was made primarily in the interest of obtaining a manageable quantity of material rather than attempting to spread my analysis too thinly by incorporating all sixty films from the corpus. Having elected to divide the analysis into four chapters, each focusing on one of the key subjects detailed above, I opted to limit myself to three key films or 'core texts' per chapter and, in the interests of providing as broad a picture of the *giallo* as possible, not to reuse the same films between chapters to a significant degree. Wherever possible, I have aimed to strike a balance between widely known titles and comparatively lesser known ones that have not been discussed in any great detail in the existing literature. Each chapter contains at least one iconic *giallo* that has been written about previously and one more obscure title that challenges pre-existing notions about the *giallo* and its conventions. Reference is also made within these chapters to a variety of other films in the corpus; however, the main emphasis is on these core texts.

**Chapter 3**, which explores the M-*giallo* and its compromised protagonist, begins with a discussion of a highly typical example of the form, albeit one about which relatively little has previously been written, *The Fifth Cord*, considering its depiction of urban spaces and the protagonist's status within them as a rootless outsider. It then explores themes of imprisonment in *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (Lado 1971), which lacks many of the more stereotypical *giallo* traits such as the black-gloved killer and also takes the unprecedented

approach of exploring the protagonist's fallibility through nonlinear storytelling, thus serving to challenge preconceived notions of what constitutes a *giallo*. The chapter concludes with an examination of the 'definitive' M-*giallo*, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, considering its two primary female characters and the male-centric anxieties that their portrayal reveals.

**Chapter 4** focuses on the F-*giallo* and the harangued, vulnerable figure of the central woman.<sup>12</sup> Positing that these films adopt a process of first pathologising the central woman and then seeking to contain her, this chapter begins by examining *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971), which takes the unusual step of conflating its central woman and its villain, thereby revealing much about the *giallo*'s engagement with the issue of women's emancipation and its conception of women as a problem to be solved. It then considers the more conventional *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, in which the process of disempowering and containing the central woman is vividly demonstrated. Finally, *Death Walks at Midnight* is examined as a notable exception to the convention of the F-*giallo* central woman as weak and passive, considering how the film resolves the presence of its radically different heroine, Valentina, within a narrative template that requires her to be a passive victim.

Queer characters tend to occupy minor roles with limited screen time. As such, **Chapter 5** adopts a broader approach than the other analysis chapters, surveying a wide variety of different characters and situations across the corpus. However, the chapter concludes with a series of case studies of characters who appear in three specific films: the widely viewed and discussed *Deep Red*, the lesser-known *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (Argento 1971) (unavailable for many years and only recently afforded official DVD and Blu-ray Disc releases), and *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, which problematises both the *giallo*'s typical moral stance on queer characters and my conception of the F-*giallo* as a vehicle for reinforcing patriarchal order.

**Chapter 6** examines children and teenagers in the *giallo*. Because there are actually only three *gialli* in the corpus in which children or teenagers feature prominently, the core texts for this chapter were effectively predetermined. Of these, the least well-known is ironically the most conventional: *Who Saw Her Die?*, a straightforward M-*giallo* disturbed by the atypical casting of the protagonist's young daughter as the main murder victim. The second film, *Don't Torture a Duckling* (Fulci 1972), features a more unconventional ensemble

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<sup>12</sup> See Chapter 4 for an explanation of my use of this term rather than 'female protagonist'.

structure and reveals significant tensions regarding the liminal positioning of children in the world of the *giallo*. Finally, *What Have You Done to Solange?* is deservedly known for being one of the most violent and sexually explicit *gialli*, a reputation which stands in stark contrast to the two previous films' far more restrained approach to such matters in relation to their child characters. Chapter 6 considers the reasons for this tentativeness and what it reveals about the moral compass of the *giallo* as a whole.

Finally, **Chapter 7** brings the thesis to a close by drawing together the findings from the four analysis chapters, considering the contributions made by the thesis, and suggesting potential future avenues for research into these films.

## 1.9 Conclusion

Despite the groundwork laid by earlier studies of the *giallo*, there are inherent difficulties in breaking such a large body of films down into meaningful categories, particularly when those categories lack any precedent in the existing literature. With this chapter, I have sought to simplify this process by providing a broad overview of the conventions, conflicts and concerns that embody the *giallo*, as well as conveying the areas in which this thesis seeks to cover new ground and pose questions that have either been ignored or given short shrift in existing writing on the *giallo*. In the next chapter, I shall attempt to place the aforementioned concerns into the context of their original production and exhibition as I provide a historical overview of the years leading up to the *giallo* boom and establish the critical framework adopted by this thesis.

## 2 Making sense of the *giallo*: Sociocultural context and critical frameworks

### 2.1 Film and the ‘real world’

Whereas the previous chapter sought to situate the *giallo* within the broader context of 1960s/1970s European popular cinema and establish the key trends and conventions that make these films noteworthy, this chapter aims to identify a means through which these conventions can be understood. Towards the end of Chapter 1, I identified various facets of the *giallo* that had not been acknowledged in existing critical responses to these films, structuring them around four main areas of interest: male protagonists, central women, queer characters, and children and teenagers. If there is a single word which binds these subjects together, it is ‘anxiety’. The trends observed through my research paint a picture of the *giallo* as a site of considerable discomfort regarding a wide variety of matters, from the roles of men and women in modern (i.e. early 1970s) society to the presence of those identified as queer, children and teenagers in a world which privileges adult male heterosexuality as the norm.

How, then, to explain these anxieties, and how to move beyond simply cataloguing them in the same way that much of the existing *giallo* literature catalogues the films’ features? Ironically, the embryo of a solution is suggested in one of these existing publications, Mikel Koven’s *La Dolce Morte*. The significance of this passage in relation to this thesis’ approach is such that it is worth quoting at length:

If there is any single theme that [...] is common across the entire *giallo* cinema, it is that these films display a marked ambivalence toward modernity. The early 1970s was a period of marked change within Italian culture and society – stretching across the entire country – varying by region, but profound throughout. Things were changing, and while it might be academically advantageous to say the Italian ‘folk’ were resistant to such changes, and viewed modernity with suspicion, such an approach is simplistic and only partially true. Modernity is not condemned in these films, but neither is it praised. The changes within Italian culture [...] can be seen through the *giallo* film as something to be discussed and debated – issues pertaining to identity, sexuality, increasing levels of violence, women’s control over their own lives and bodies, history, the state – all abstract ideas, which are all portrayed as human stories in the *giallo* film. (2006: 16)

The core of Koven’s assertion – that the *gialli* represent a deeply ambivalent reaction to a period of seismic sociocultural change – opens up a vast array of possibilities for my own

research. Indeed, many aspects of Koven's observations are confirmed by my own research and the trends noted in Chapter 1. The ambivalence he notes is particularly apparent in the way the *gialli* engage with the destabilisation of the traditional roles of men and women through their narratives of displaced men facing existential crises (frequently, though certainly not always, brought into conflict with monstrous, emasculating women) and agency-deprived women plunged into living nightmares as they seek to forsake the traditional functions imposed on them by society. However, despite making reference to the social changes that took place in the 1970s, Koven only conveys a vague notion that this was a tumultuous time in history, doing little to refine these "abstract ideas" into something more concrete. As such, *La Dolce Morte* – and the body of existing literature on the *giallo* as a whole – cannot be relied on to provide a suitable framework through which to tackle these films as the sort of sociocultural engagement proposed by Koven.

I was already aware from my reading on film theory that various filmic movements from different moments in history have been interpreted as forms of engagement with or reflections of the sociocultural conditions and concerns prevalent when they were produced. With this in mind, I began to explore the possibility of using the framework provided by the critical responses to one of these movements as a means to explain the conventions of the *giallo*. The notion that films, no matter how 'low-brow' they might be, offer insight into contemporary sociocultural attitudes and anxieties is certainly not a new one. For instance, critics (e.g. Wood 1986; Lowenstein 2005) have read the wave of horror movies that emerged in the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s as a means of engaging with contemporary American concerns such as the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War. In *Film History: Theory and Practice*, Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery chart numerous examples of critics who have explored the relationship between stereotypic attitudes that appear in films and those that exist in society, observing the common view that filmic images are "reflections of prevailing social norms" – for instance, stereotypical representations of women prevail on screen because these same stereotypes are also present in society. As a result, "changes in representations are attributed to changes in public sentiment" (1985: 159). Movies, they argue, are representations of society, no matter how oblique these representations may be:

That is, they derive their images and sounds, themes and stories ultimately from their social environment. In fictional films, characters are given attitudes, gestures, sentiments, motivations, and appearances that are, in part at least, based on social roles and on general notions about how a policeman, factory worker, debutante, mother, or husband is 'supposed' to act. (1985: 158)

This notion also has some precedent in the study of Italian popular cinema. In his *History of Italian Cinema*, Gian Piero Brunetta considers the merits of studying the comedies of the 1960s and 70s, stating that they provide “an overview that could have been used in an annual report of sociological statistics documenting the Italian society” (2009: 185). Similarly, in his discussion of the spaghetti western and its audience, Christopher Wagstaff posits that the popular films of this period were embraced because their rejection of moralising and positive role models “matched the social situation in which the viewing public found itself” (1992: 257). However, such an approach has yet to be applied in anything approaching a meaningful way to the *giallo*, which, as established in the previous chapter, is frequently critiqued from the point of view of its typological characteristics, describing the films’ recurring trends without giving due consideration to what these trends say about the *giallo* and its relationship with the ‘real world’.

This chapter’s primary goal is to identify an appropriate means to explore the *gialli*’s engagement with the sociocultural concerns of the ‘boom’ years of 1970-1975. Before doing so, however, it makes sense to first establish the historical context out of which the *giallo* emerged, examining the formative period during which the attitudes with which the *gialli* engage were crystallised by a variety of sociocultural developments. I have opted to examine the key sociocultural changes that occurred in Italy and Western Europe in the years following the Second World War, combining historical accounts with contemporary writings that documented and commented on with the changing social mores of this period in order to take into account popular contemporary attitudes. It is my intention that, in establishing the sociocultural conditions that gave rise to the *giallo* and providing a historical context to the conventions observed in Chapter 1, this overview will assist the process of identifying an appropriate model from which to derive this thesis’ critical framework.

## **2.2 Italy and Western Europe 1945-1970: An overview**

It is important to stress that my aim with this section is not to provide an exhaustive and detailed account of historical events during this period. Doing so would be inappropriate for the *gialli*, which do not as a rule refer or respond directly to specific events or moments in history. For example, despite the large number of *gialli* dealing with infidelity and women trying to leave their husbands, there is no explicit commentary on the legalisation of divorce in Italy in 1970 or the ensuing efforts by the Catholic Church to have it

revealed. Likewise the *gialli* *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Dallamano 1972) and *Strip Nude for your Killer* (Bianchi 1975) may include back alley abortions as plot devices, but make no reference to the mounting pressure from feminist groups for the legalisation of abortion both in Italy and more broadly throughout Europe. Even the Prague-set *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (Lado 1971), while rife with paranoia and imagery of captivity, is less about life under Soviet rule than it is an indictment of older generations ‘preying’ on and exploiting the young (though this in itself taps into the general mood of the time; see section 2.2.2). Direct references to current affairs tend to be fleeting at best: for instance, passing mentions of a railway strike in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Argento 1970) or financial instability in *The Fifth Cord* (Bazzoni 1971) are never explored further.

What the *gialli* do instead is broadly convey a flavour of the anxieties and uncertainty characteristic of the period in which they were produced. This thesis aims to read the *gialli* as a symptom of and articulation of these concerns rather than a direct attempt to negotiate them. The fact that these films were released in the early 1970s means that they *anticipate* the sociocultural developments of the decade rather than respond to them after the fact. Therefore, this section is less concerned with groups such as the various women’s movements which emerged over the course of the 1970s and more with what Frank Burke refers to as their “prehistory” (2006: 210-214): the sociocultural conditions of the preceding years to which these groups, and the *gialli* themselves, responded. To that end, this section broadly sketches out the ways in which society and social attitudes developed in the quarter-century following the Second World War, establishing the sociocultural milieu that gave rise to the *giallo* in order to better understand the concerns that are manifested in the films themselves. While this thesis specifically focuses on gender in the *giallo*, this overview takes a fairly broad approach, covering a number of sociocultural developments whose relevance to my research goals may not immediately be obvious. In doing so, however, I hope to illustrate that virtually every aspect of social change during this period either impacted on or was influenced by issues relating to gender. Furthermore, because the *giallo* is best thought of less as a product of Italian national cinema and more broadly in terms of popular European cinema, this section, while paying particular attention to the Italian perspective, also covers developments in Western Europe as a whole.



### 2.2.1 Recovery and prosperity

The sociocultural conditions that gave birth to the *giallo* grew out of the events that occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Following the fall of Fascism and the abolition of the monarchy, Italy was reborn as a republic with its new constitution ratified on 1 January 1948. In many respects, the country was starting again from scratch, less than a century after it had been formally unified in 1861 (Ginsborg 1990: 98-99; Killinger 2002: 9; Ventresca 2004: 273). Among the provisions of the new constitution was the recognition of equality for all citizens, and the condemnation of any discrimination based on “sex, race, language, religion, political opinion, and personal and social conditions” (Wanrooij 2004: 627) – a momentous declaration after the inequalities of the preceding years under Fascist rule. As will later be shown, what was declared in the constitution would prove to be far removed from what was borne out in reality, but both the ‘new beginning’ afforded to the country and the grand ambitions for the future as laid out in the constitution can in many respects be seen to set the tone for the period of growth and optimism which followed.

From 1945 to 1975, Europe’s economies grew faster than at any other point in history, and in the 1950s and 1960s experienced such dramatic and accelerated growth that the standard of living improved visibly from one year to the next (Vinen 2002: 324; Kaplan 1992: 11). The speed with which Europe recovered was due at least in part to the funds contributed by the Marshall Plan, through which the United States poured money into repairing the economic infrastructure of Europe that had been destroyed during the war (Foot 2003: 138). Newly liberalised trading regulations between western countries also contributed to the economic recovery (Di Scala 1995: 307), fostering a new climate of cooperation between nations and a loosening of borders. Western Europe, as a result, became increasingly integrated and cosmopolitan. This growth was particularly pronounced in Italy, often considered more ‘backward’ than its more economically developed northern European neighbours. With industrialisation occurring on a massive scale in northern and central Italy, there followed mass migration from rural areas (particularly in the South) to Rome and to the ‘Industrial Triangle’ of Milan, Turin and Genoa, as people abandoned agricultural land in search of work in the factories (Di Scala 1995: 311-312; Ginsborg 1990: 219-220). Between 1958 and 1963 the country experienced what is widely referred

to as the ‘Economic Miracle’<sup>13</sup> – a period of particularly impressive growth which, for vast swathes of Italy’s population,

offered a material transformation which can only be called a profound liberation. For the first time the majority of the population had the possibility of living decently, of being warm and well clothed, of eating good food, and could bring up their children without fear of their being malformed or malnourished. (Ginsborg 1990: 249)

This period has often been characterised as a time when the country was transformed from “an old, ‘traditional’ or peasant society of low consumption [...] [into] a ‘modern’ society of mass consumption” (Forgacs and Gundle 2007: 4; see also Di Scala 1995: 308; Ginsborg 1990: 212-217). By 1970, vastly more Italians than before could afford commodities such as washing machines and televisions,<sup>14</sup> and were able to take lengthy holidays. The proliferation of cars also caused a lessening of Italy’s long-standing regionalism as the increased mobility allowed people to travel further afield more readily. This increased mobility also impacted on tourism, with trips abroad no longer a luxury restricted to the privileged elite. People could more easily visit foreign countries, and even those who remained at home felt the effects of this increased globalism via the influx of foreign tourists (Di Scala 1995: 312-313; Ginsborg 1990: 242-243). Much is made of this in the *giallo* with its proliferation of Italians abroad and foreigners in Italy. Italy and its citizens thus went from being an ‘underdeveloped’ nation devastated by the ravages of war to enjoying *la dolce vita* in a remarkably short space of time.

The vast upheaval the country was undergoing brought with it significant changes in cultural and social attitudes (Ginsborg 1990: 239). John Foot argues in his case study of Milan in the years 1950-1970 that accounts of Italy’s Economic Miracle have tended to overlook the family, which he describes as both being affected by and in turn affecting the Miracle in numerous ways (1995: 315). Indeed, the post-war years saw the family and attitudes towards it changing significantly. During the 1960s, family sizes shrank, with women having fewer children and within a shorter timeframe. Increasing numbers of children stayed on at school for longer, meaning that less time was spent on child rearing in the home. Institutions such as schools, universities and the church therefore assumed

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<sup>13</sup> Numerous other countries experienced their own version of the Economic Miracle. In France, for example, it is customary to refer to *les trente glorieuses* (‘the glorious thirty’), a reference to the years 1945-1975, during which the country’s living standards improved rapidly and dramatically (Dormois 2004: 11).

<sup>14</sup> In his case study of the Milanese districts of Bovisa and Comasina, John Foot states that by the early 1960s nearly 90% of families living in Comasina owned a television (1995: 327) – a striking statistic for a country in which, in 1951, just over 7% of households had a combination of electricity, drinking water and an indoor lavatory (Ginsborg 1990: 210).

greater significance in children's daily lives than had been the case previously, while the role of the extended family in children's development was diminished. The family structure became less rigidly defined, with young people daring for the first time to openly challenge the position of the husband/father as *de facto* head of the family. Sexual attitudes, however, were slow to change, with Italy – and particularly the South – clinging to old taboos and codes of honour. Overall, the make-up of the 'nuclear family' remained unchanged (husband, wife and children) and the media continued to reinforce the ideal of the heterosexual couple – a tendency that was consistent throughout western Europe, with homosexuality remaining illegal in numerous countries until the late 1960s (Ginsborg 1990: 243-244; Kaplan 1992: 14; Di Scala 1995: 314; Vinen 2002: 444-446).<sup>15</sup>

The period also saw a marked decline in religious observance, with the number of regular churchgoers in Italy falling from over two-thirds of the population to just over one-third between the mid-1950s and late 1960s – a decline that was particularly pronounced in the major urban areas, with just over a tenth of men and a quarter of women attending Sunday mass by 1968 (Ginsborg 1990: 245). Despite this, the Catholic Church continued to wield considerable power over society, exercising a stranglehold over both politics and education, and within the censorship body responsible for approving the content of films (Landy 2000: 149; Vinen 2002: 441). The country, it seemed, was failing to keep up with its population's changing social mores. In one way or another, similar situations could be observed throughout Western Europe, with perceptions of the family and society changing in ways that the various countries' legislation failed to reflect, setting the stage for "major conflict" (Kaplan 1992: 14-15; see also Vinen 2002: 441).

The proliferation of television, meanwhile, led to heightened isolation within communities as television viewing increasingly came to replace socialisation outside the home as a means of recreation (Foot 1995: 329). People had come to favour the "privacy, security, comfort, [and] extra space" afforded within the home by the developments of the Miracle, eschewing the "network of kinship and support" that had been facilitated by the greater levels of socialisation of previous decades (Foot 1995: 330; see also Ginsborg 1990: 243). Poor government planning also meant that, while the state played a crucial role in the acceleration of economic development, it failed to account for or take responsibility for the results, allowing the onus to fall on "private spending and consumption", making the Miracle "an exquisitely private affair, which reinforced the historic tendency of each

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<sup>15</sup> In Italy, homosexuality was effectively legalised in 1889 when the *Codice Zanardelli* abolished any difference in the treatment of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Albanese 2006: 57).

Italian family to fend for itself as best it could” (Ginsborg 1990: 240). The modern family was thus more isolated, rejecting the ‘interference’ of (and in many respects abandoned by) community and the state. At the same time, however, Foot points to the nature of much of the pre-existing urban working class accommodation, with its long balconies and tightly-packed flats, leading to a sense of “enforced intimacy” and a lack of privacy (Foot 1995: 331). These concerns relating to privacy, space and place – in particular the conflict between interior and exterior spaces – and the extent to which they impact on masculine and feminine identities in different ways are significant themes in the *giallo* and are explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

The increase in industrialisation and the long hours workers now spent in the factories and offices also meant that in many ways work colleagues came to represent a ‘second family’ – one with which workers spent more time and in many cases came to value more than their natural family (Foot 1995: 332-335). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the strain of long working hours and the increasing emphasis on the ‘second family’ at work took its toll on many working class families, with a record number of separations occurring in the 1950s and 1960s (1995: 336). Foot’s description of the two competing families – home and work – conjures up a picture of a largely male workforce spending more and more time away from home while their wives became increasingly isolated and confined within the home, substituting new amenities like television for social contact. The increasing emphasis on the home and consumerism led to more women than ever becoming full-time housewives, with the number of women in the workforce declining and being recorded as among the lowest in Western Europe (Ginsborg 1995: 244). Similar declines in women in employment have been observed in other European countries, among them France, where the trend continued from the end of the Second World War until the early 1960s (Vinen 2002: 442). Again, this gender divide is apparent in the *gialli* and is the subject of extended discussion in Chapter 4.

Tempting as it is to view the post-war years as something of a glorious golden age in which Italy (and Western Europe as a whole) progressed by leaps and bounds, it is important to acknowledge the dark underside of much of the progress that occurred. The above account shows that, in spite of the moniker of ‘Economic Miracle’, the period was tainted by uncertainty and increasing divisions and conflict within society and between the state and its citizens. In the highly influential *One Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse draws attention to the “tension and contradiction” that had now come to define Western industrialised society, arguing that

[t]he category 'society' itself expressed the acute conflict between the social and political sphere – society as antagonistic to the state. Similarly, 'individual', 'class', 'private', 'family' denoted spheres and forces not yet integrated with the established conditions. (1964: xiv)

Marcuse describes a process of cultural homogenisation, a totalitarian “project” to reorganise society “into an omnipresent system which swallows up or repulses all alternatives” (1964: xvi). He is particularly critical of the rapid growth of consumerism, viewing it as a means to seduce the masses by instilling in them a desire for commodities they do not in fact need in order to stifle social criticism and revolutionary potential (Marcuse 1964; Smith and Riley 2009: 206). These notions of the often unnoticed imposition of new forms of control by the state on its citizens and an erosion of their autonomy and individuality underpin much of his writing, which points to the increased standard of living in the 1960s producing a climate of complacency in which the *status quo* is simply accepted and it “seems to make little difference whether the increasing satisfaction of needs is accomplished by an authoritarian or a non-authoritarian system” (Marcuse 1964: 1-2). Stephen Gundle makes similar observations with specific reference to Italy, arguing that the “dominant feature of this period” was one of “cultural unification in accordance with the myths and models of consumer capitalism” (1985: 121). Women in particular were targeted by advertising campaigns in magazines and on television, which championed the ideal of the modern Italian woman as “smartly dressed, with well-turned-out children and a sparkling house full of consumer durables” (Ginsborg 1990: 244).

Even the Marshall Plan had come with strings attached, mainly centring on the defence of capitalism and a commitment to modernisation (Vinen 2002: 311-312). In the case of Italy, the Americans made it clear that a Communist government would be unacceptable (Ginsborg 1990: 115) and the Christian Democrats in turn effectively blackmailed voters during the elections of 1948 by threatening to suspend aid if they supported the left-wing parties (Corni 2011: 263). The Socialists and Communists in turn viewed the Marshall Plan as “an instrument of American domination” (Di Scala 1995: 291) – merely another manifestation of the sort of American imperialism also perceived in the US military’s strong presence in many European countries in the post-war years, among them Italy and Germany (Vinen 2002: 310). Countries like Italy went from having empires to themselves being subjects of an emergent American ‘empire’ – a loss of power that was profoundly damaging to the nation’s psyche.

With so much anxiety simmering below the surface, the stage was well and truly set for the “major conflict” to which Gisela Kaplan alluded (1992: 15) – a period of collective action that was to consume the country for the next two decades (Ginsborg 1990: 250).

### 2.2.2 Unrest and agitation

While the 1950s and early-to-mid-1960s were dominated by rapid increases in living standards and a general sense of well-being, from the latter part of the 1960s onwards the mood changed dramatically. The optimism of the post-war years gave way to unrest and agitation, the most potent symbol of which remains the student protests and riots that broke out in Paris in May 1968. The reasons for this unrest were many and varied: opposition to the Vietnam War, unhappiness with the perceived authoritarianism and isolationism of student life, and “a suspicion of all organisation, all hierarchy, and of the traditional Left [...] and an at once powerful and confused equation of social and of sexual repression” (Harvey 1978: 3-4). Fundamentally, a shift was occurring in Western Europe’s psyche, with the ideals and institutions that had previously been taken for granted coming under attack from a diverse array of groups divided by their incompatible aims and ideologies but united by their restlessness and dissatisfaction with the *status quo*.

Although “probably more widely read than properly understood” (Smith and Riley 2009: 206), the writings of contemporary theorists such as Marcuse (in addition to those of Marx and Mao) can be seen as something of a call to arms for the university students who took to the streets throughout Western Europe in 1967 and 1968, including in Italian university towns such as Rome, Trento and Turin (Ginsborg 1990: 306-308). Jonathan Dunnage describes a widespread desire for “social, political and cultural emancipation” (2002: 148) that manifested itself in what Ginsborg calls an “era of collective action” in Italy – a wave of agitation for change which, while overshadowed by the events of May 1968 in Paris, would prove to be “the most profound and long-lasting” of all the European protest movements (1990: 298). The unrest, which began in the universities as “an ethical revolt, a notable attempt to turn the tide against the predominant values of the time” (1990: 301), spread outwards to incorporate a large number of movements from all sides of the political spectrum, each with separate agendas and concerns, all converging at around the same time in a series of mass strikes and demonstrations (Kaplan 1992: 242-243). It constituted the rise of a “new ideology, a culture of anti-authoritarianism and self assessment” (Breschi 2008), and included (among others) factory workers, white collar employees and public

servants, driven by a demand for better pay and working conditions and aggravated by ballooning inflation (Di Scala 1995: 315). Ginsborg describes “an irreverent anti-authoritarianism” that responded to symbols of the state such as the police and judiciary with increasing mockery. The nuclear family, too, was a target for derision, with many students identifying more with their peers than their families, rejecting the advice and authority of their parents, and consequently the values of the Economic Miracle from which the previous generation had benefited. The established forces of the Left, such as the Communist party, were also viewed as ineffective and, in their own way, part of the establishment. As such, the student movement situated itself against the opposing forces of capitalism and Communism, both of which responded in kind (Ginsborg 1990: 304-308).

The so-called *autunno caldo* (hot autumn) of 1969 saw mass strikes engulf northern Italy and marked a turning point after which the country moved from a period of post-war prosperity into one of social and economic instability (Ginsborg 1990: 316-317; Kaplan 1992: 242). To understand how this diverse array of movements could gain such widespread momentum, one must consider the sheer number of social, economic and ideological factors that all seemed to converge at the same time. Kaplan describes Italy as a country spiralling into a “headlong crisis”:

Capital flight, high inflation rates, high unemployment (especially in the south) and a high number of strike days became the order of the day [...] At the same time, Italy [...] underwent profound changes and at a rate in which social, geopolitical and political adjustments were severely lagging behind economic developments and general realities of the day. In this process of development, increasing segmentation and fragmentation was unavoidable. An Italian observer very poignantly remarked of the time: ‘We Italians are in transit from the past to the future of industrial capitalism without having lived through its present’ (cit. In Tarrow, 1980: 176). (1992: 243)

This description, in particular the quote from the “Italian observer”, highlights both the scale of these changes and the great speed at which they were seen to be unfolding, conjuring an image of a runaway freight train on which everyone, whether they liked it or not, was a passenger. Kaplan and other historians such as Ginsborg (1990), Di Scala (1995) and Forgacs and Gundle (2007) paint a picture of a period in which out of widespread unrest there was born a genuine desire to reshape society into something more just, and a belief that this change was just around the corner.

The unrest expanded beyond students and workers, sweeping the country up in a drive that “challenged the way in which power was exercised, resources distributed, social classes

divided” (Ginbsorg 1990: 322). From this, a diverse array of movements emerged, each with their own demands and concerns. Of these, arguably the most significant to the concerns of this thesis was the growing demand for women’s emancipation. The post-war years had brought some gains for Europe’s women, including improvements to their socioeconomic status as a result of the shrinking size of the average family. However, there was clearly a considerable way still to go, with Italy in particular reporting lower numbers of women in employment than other European countries (Di Scala 1995: 314). Further injustices prevailed despite the new constitution’s declaration of equal rights between men and women; for instance, until 1968 women could still be prosecuted for adultery. Furthermore, the constitution included a proviso that “the need to guarantee the unity of the family justified limits to the legal and moral equality of husband and wife” (Wanrooij 2004: 622), in effect undermining its declaration of equality for all citizens.

While the students’ and workers’ movements of 1968 were profoundly concerned with issues of class, gender equality was rarely taken into account. A considerable number of women actively participated in the students’ and workers’ strikes and demonstrations; there was, however, a general sense that they were expected to put their concerns on hold in the name of the class struggle (Ginbsorg 1990: 367; Kaplan 1992: 9, 243; Di Scala 1995: 314). Furthermore, while notions of sexual liberation and the breaking of taboos frequently went hand in hand with the revolutionary ideals of the student protesters, they were largely male-centric in their outlook and generally expected women to submit unquestioningly to their ideals. Ginsborg describes this “obligatory sexual liberty” as a new form of oppression that “arose in the name of liberation”, pointing to the fact that one form of subjugation was simply being replaced by another (1990: 306).<sup>16</sup> These observations echo the concerns expressed by feminist critics such as Sheila Jeffreys, who describes the apparent liberation of the 1950s and 1960s as nothing more than “the freedom for women to take pleasure from their own eroticised subordination” (1990: 1).

In part as a result of the general lack of interest in the plight of women on the part of the existing protest movements, women throughout Western Europe who were eager for change began to organise themselves into their own protest groups. The ‘second-wave’ feminist movements originated in France and West Germany at around this period, and most other Western European countries spawned their own comparable movements in the

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<sup>16</sup> Homosexuals too found the sexual liberation movement to be unsympathetic to their plight, indicating that liberation was only seen as positive if it was of a male, heterosexual variety. Like their feminist counterparts, they too would form their own separate pressure groups in early 1970s, such as the Unitary Front of Revolutionary Italian Homosexuals (FUORI) (Wanrooij 2004: 626).



ensuing years, often capitalising on the experience gained participating in the students' and workers' movements (Kaplan 1992: 7-12). Among these, Italy in the 1970s saw the emergence of a feminist movement which challenged male domination of society and the role of institutions such as the Catholic Church, the education system and the political elite in maintaining this inequality. This movement, which was as a rule vocal, politically aware and well-organised, brought attention to women's subservient position in society and heralded the passing of a number of reforms, among them the legalisation of divorce in 1970 (Kaplan 1992: 229-230; Di Scala 1995: 314). Kaplan provides a particularly comprehensive summary of the character of the Italian feminist movement:

Compared with any other country in western Europe, Italy probably had the most impressive, politically active and far-reaching women's movement of the 1970s. It was large scale, extremely well organised, and strongly confrontational [...] [I]n no other country were so many feminist slogans, songs and banners created, and so many hundreds of thousands of women mobilised; and perhaps in no other country were so many women injured, imprisoned or killed in their fight for liberation. (1992: 229)

This was, in short, a movement that was willing to fight to achieve its goals, sometimes literally: Di Scala describes it as "aggressive" (1995: 314), and Kaplan acknowledges the Italian *Rivolata Femminile* as one of a small number of feminist groups that explicitly called for a rejection of the primarily non-violent strategies practiced by their counterparts (1992: 19; Ginsborg 1990: 369). Given the challenge asserted against the *status quo* by feminist groups, there can be little surprise that they were regarded as and characterised in profoundly negative terms by the men who felt they had much to lose if they ceded ground to women. Ginsborg notes that the 'prefigurative' politics of the feminist movement, which advocated the immediate transformation of everyday relationships between men, women and children rather than waiting until "after the revolution", were an anathema to the other revolutionary groups, "where personal relationships were subordinate to the greater goal of eventual radical change" (1990: 368-369). Kaplan describes the "surprise, anger and disbelief" that greeted the hitherto unfamiliar sight of upwards of half a million women in Italy, France and West Germany marching to demand the right to abortion during this period (1992: 17). Reactions to calls for women's emancipation throughout the 1970s were often both verbally and physically violent (1992: 249-250). Taking all of this into account, it is hard not to see something of an 'us and them' mentality existing, with women's concerns largely dismissed both by their fellow (male) activists and by the public at large, creating a climate in the 1970s of gender warfare that is negotiated in the *gialli* in the form of a perpetual distrust of women and the idea of women's liberation.

In the face of so much entrenched resistance, changes to the law in terms of equality and women's rights were gradual and remained very much a work in progress at the time of the *giallo* boom. For example, abortion remained illegal in Italy until 1978, and it was not until 1977 that equal rights for men and women in terms of recruitment, hiring and career were officially enshrined in law (Wanrooij 2004: 622). Italy remained a country with a tradition of "a machismo steeped in violence" (Kaplan 1992: 230) and one in which (particularly in the rural south) traditional notions of a male code of 'honour' and the viewing of women as property prevailed. Much of the blame for the slow speed at which change progressed can be levelled against the hostility of conservative forces, including the Catholic Church, but the matter was not helped by the fact that a great deal of fascist legislation, which discriminated heavily against women in matters of employment and family law, remained in place despite the overthrow of Mussolini and the creation of the new constitution (1992: 243-244). By the time the *giallo* had waxed and waned, the biggest demonstrations of the women's movement, which took place in the latter half of the 1970s, had yet to occur (Ginsborg 1990: 369), and a more fundamental restructuring of society to tackle its intrinsic inequalities had not been achieved. Nonetheless, by 1970, in the space of the twenty-five years since the end of the war women had won the right to vote, to equal pay and to divorce (Martinelli, Chiesi and Stefanizzi 1999: 333). Thus, while much progress was still to be made, women's position in society – and as a result the face of society itself – had changed significantly.

### 2.2.3 The end of the dream

Although originally published in 1964, when the events of the late 1960s and their ultimate failure had yet to occur, the overall tone of Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* captures the spirit that prevailed by the early 1970s: one of pessimism, distrust and isolation. The revolutionary action of the late 1960s had started with grand ambitions to reform society into something better. However, such attempts proved futile, with the early 1970s onwards constituting a disintegration of the various protest groups, whose goals and ideals often differed radically or were simply too poorly thought out to be put into practice, and a retrenchment of the *status quo*. Ginsborg conjures an image of a society and a revolutionary movement which were both simply too fragmented and short-sighted for real change to be possible, while Italy, at the time still enjoying the benefits of the Economic Miracle, was unlikely to respond particularly enthusiastically to what was essentially a call to reject its very foundations: consumerism, materialism, individualism, the nuclear family

(1990: 340-343). Some progress was and would continue to be made in terms of pay increases and improved conditions for workers, but overall progress had slowed and, in the face of the economic crisis of 1971 and the ballooning inflation which followed, workers were now increasingly focused on defending the rights that had already been won rather than agitating for a revolution (1990: 320-322).

The collapse of the students' and workers' protest movements did not, however, lead to a more peaceful existence. The demonstrations of 1968 and the 'hot autumn' gave way to the *anni di piombo* – the 'years of lead', a period characterised by intense turmoil that saw conflict between the state and extreme Left and Right groups spiral out of control in the form of multiple bombings, kidnappings and political assassinations (Di Scala 1995: 298-300). These actions would continue throughout the 1970s, with bystanders often caught in the crossfire, while the mood of paranoia and uncertainty was heightened by speculation about police brutality, government cover-ups and a secret service plot to incite mass panic as a pretext to installing an authoritarian regime (Ginsborg 1990: 333-334). Although this period stretches beyond the *giallo* boom and thus the scope of this thesis, it is worth considering the effect of this hitherto unknown menace on the public mood when the *giallo* craze was beginning to take off. While the *gialli* themselves do not deal with terrorism or political unrest, the feeling of uncertainty they convey points in an abstract manner to the general unease of the period.<sup>17</sup> Much like the typical *giallo* with its roster of potential murder suspects, each with something to hide, the 'years of lead' were characterised by ubiquitous suspicion and a sense that no-one – not one's neighbours, nor the police, the government or the secret service – could be trusted.

In describing the failure of the May 1968 movement to achieve meaningful and lasting change, Alain Touraine proclaims the movement's legacy to be its destruction of "the illusion of a society united through growth and prosperity [...] replac[ing] the mirage of social rationality and the common good with a picture of society's struggles and contradictions" (1971: 27, quoted in Harvey 1978: 14). Rather than creating a better future, therefore, the wave of Western European protest epitomised by the events of May 1968 merely brought to the surface the problems of the *status quo*, creating a discourse through which people could negotiate them but offering little hope of change. People were now

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<sup>17</sup> Popular cinema would ultimately engage with these events more directly in the form of the *poliziottesco*, which depicted police and gangsters clashing in violent and often anarchic urban spaces. That the *poliziottesco* enjoyed its own boom immediately following that of the *giallo* and in many respects can be regarded as its natural successor is further evidence of the *filoni*'s engagement with contemporary discourse on social issues.

acutely aware of the shortcomings and tensions that existed in society, which in conjunction with new problems such as inflation, fuel shortages and political instability made a return to the optimism of the previous decade impossible. In short, the dream created by the great socio-economic advances of the post-war years was over, and Western Europe now faced a volatile and uncertain future.

To summarise, historical accounts of Western Europe in the twenty-five years or so following the end of the Second World War depict a society riven with contradictions and uncertainties. For most people, the everyday quality of life had improved substantially, but at the same time the tensions and inequalities that existed in society were more apparent than ever. Similarly, Europe was now more integrated and experiencing unprecedented levels of cooperation between nations, while citizens were both more homogenised and more isolated from the rest of society – the same but separate. It is against the backdrop of all this unrest, distrust and tension that the *giallo* emerged, and the remainder of this chapter is devoted to identifying how best to bring together the facts of the above historical overview and the fiction of the films.

## 2.3 Establishing an appropriate framework

In seeking a means to make sense of the *giallo*'s engagement with real world anxieties, I initially turned to literature on various other European bodies of films (or *filoni*, to borrow the Italian term) produced at around the time of the *giallo* boom and influenced by similar sociocultural concerns. Unfortunately, literature on other *filoni* from this period tends to suffer from similar limitations to writing on the *giallo*, offering tantalising glimpses at the possibilities for reading them as sociocultural engagements but either failing to follow through with this approach or doing so in such a way as to be too preliminary or superficial to be useful. For a while, the most promising avenue appeared to be the analysis by a handful of critics of the West German '*krimi*' films, a series of mystery thrillers which enjoyed their heyday between the late 1950s and the early 1970s, thus overlapping with the *giallo* boom. The shared characteristics and timeframe, not to mention the cross-pollination between the two *filoni* observed in the previous chapter, suggested that the *krimi* films were an ideal counterpoint to the *gialli*. However, I quickly exhausted all the *krimi* literature I could find and was left none the wiser as to the specific nature of their engagement with contemporary sociocultural concerns, beyond a vague sense that their popularity coincided with significant social change and that a degree of unease surrounding

this was visible within the films (Bergfelder 2002; Grob 1991; Schneider 1998). Having run out of options as far as the 1960s/1970s European *filoni* were concerned, I resolved to look further afield, broadening my approach to consider other, non-European movements from different periods in history.

In existing literature on the *giallo*, references to the American *films noirs* of the 1940s and 1950s appear repeatedly, with comparisons frequently being drawn between the two movements. These tend to be somewhat superficial. For instance, multiple authors have observed that, like '*giallo*', the name '*noir*' is derived from the colour of the jackets in which the popular novels that served as inspiration for the films were sold (Gallant 2001b: 19; McDonagh 2010: 10; Met 2006: 195). Xavier Mendik also notes that both *films noirs* and *gialli* have a tendency to locate the narrative in "an unstable environment which the hero cannot fully comprehend" and to use flashbacks to explore past crimes (2000: 36-37). Furthermore, a number of authors introduce *film noir* as a means of illustrating the concept of *filone* in a manner that will be familiar to most readers. For instance, Maitland McDonagh introduces the *films noirs* as a group of films which, like the *gialli*, are connected by a shared "visual vocabulary" as opposed to being a genre in the traditional sense,<sup>18</sup> noting that "all mysteries are no more *gialli* than all detective thrillers are *films noirs*" (2010: 10-12). Indeed, James Naremore's description of the problem of defining *film noir* might just as easily have been written in reference to the *giallo*:

It has always been easier to recognize a film noir than to define the term. [...] There is in fact no completely satisfactory way to organize the category; and despite scores of books and essays that have been written about it, nobody is sure whether the films in question constitute a period, a genre, a cycle, a style, or simply a "phenomenon." (2008: 9)

Like the *giallo*, *film noir* is also a historically bounded cycle, confined to and responding to concerns specific to a distinct period in time. Writing on *film noir* therefore allows for a degree of specificity not offered by literature on longer-running genres with less specific parameters, such as horror or the detective thriller, both of which encompass a diverse array of films that were produced over a lengthy period and changed significantly during that time. That is not to suggest that I am intent on dismissing this sort of broad-based approach out of hand, and indeed in the chapters ahead I make reference to literature pertaining to both these genres. However, because I aim to explore the *giallo* at a specific moment in time, it makes sense to derive my main framework from another movement that

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<sup>18</sup> That said, the word "genre" has been used (I would argue erroneously) to refer to both *film noir* and the *giallo* by numerous critics.

offers a similar degree of ‘tightness’. Furthermore, although the *noir* boom is generally regarded to have run from 1941, with the release of John Huston’s *The Maltese Falcon*, to 1958, with Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil* (Gates 2006: 2010), it was not until the 1970s that American critics began to acknowledge the existence of *film noir* as a specific group of films linked by their shared characteristics (Naremore 2008: 10). As such, despite being rooted in the concerns of an earlier period, it is interesting that *film noir* became a point of interest for both critics and the filmmakers responsible for the ‘neo-*noir*’ revival at around the time of the *giallo* boom, suggesting that something about those anxieties was as relevant during this period as when the films themselves were made (Tasker 1998: 120).

Moreover, although ostensibly an American phenomenon, *film noir* as a concept is not totally removed from the European context. Indeed, Naremore suggests that *film noir* in fact occupies “a liminal space somewhere between Europe and America” (2008: 220). The actual identification of *noir* as a specific group of films with shared typology, conventions and preoccupations began with European critics. The term is believed to have first been used by French-Italian critic Nino Frank in 1946 in his essay “Un nouveau genre ‘policier’: L’aventure criminelle” (“A new kind of ‘police’ drama: The criminal adventure”) (Biesen 2005: 10; Martin 1998: 204; Naremore 2008: 41), with French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton attempting to formally define the characteristics of *film noir* in their *Panorama of American Film Noir* (1955; translated 2002). Indeed, although Borde and Chaumeton primarily referred to *film noir* as a specifically American form, many of its most prominent directors were in fact European émigrés (Dickos 2002: 60; Spicer 2007: 6). These directors infused their films with a number of decidedly European traditions, in particular the foreboding atmosphere and visual style of German expressionism, and, to a lesser degree, the location shooting and contemporary social concerns associated with Italian neorealism (Biesen 2005: 207; Spicer 2007: 6).

As relatively superficial as these comparisons are, it was partly thanks to them that I initially began to consider *film noir* as a ‘way into’ my exploration of the *giallo*. My own early forays into the possibilities offered by *film noir* were as skin-deep as those found in existing *giallo* criticism. It was not until I began to more firmly establish the sociocultural context out of which the *gialli* emerged that I started to realise just how deeply the shared connections between the two movements ran. Just as Koven’s assertion that “[t]he changes within Italian culture [...] can be seen through the *giallo*” (2006: 16) prompted my own reading of the *giallo* as a sociocultural engagement, it was a passage in an essay by Sylvia

Harvey on the absence of family in *film noir* that alerted me to the similar ways in which both movements engage with contemporary anxieties:

Like an echo chamber, film noir captures and magnifies the rumbles that preceded one of those earthquakes in human history that shift the hidden foundations of a society, and which begin the displacement of its characteristic and dominant systems of values and beliefs. (1998: 35)

The more I read on *film noir*, the more apparent it became that Harvey's assertion regarding *noir*'s relationship with contemporary society was not an isolated observation and that there existed a sizeable body of literature that did for *film noir* what I proposed to do for the *giallo*. As Frank Krutnik notes, *film noir* "is either explicitly or implicitly regarded as a reflection of the various social and cultural upheavals experienced by the US" during the tumultuous period during which it was most prolific (1991: 56). Michael Richardson advances a similar argument, stating that "[t]he world conjured up in noir was specific to its time and gave expression to a consciousness of uncertainty that manifested itself in a complex of ways" (2010: 101). Indeed, Vivian Sobchack goes as far as to state that virtually all academic criticism of *film noir* "attempt[s] to relate the films to changes in American culture during the second World War and its aftermath" (1998: 129).

*Film noir*, then, constitutes a body of films that engages with sociocultural concerns that were prevalent in the 1940s and 1950s, and within this body of films, a number of comparisons can be drawn with the *giallo*. My interest, however, does not lie in charting the relatively superficial similarities that can be observed between the two movements. Rather, I am interested in the broader applicability of criticism of *film noir* as a critical framework for understanding the *giallo*'s own engagement with contemporary sociocultural anxieties. As with my own research, much of the writing on *film noir* focuses on exploring these films' anxieties pertaining to gender and sexuality – what Krutnik describes as "scenarios of maladjustment" (1991: 65). As such, this body of literature offers a far more suitable foundation than (for instance) writing on the *krimi*, which is all but silent on the matter of gender. In the remainder of this chapter, I will first establish the nature of the sociocultural developments and anxieties with which *film noir* engages, before outlining how the critical responses to this inform my own approach to the *giallo*.

## 2.4 “Scenarios of maladjustment”: *Film noir* as a critical framework

When the first *films noirs* emerged in the early 1940s, the United States had just entered the Second World War. The conscription of able-bodied men decimated the country's workforce, and women, traditionally devoted to the home and to raising children, were now encouraged to enter employment as a matter of patriotic duty (Krutnik 1991: 57; Oliver and Trigo 2003: xiii). These developments, Krutnik argues, “set in motion a temporary confusion in regard to traditional conceptions of sexual role and sexual identity, for both men and women” (1991: 57). Such anxieties were only entrenched in the post-war period as divisions that had been repressed as part of the war effort became all the more readily apparent (1991: 57-59). Men returned from combat to find themselves no longer the “prime mover[s] of culture” (1991: 64), since, while efforts were made to return women to the domestic sphere (Martin 1998: 203), many refused to give up working, having come to appreciate the newfound freedom and responsibility it entailed (Naremore 2008: 89; Oliver and Trigo 2003: 237-238). Meanwhile, as a result of economic recovery and increased prosperity, consumer culture now reigned supreme, with people becoming increasingly pressurised to define themselves through the latest mass-produced products, while simultaneously experiencing a process of alienation and a sense of uncertainty as to where they belonged (Krutnik 1991: 60; Richardson 2010: 84). The war had unceremoniously hauled the United States out of its “cocoon of isolationism”, to which it could not return (Richardson 2010: 84). The outside world loomed beyond the country's borders, and it was a frightening place, with the spectre of communism and the potential of nuclear war casting a grim shadow over this period of prosperity (Biesen 2005: 3; Sobchack 1998: 131).

As such, this period in American history was one of intense contradictions: “one in which extraordinary American prosperity and supremacy on the international stage coexisted with domestic cultural responses ranging from euphoric celebration to anxiety and fear” (Dimendberg 2004: 8). A sense of “collective social angst” pervades the *noirs*: a manifestation of concerns about the war, alienation and sexual confusion (Joglekar 2008: 63) and “a response to white men's sense of a loss of control and authority, especially control and authority over women” (Oliver and Trigo 2003: xiii). However, the specific anxieties that constitute this widely recognised atmosphere of discontent are rarely reflected in *film noir* in a direct sense. Just as the *gialli* do not offer specific commentary on, for instance, the growing debate in the 1970s surrounding women's reproductive rights,



the *noirs* tend not to directly address the issue of men returning from the battlefield to find women having ‘replaced’ them in the workplace. As Foster Hirsh notes:

Specific social traumas and upheavals remain outside the frame. *Noir* never insisted on its “extracurricular” meanings or its social relevance. But beneath its repeated stories of double and triple crosses, its private passions erupting into heinous crimes, the sleazy, compromised morality of many of its characters, can be glimpsed the political paranoia and brutality of the period. In its pervasive aura of defeat and despair, its images of entrapment, the escalating derangement of its leading characters, *noir* registers, in a general way, the country’s sour postwar mood. This darkest, most downbeat of American film genres traces a series of metaphors for a decade of anxiety, a contemporary apocalypse bounded on the one hand by Nazi brutality and on the other by the awful knowledge of nuclear power. (2008: 21)

What the *noirs* instead do, then, is filter then-contemporary sociocultural concerns through the generic conventions of the detective thriller. In explaining the gulf that exists between the preoccupations evident in the *noirs* and those of real world 1940s and 1950s America, Krutnik quotes Michael Selig, who observes that

genre films are as determined by the conventions of storytelling as much as by cultural and social issues [...] [T]he movies don’t directly reflect their social context, but reflect society more in the manner of a funhouse mirror, with all its peculiar aberrations of size and perspective. (Selig 1985: 134, quoted in Krutnik 1991: 66)

Rather than merely recording reality, then, popular cinema endeavours “to process it through idealized characters, narratives, and themes into a fantasy that will bring pleasure to its audiences” (Gates 2006: 48). Instead of directly addressing concerns relating to (for example) economic decline, unemployment and post-war disillusionment, these themes enter the films “by a series of complex transmutations”, whereby “[t]he hard facts of economic life are transmuted [...] into [...] the feelings of loss and alienation expressed by the characters” (Harvey 1998: 39). As such, rather than reading *films noirs* as direct allegories for the real world situation in the 1940s and 1950s, it is more helpful to view them as a means of engaging with the world and negotiating its problems without explicitly identifying specific events or circumstances. Various critics have attempted to ‘decode’ *noir*’s conventions, through the process of which they reveal the anxieties that lie beneath the surfaces of these films and relate them back to reality. This, Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo argue, “makes visible the traces of possibilities that are repressed and excluded so that race, sex, and national identity defend their ‘proper’ borders – black/white, masculine/feminine, familiar/foreigner” (2003: xxxv).

As a means of illustrating this approach in action, and to demonstrate how such a methodology might be applied to my own reading of the *giallo*, I now propose to briefly examine literature on *film noir* that focuses on decoding the meaning behind the enduring figure of the *femme fatale*. From there, I will go on to explore the body of literature that considers the articulation of a ‘crisis of masculinity’ within *noir*, in doing so revealing the films’ underlying anxieties, before concluding by clarifying how similar ‘decoding’ strategies can be applied to the *giallo* to achieve a similar outcome.

### 2.4.1 ‘Decoding’ the *femme fatale*

As demonstrated by the array of essays focusing on different literary and filmic genres in *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories, Contexts* (ed. Hanson and O’Rawe 2010), the concept of the *femme fatale* – “a female character who uses her beauty to lure and entrap men, leading to their downfall and, usually, death” (Blandford, Grant and Hillier 2001: 95-96) – is far from unique to *film noir*. Indeed, she is “as old as Eve, and as current as today’s movies, comic books and dime novels” (Place 1998: 47), appearing in cultural forms as diverse as late 19<sup>th</sup> century art and popular modern cinema. However, it is with *film noir* that she has become most inextricably linked in the popular conscience, to the extent that the two are often considered inseparable: “if a film has a *femme fatale*, it is a *film noir*, and in order to qualify as a *noir*, the *femme* is indispensable” (Hanson and O’Rawe 2010: 2). Moreover, the variant of the *femme fatale* found in *film noir* has her own distinctive characteristics and represents concerns specific to the sociocultural context of the *noir* boom period (Hanson 2010: 217). Unless otherwise noted, my use of the phrase ‘*femme fatale*’ in this section refers specifically to the figure found in *film noir*.

You know the type. Dressed all in black with legs up to here, she slinks into the PI’s office, holding a cigarette on a long, long holder, saying “Oh, Mr. Rockhammer, you’re the only one who can help me find out who killed my extremely wealthy husband.” Did she do it? Do I care? Where’d that saxophone music come from? Whatever her story is, whether she did it or not, she’s definitely keeping some secret. (TV Tropes, date unknown)<sup>19</sup>

The above quote from TV Tropes, a web site dedicated to cataloguing recurring conventions in film, television and other media, neatly illustrates both how entrenched the *noir femme fatale* is in popular culture and how specific (and instantly recognisable) the archetype is. The *femme fatale* appears throughout the *noir* canon, usually in the form of a

<sup>19</sup> See <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki/Main/FemmeFatale>, accessed 21<sup>st</sup> February 2013.

morally suspect, aggressively sexual, liberated woman who actively pursues her own desires, both carnal and otherwise. In the process, she usually ends up seducing the male protagonist, as a result of which he becomes professionally and personally compromised (Biesen 2005: 6-7; Borde and Chaumeton 2002: 9). Oliver and Trigo present the character of Helen Grayle (Claire Trevor) in *Murder, My Sweet* (Dmytryk 1944) as a typical *noir femme fatale*. Helen, they write,

is sexually powerful and therefore all evil [...] Helen is manipulative and self-serving and will do anything for money and class standing. She is not emotionally attached to any of the other characters. She is sexually powerful and uses sex to seduce men and get what she wants. She is the object of obsessive desire [...] Helen has a questionable, hidden past that involves committing a crime and manipulating Moose [one of her male admirers] to take the rap. She has killed at least one man, Lindsay Marriott, and she continually lies to the detective and attempts to seduce him in order to use him in her scheme. (2003: 29)

In addition to these recurring character traits, a strong and highly sexualised visual iconography also pervades. The typical *femme fatale* is long-haired, long-legged and heavily made-up. She is often depicted smoking sensually, and wears fashionable and revealing outfits, augmented with copious amounts of jewellery. She is inextricably linked with the criminal underworld, frequently appearing in seedy nightclubs, shadowy alleyways and rundown motels which, in conjunction with the dark, moody cinematography, serve to express visually the threat of the *femme fatale*'s power over the male protagonist (Place 1998: 53-54). She is defined by her sexuality, which is "perceived to be rapacious, or fatal to her male partners" (Stott 1992: viii). Across *film noir*, female sexuality is coded as "destructive, unbridled and unhealthy, certainly when it is cut loose from socially acceptable avenues such as monogamous marriage" (Bell 2010: 109).

Critical to *film noir*'s articulation of female sexuality as a threat to masculinity is the need for the *femme fatale* to ultimately be defeated and contained. In her analysis of the *femme fatale*'s function, Janey Place interprets popular culture as a means of expressing and reproducing "the ideologies necessary to the existence of the social structure" (1998: 47). This process, she claims,

not only expresses dominant ideologies, it is also responsive to the *repressed* needs of the culture. [...] [T]he myths of the sexually aggressive woman [...] first allows sensuous expression of that idea and then destroys it. And by its limited expression, ending in defeat, that unacceptable element is controlled. (1998: 48)

Across the *noir* canon, a pattern emerges whereby, over the course of the film, its male characters regain and reassert control over the *femme fatale*, in the process of which various visual signifiers of her power, including her mobility, privileged position within the frame and control of camera movement, are eroded (1998: 55-56). By the film's end, the *femme fatale* is either killed, imprisoned or 'redeemed', thereby closing down the potential for her to threaten and disrupt the conventional (male-privileged) social order. "The lesson," Place concludes, "is obvious: only in a controlled, impotent, powerless form, powerless to move or act, is the sexual woman no threat to the film noir man" (1998: 60).

On a relatively superficial level, therefore, the *femme fatale* can be read as a manifestation of male fears of strong, independent and sexually assertive women and an attempt to allay those fears by containing or punishing such women for their transgressions. Such a reading, however, only reveals so much. Clearly, the *femme fatale* herself is a mythological fabrication rather than an accurate depiction of women in 1940s and 1950s America or even a faithful representation of how women were *perceived* during this time. As such, the relationship between the *femme fatale* and reality is better thought of in terms of the "funhouse mirror" held up to society by genre films as articulated by Selig. She is a male fantasy figure (Haskell 1974: 190-191, quoted in Martin 1998: 208-209) designed to unsettle and disorient both the male protagonist and the spectator, but articulated through "a male-dominated mode of production producing narratives that ideologically [reproduce] women's cultural oppression" (Hanson 2010: 215).

Key to understanding the circuitous relationship between *film noir* and the real world of post-war America is the argument that, although the *femme fatale* is often a villainous figure, she is not actually a reaction to the notion of villainous women but rather the idea of 'liberated' women in general. The *femme fatale*'s initial act of transgression often boils down to little more than desire: the desire to own her own nightclub, for example, or to escape from a domineering relationship. By acting on these desires, however, she inevitably ends up causing irreparable damage, often the deaths of the men with whom she comes into contact (Place 1998: 56-57). Julie Grossman argues that the *femme fatale* "fulfils a need that seems quite persistent in the culture to scapegoat women whose lives do not follow an easily digestible pattern", and stands in stark contrast to the non-judgemental treatment of *film noir*'s similarly morally compromised male characters (2010: 205). Within the moral framework of *film noir*, a woman pursuing her own independent, self-interested desires constitutes an unacceptable contravention of the social order, and by

conflating these desires with criminality, *film noir*'s narrative framework provides a means of closing them down.

The morally dubious nature of the *femmes fatales* and the visual iconography that accompanies them are therefore ideally suited to the mysterious, uncertain world of the detective thriller in which so many *films noirs* are set. The goal of the protagonist in any detective film is of course to solve the central mystery, but for Mary Ann Doane the *femme fatale*'s "most striking characteristic" is her unknowability. She is not as she seems: threatening without initially appearing to be, she is difficult to accurately read, and therefore unpredictable and unmanageable (Doane 1991: 1; see also Dyer 1998a: 116). Steve Neale similarly describes her as "illegible", using the example of Phyllis (Barbara Stanwyck) in *Double Indemnity* (Wilder 1944), to whom the spectator is denied attachment or access through the aligning of the his/her knowledge and point of view with that of the male protagonist, Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) (2010: 188-189). Such strategies, Neale argues, ensure that Phyllis remains unknowable and her motivation and thoughts shrouded in mystery. The *femme fatale* is therefore as much a puzzle to be investigated as the *noir*'s central mystery, and many of these films employ strategies of displacement, shifting the focus of the criminal investigation away from the crime itself and on to the figure of the *femme fatale* and therefore female sexuality in general (Bell 2010: 108). As such, she is a mystery that cannot be fully solved, arguably in part because the concerns she articulates were themselves ongoing when the films were produced.

The strength of the *femme fatale*, and the lingering sense that she can never truly be understood or contained, has led to some feminist critics, from the 1970s onwards, identifying in *film noir* in general and the *femme fatale* in particular an opportunity for 'reading against the grain'. Many of these interpretations are deliberately subversive, inferring meanings that it is unlikely their makers intended and suggesting that the *femmes fatales* cannot be contained by the films in which they feature, in that they "figure as a form of myth that is both re-expressed within, and transcends the limits of, particular films' narrative structures or the boundaries of genre more generally" (Hanson 2010: 216). For instance, although Place disavows any notion that *film noir* is itself progressive, she does identify it as "one of the few periods of film in which women are active, not static symbols, are intelligent and powerful [...] and derive power, not weakness, from their sexuality" (1998: 47). Similarly, she acknowledges that, even though *noir* narratives invariably lead to the *femme fatale*'s destruction, the potency of the image of the strong, sexual woman is such that this, rather than her demise, is what is ultimately remembered

(1998: 48). Melanie Bell makes a similar point in relation to the presence of *femmes fatales* in UK post-war cinema, stating that, although the “moralizing discourse” of these films is not completely overturned, it is “disrupted and its validity rendered ambiguous” (2010: 105).

There is insufficient space here to do justice to exploring the possibility of female spectators deriving unintended pleasure from what is essentially a construct created by men for the consumption of men; nor would such an examination be in keeping with the focus of this thesis. However, regardless of what the writers, producers and directors of *film noir* intended with these characters, the point remains that they transcend conventional notions of femininity as passive and deprived of agency, and a considerable degree of enjoyment can and has been derived from this fact. It is difficult, therefore, to simply dismiss the *femme fatale* as merely a reactionary, misogynist creation: something far more complex and nuanced is at work.

### 2.4.2 *Noir* masculinity in crisis

Man has been inexplicably uprooted from those values, belief and endeavours that offer him meaning and stability, and [...] he is struggling for a foothold in a maze of right and wrong. He has no reference points, no moral base from which to confidently operate. Any previous framework is cut loose and morality becomes relative, both externally [...] and internally [...] Values, like identities, are constantly shifting and must be redefined at every turn. Nothing – especially woman – is stable, nothing is dependable. (Place 1998: 51)

One of the most intriguing mysteries surrounding the *femme fatale* is the sense that she represents “more than can be articulated” within the films themselves (Hanson and O’Rawe 2010: 2). Indeed a number of critics suggest that the true concern addressed by the presence of the *femme fatale* is not women and their changing place in the social order but rather masculinity and the uncertainty surrounding the male identity in post-war America. As Krutnik observes, the *femme fatale* is in fact “a ‘fall-guy’ [...] for a more extensive and much less easily acknowledged erosion of confidence in the structuring mechanisms of masculine identity and the masculine role” (1991: 64). The hostile portrayal of women, therefore, “testifies in a very acute manner to problems within men – for these feared, but fascinating, women tend to represent conflicting currents within male identity” (1991: 63). These comments are echoed by Mary Wood, who reads the *femme fatale* in the Italian *noirs* of the 2000s as a reflection of “the projection onto the female body of blame for social malaise” – for instance, “[a]nxieties about female power, corruption, immigration,

the mafia and materialism” (2010: 166) – and by Doane, who calls her “a kind of signpost or emblem” for the films’ true concerns (1991: 3). Rather than actually acknowledging these concerns, the films’ male protagonists “project their own desires and fears onto women” (Grossman 2010: 199).

*Film noir* is “almost always a masculine scenario”: in other words, the *noir* protagonist is “a man struggling with other men, who suffers alienation and despair, and is lured by fatal and deceptive women” (Cowie 1993: 121-122). Because the male protagonists’ point of view is privileged over that of their female counterparts, female characters that may in fact have the potential to be complex and three-dimensional are reduced to simplistic ‘spider women’. Indeed, as Angela Martin notes, female characters in *film noir* “are more often subjected to male definition, control and violence, not because they are a threat but because the male characters are themselves psychotic, or project a neurotic sense of threat on everyone and everything around them” (1998: 209). This male psychosis is not typically acknowledged within the context of the films themselves, since, as Richard Dyer points out, to directly articulate anxieties about masculinity would mean having to confront masculinity as a problem (1998a: 115) – something which the *noirs* resolutely refuse to do.

*Film noir* criticism was initially slow to actually turn its attention to depictions of masculinity, preferring instead to focus on their typology and categorisation and, within the context of gender, their representation of women. This tendency is not unique to literature on *film noir*; indeed, Neale notes an inclination in critiques of gender and sexuality in cinema as a whole to focus exclusively on the depiction of women and non-heterosexual and/or non-white men (1993: 9-10).<sup>20</sup> White heterosexual masculinity was taken for granted by virtue of being seen as the ‘default’ state, with attention instead falling on those marked as ‘other’, attempting to explain them by virtue of how they differed from white heterosexual masculinity (Gates 2006: 27). One can argue that this oversight is a direct consequence of cinema’s own unwillingness or inability to call masculinity into question. As Neale observes,

[w]hile mainstream cinema, in its assumption of a male norm, perspective and look, can constantly take women and the female image as its object of investigation, it has rarely investigated men and the male image in the same kind of way: women are a problem, a source of anxiety, of obsessive enquiry; men are not. [...] Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery. (1993: 19)

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<sup>20</sup> As Dyer notes in relation to discourse on race, all too often “other people are raced, [while] we [i.e. white people] are just people” (1997: 1).

Since the 1970s, however, masculinity has been re-examined and reassessed, exploring “how heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures, and contradictions that inscription may involve” (Neale 1993: 9-10). A sizeable amount of the literature on gender and sexuality produced since then has been concerned with deconstructing white heterosexual masculinity instead of simply allowing it to serve as the ‘invisible norm’ against which other gender identities were measured, and much of the work on masculinity in *film noir* falls under his heading.

At the heart of the sense of alienation and uncertainty that characterises *film noir* is the notion that masculinity is in a state of crisis – a belief that frequently manifests itself in the form of what Dyer refers to as an “anxiety over the existence and definition of masculinity and normality” that simmers below the surface but is rarely directly articulated (1998a: 115; see also Biesen 2005: 49). The extent to which the supposed ‘heroes’ of *film noir* are subjected to a process of emasculation and their position in the world revealed to be unstable has been explored by a number of critics over the last two decades (including Biesen 2005, Doane 1991, Dyer 1998a, Krutnik 1991 and Tasker 1998) – a subversion of the traditional “stabilising” presence of the detective in the crime thriller, whose conventional role is to restore the logic and order that has been disrupted by the committing of a crime (Krutnik 1991: 130).<sup>21</sup>

Critical engagement with the ‘troubled’ nature of masculinity within *film noir* was largely spearheaded by Frank Krutnik in his book *In a Lonely Street: Film noir, genre, masculinity* (1991). The *noirs*, he argues, “reveal an obsession with male figures who are both internally divided and alienated from the culturally permissible (or ideal) parameters of masculine identity, desire and achievement” (1991: xiii). Krutnik divides the *noirs* into a number of distinct subcategories, each of which engages with sociocultural concerns using a different narrative framework. One of these, the “‘tough’ suspense thriller”, displaces the traditional investigative narrative in favour of an exploration of the protagonist’s own neurosis and eschews narrative resolution. In so doing, the suspense thriller “opens up a space for representations of masculine authority and masculine identity which are less controlled and stable” than in the traditional investigative narrative (1991: 125). These suspense thrillers, which Krutnik suggests might also be considered “‘paranoid man’ films”, are “melodramas specifically and overwhelmingly concerned with the problems besetting masculine identity and meaning”, in which conventional ‘tough’ masculinity is

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<sup>21</sup> Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot serve as ideal examples of the ‘classical’ detective as a detached, rational and stabilising presence – the polar opposite of *noir*’s harangued, compromised sleuths.



either unattainable or hopelessly precarious (1991: 131). Krutnik draws repeated parallels between these films, characterised by “a persistent fascination with the spectacle of the passive or emasculated man” (1991: 127), and melodramas, traditionally thought of as ‘women’s pictures’, and in so doing reveals the extent to which traditional notions of masculinity are destabilised in these films.

Literature on the crisis of masculinity within *noir* can broadly be divided into two categories: that which, like Krutnik’s book, focuses on the films’ portrayal of men and masculinity as troubled or compromised, and that which examines external factors, including but not limited to the *femme fatale*, as a means of articulating the crisis. As Philippa Gates notes, “the reality of men’s heterosexual identities is dependent upon an array of structures and institutions, and when these weaken or shift, men’s dominant position in society is threatened” (2006: 28). The issue of gender is therefore often implicit rather than explicit in these films, since many of the anxieties articulated in *film noir*, while not directly related to tensions between men and women, express concerns that are predominantly those of men and explore them from a male perspective. For instance, it is telling that, in his discussion of urban spaces in *noir*, Edward Dimendberg (2004) makes scant reference to female characters. The anxieties into which these lonely, menacing cities tap recall the nature of post-war Italian and European urban life described in section 2.2.1: increased isolation, homogenisation and surveillance, and “an inability to dwell comfortably anywhere” (2004: 7). These concerns are mainly experienced by the films’ male characters as they struggle to adjust to a new and unfamiliar social landscape. That is not to suggest that women did not also experience feelings of isolation and confusion as a result of the sociocultural developments of the 1940s and 1950s – indeed, given the extent to which women’s lives were transformed by the upheavals of this period, it is reasonable to assume that they *did*.<sup>22</sup> However, this possibility is not afforded any attention by the overwhelmingly male-centric *noirs*. In addition, critics have also begun to examine the relationships between male protagonists and other male characters, noting the ways in which different masculinities are measured against and placed into conflict with one another. In particular, Dyer’s work on queerness and its “marginal but insidiously present” status in *film noir* (2004: 90) reveals powerful anxieties at play not just between men and women but also between men and other men (1977; 1998b; 2002; 2004; see also Krutnik 1991).

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<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Krutnik, who notes the “confusion in regard to traditional conceptions of sexual role and sexual identity, *for both men and women*” as a result of the turmoil of the Second World War (1991: 57, emphasis mine).

All of this points to the use of various strategies of displacement in *film noir* with regard to dealing with contemporary sociocultural concerns. These films are fundamentally about men and their responses to the changing nature of society, but their inability to directly acknowledge these anxieties means that they tend to be relocated to other figures. Often, they are projected on to women in the form of the *femme fatale*, who represents both male anxieties regarding the changing position of women in society, and more generally a perceived loss of male power, control and stability. *Femmes fatales*, however, are merely the most widely recognised symbol of these anxieties, which can also be observed through the relationship between the male protagonist and the hostile urban environment which he traverses, the dark and unsettling visual iconography and the overriding atmosphere of unease, uncertainty and insecurity that permeates these films. This means that *films noirs* cannot simply be reduced to narratives about good men versus bad women.

### 2.4.3 'Decoding' the *giallo*

I chose to begin my examination of *film noir* criticism by focusing on the *femme fatale* as a case study because she demonstrates an important point: that, by referring to the critical responses on *film noir*, it is not my intention to merely identify similarities between it and the *giallo*. A case can be made that certain female characters in the *giallo*, such as female killers like Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Argento 1970) or predatory lesbians like Julia Durer (Anita Strindberg) in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971), share characteristics with the *femme fatale* and illustrate similar anxieties about women. However, these characters are far from ubiquitous in the *giallo*, meaning that superficial comparisons can only be taken so far. Instead, my intention is to use a broadly similar approach, reading the *gialli* 'between the lines', as it were, to uncover the sociocultural anxieties that lie buried beneath the surface.

Another important issue that must be emphasised is that, while my aim is to situate the *gialli* within their historical context, it is not my intention to explore how contemporary early 1970s audiences would have viewed these films, or indeed whether their makers intended them to be read as a commentary on then-present day sociocultural concerns. The former has already been capably covered by Mikel Koven in *La Dolce Morte*, while the latter is complicated by the fact that few *giallo* directors, writers and producers have gone 'on the record' as to their ideological intentions regarding their films. In any event, my decision to avoid an auteurist interpretation of the *gialli*, as explained in Chapter 1,

precludes an approach that privileges directorial intent. Criticism of *film noir* has relied largely on the benefit of hindsight, given that the films that are now considered *noirs* were only recognised as belonging to a unified movement retroactively (Neale 2000: 153; Spicer 2002: 1-2). The *gialli* were different in that regard, the Italian popular film industry's penchant for nakedly imitating successful formulae meaning that their makers would have been well aware that the films they were producing adhered closely to a fairly narrowly defined blueprint. Both movements, however, are united by the fact that the relationships between real world historical events and the conventions of the films themselves were not formally recognised until many years after the fact.

This level of distance allows patterns across the corpus, and correlations between those patterns and real world historical developments, to be observed with a level of hindsight that would not have been possible when these films were originally released. In the same way that, for instance, it is now possible to view the tensions that arose between men returning from combat and the women who had replaced them in the factories in wartime America as part of a broader movement towards increased autonomy for women in the post-war years, the student demonstrations in cities such as Paris and Rome in 1968 can, in retrospect, be understood within the wider context of the social and political unrest, left- and right-wing agitation and economic instability that engulfed much of the western world in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, marking the end of the Economic Miracle and Western European post-war consensus politics. Our distance from these events allows us to observe broad patterns as opposed to merely examining isolated incidents. In turn, the anxieties that influenced and were influenced by these patterns can be observed, albeit in a refracted form, in popular filmic cycles such as *film noir* and the *giallo*.

The methodology of this thesis, therefore, relies on three distinct areas of knowledge:

- 1. An understanding of the historical events in the years prior to and during the *giallo* boom, and of the sociocultural concerns and anxieties that dominated this period.**
- 2. An awareness of the strategies of displacement employed in *film noir* to negotiate the anxieties of the 1940s and 1950s, and the ways in which these have been understood by film theorists.**

### 3. A familiarity with the *giallo* as a whole, coupled with close textual analysis of a selection of core films.

To summarise, critical responses to *film noir* provide me with a way of approaching the *giallo* that is less concerned with finding explicit reflections of specific historical events, instead viewing the films as conveying a general flavour of the sociocultural concerns that were prevalent during the *giallo* boom. *Gialli*, like *noirs*, are brimming with anxieties regarding gender and sexuality but at the same time struggle to articulate these concerns directly. Instead, they disguise them within the bounds of generic conventions, thereby making them palatable as entertainment. If, however, these “scenarios of maladjustment” are decoded, then the concerns simmering beneath the films’ surfaces are revealed. With a knowledge of *noir*’s compromised male sleuths, unknowable women and hostile urban spaces as articulations of contemporary anxieties, I can now begin to explore characters, situations and conventions of the *gialli*, working from the hypothesis that they, like the *films noirs*, engage in a refracted form with contemporary sociocultural concerns.

## 2.5 Conclusion

With these two initial chapters, I have built a case for reading the *giallo* as more than just a series of gaudy murder-mystery thrillers, considering instead the real-world social context out of which they arose and relating the conventions of the films back to the dominant preoccupations of this period. In a manner of speaking, therefore, this thesis aims to *explain* rather than merely *describe*, thereby going beyond the bulk of the existing published literature on the *giallo*.

In this chapter, I have tried to do what the *gialli* themselves do, eschewing dates and statistics in favour of a more discursive approach, sketching out key social changes, general trends and prevailing cultural attitudes to convey, as concisely as possible, the various conditions that aligned to create the climate out of which a movement like the *giallo* could develop and achieve tremendous popularity. At the same time, I have attempted to demonstrate, through reference to other filmic movements at different moments in history, that it is possible and indeed justifiable to approach a populist and often seemingly frivolous movement such as the *giallo* and read it as an articulation of very real contemporary anxieties. Furthermore, through engaging with the extensive body of scholarly analysis of *film noir*, and in highlighting the extent to which both movements

can be read as responses to similar overarching concerns, I have provided myself with a useful framework to serve as something of a guide as I now move on to examine my various core texts in the subsequent analysis chapters.

### 3 “Keep[ing] individualism alive”: The *M-giallo* protagonist in crisis

#### 3.1 Introduction

In the process of completing this thesis and the MLitt dissertation that preceded it, I have presented my research at several group tutorials and symposia. On a number of these occasions, I have shown one or both of two scenes from Dario Argento’s 1970 *giallo* *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. The first of these depicts the film’s protagonist, Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), witnessing what appears to be an attack on a woman, Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi), in an art gallery by a knife-wielding man in a black hat and coat. In one of the simplest yet most spectacular set-pieces in the entire *giallo* canon, Sam rushes to help the wounded Monica but finds himself caught between two sets of mechanically operated glass doors, trapped like a caged animal and forced to watch helplessly as Monica lies bleeding on the floor, mere feet from him but unreachable. The second scene, towards the end of the film, is in many respects a rerun of these events. At this point, Monica has unveiled herself as the serial killer who has been terrorising Rome over the course of the film, revealing that Sam’s initial reading of the gallery scene was wrong: in actual fact, *she* was the aggressor, attempting to stab the figure in black – her husband Alberto (Umberto Raho) – rather than the other way around. Sam pursues Monica back to the same gallery, where he once again finds himself immobile and powerless, trapped beneath a massive art exhibit as Monica taunts and threatens him with her knife. Only the last-minute arrival of the police, led by Inspector Morosini (Enrico Maria Salerno), saves Sam from certain death. Traumatized and on the verge of tears, Sam clings to Morosini.

I find myself constantly returning to these scenes, and using them as a means to introduce new audiences to the *giallo*, because together they seem to encapsulate, in the space of a little under eight minutes, the very essence of these films and their recurrent anxieties. The first of these scenes, in particular, has already been discussed by a number of critics in terms of its expression, through the caging of its protagonist, of a fear of emasculation (Burke 2002; Burke 2006; Mendik 1996a; Needham 2001). It is my contention that these two scenes, and indeed the *M-gialli* in general, convey a broader sense of male anxiety, confusion and ambivalence towards the modern world and the changes wrought by recent sociocultural developments. These include women’s emancipation, sexual liberation, the spread of urbanisation and resulting feelings of imprisonment and alienation, the

machinations of an establishment perceived as increasingly totalitarian, and a growing lack of certainty regarding men's position in a world in which the old systems of male privilege are being subjected to attacks on multiple fronts.

This chapter seeks to explore the *M-giallo*, its male protagonists and their relationship with the world around them, shedding light on the ways in which the sociocultural anxieties of the early 1970s are negotiated within the framework of the *M-giallo*. To that end, this chapter begins with a brief overview of the typical *M-giallo* protagonist, before going on to examine each of the main themes of the *M-giallo* via a more detailed discussion of one of the three core texts selected from the main corpus of study discussed in Chapter 1. Section 3.3 explores the *M-giallo*'s ambivalence regarding urban spaces through an examination of *The Fifth Cord* (Bazzoni 1971) and its protagonist, Andrea Bild (Franco Nero). Section 3.4 turns to *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (Lado 1971), building on the previous section's exploration of urban spaces to examine the *M-giallo*'s preoccupations with freedom and captivity, and the desire to maintain one's own individuality in a hostile and increasingly homogenised world. Finally, section 3.5 returns to *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, considering its two very different main female characters – the “hopelessly insane” killer Monica Ranieri and Sam's long-suffering girlfriend Giulia (Suzy Kendall) – and their differing functions within the film's narrative of compromised masculinity.

## 3.2 Defining the *M-giallo* protagonist

Before examining the three core texts on which this chapter focuses, it seems sensible to first broadly sketch out the primary characteristics that tend to be shared by the nature of the *giallo*'s male protagonists, thereby providing some context to the more in-depth examination of their role within the films which follows.

While, for many, the word '*giallo*' conjures up images of 'scream queens' such as Edwige Fenech and Nieves Navarro/Susan Scott being stalked and terrorised, my research has led me to the conclusion that the male-centric *M-gialli* articulate the *giallo*'s preoccupations and fears in their most direct form. As noted in Chapter 1, more than half of the films in the corpus focus on a male protagonist. In doing so, they deal with the recurring anxieties of the *giallo* in a specific manner distinct from that of the *F-gialli*. The male actor most readily associated with the *giallo* is arguably George Hilton, whose characters, with their penchant for the latest trendy fashions and easy 'lounge lizard' demeanour, epitomised the

trendy jet set culture that the *gialli* so readily embraced. Hilton, however, rarely played a protagonist in his own right, tending instead to be cast as the love interest (who often doubled up as the killer) in many an F-*giallo*, usually opposite Edwige Fenech. This role, which will be covered in Chapter 4 in my discussion of the F-*giallo* and its ‘central women’, fulfilled a very different function from that of the troubled M-*giallo* protagonist, which accordingly called for a different sort of screen presence than that of the self-assured ‘bad boy’ Hilton.



**Figure 3.1 – Collage of M-*giallo* protagonists: Giancarlo Giannini in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula*, Tony Musante in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Jean Sorel in *Short Night of Glass Dolls* and Fabio Testi in *What Have You Done to Solange?***

Figure 3.1, above, shows stills of several M-*giallo* protagonists, demonstrating the characteristics shared by the majority of these characters and the actors playing them. They are generally in their early-to-mid-thirties, handsome and well-groomed, with either no or neatly styled facial hair. In terms of clothing, they favour smart-casual attire, consisting primarily of open-necked, patterned shirts and sweaters, jeans or slacks, and sports coats or denim jackets (often slung over the protagonist’s arm or shoulder), although some wear



suits if their work requires it. The overall image, reflected across the M-*giallo* canon, is one of coolness and sophistication – that of a ‘modern’ man in touch with current fashion trends. These characters are usually involved in the creative arts in some capacity: painters, musicians, novelists and journalists are among the most frequently recurring professions. However, they seem to spend far more time indulging in leisurely pursuits such as going to parties, embarking on passionate affairs (often with younger women) and, of course, attempting to solve murder-mysteries than actually doing their jobs. They are typically set in opposition to the establishment, both through their implicit countercultural leanings and their status as amateur detectives who operate outside the law, which frequently creates conflict between them and the ‘official’ (but often lazy and ineffectual) investigators.

M-*giallo* protagonists are also marked by their internationality. Whereas the F-*giallo*’s leading ladies tended to be former models and ‘B-movie’ actresses with little to no international profile, M-*gialli* often attracted the talents of established, internationally recognised stars, many of them native English speakers. Helmut Berger (*The Bloodstained Butterfly* [Tessari 1971]), James Franciscus (*The Cat O’ Nine Tails* [Argento 1971]), David Hemmings (*Deep Red* [Argento 1975]), George Lazenby (*Who Saw Her Die?* [Lado 1972]), Jean Sorel (*One on Top of the Other* [Fulci 1969], *Short Night of Glass Dolls*) and Jean-Louis Trintignant (*Death Laid an Egg* [Questi 1968]) have all featured as M-*giallo* protagonists, in addition to home-grown stars like Lino Capolicchio (*The Bloodstained Shadow* [Bido 1978], *The House with Laughing Windows* [Avati 1976]), Giancarlo Giannini (*The Black Belly of the Tarantula* [Cavara 1971]) and Fabio Testi (*What Have You Done to Solange?* [Dallamano 1972]). As noted in Chapter 1, the characters they play are often either visiting or living in foreign countries, immediately marking them as outsiders who do not fit into the local community. Furthermore, even those that are not foreign nationals tend to be marked as outsiders, by virtue of being from another part of the country (as with the journalist protagonist in *Don’t Torture a Duckling* [Fulci 1972]), having recently returned to their home town after a lengthy absence (*The Bloodstained Shadow* [Bido 1978]) or even through the presence of a foreign actor playing a character who is supposedly a local (the supposedly Venetian sculptor played by George Lazenby in *Who Saw Her Die?*). On other occasions the protagonist is identified as an outsider by their liminal status within a specific social circle, as in *The Fifth Cord*, in which Andrea Bild has been ostracised by his former lover and her friends because of his past indiscretions.

*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*’s Sam Dalmas is a highly typical M-*giallo* protagonist. He is an American novelist, regarded (according to him, at any rate) as “the great hope of

American literature”, but has relocated to Rome to seek stimulation for his next book. Thanks to his lack of inspiration, he is forced to make ends meet by writing manuals on the preservation of rare birds for a local ornithological institute. He has a girlfriend, Giulia, a model – described as “*very young and very pretty*” by the film’s killer in a menacing telephone call – with whom he lives in an urban apartment that is small, messy and sparsely furnished, but lined with books and posters. Despite a lack of overt politicisation, Sam clearly regards himself as a freethinking intellectual, the large portrait of Albert Einstein and the “Black Power” poster that adorn the walls of his apartment referencing a countercultural consciousness. As such, he views the writing of dreary textbooks as a betrayal of his artistic sensibilities, demonstrated by his refusing to accept a copy of the finished product, sarcastically declaring “Who needs it? I have this!” as he waves his paycheque.

The M-*giallo*’s protagonists, and the narratives that involve them, are characterised by uncertainty and an overbearing atmosphere of futility. In addition to emphasising these characters’ lack of ‘belongingness’, the murder investigations in which they become involved also tend to reinforce a sense that they are essentially powerless to affect the outcome of the narrative. The typical *giallo* mystery is not solved through rational deduction; in fact, it is often the killer who eventually chooses to reveal his/her identity to the amateur detective, rather than the detective successfully unmasking him/her. In addition, the killer’s unmasking and subsequent defeat (whether through death or captivity) typically fail to instil any sense that the world has been restored to order. These films typically end with the protagonist’s place in the world more uncertain than ever, his self-assuredness rocked by the tensions brought to the surface through the process of unravelling the mystery. One need only look at the final moments of Argento’s later *Deep Red*, which otherwise has virtually the same narrative framework as *Bird*, to see this tendency in practice. In the final shot, the end credits roll over the image of Marc Daly, a virtual facsimile of Sam Dalmas, staring at his own reflection in a pool of blood, deeply troubled and giving the impression that he still does not fully comprehend all that he has seen. The implication is that Marc may have survived his ordeal, but that the meaning and closure he sought through his investigation of the murders remains denied to him.

All of this cultivates an image of a well-travelled, cultured and educated but troubled and rootless individual who travels from place to place, dabbling in the arts and soaking up the local culture – experiencing *la dolce vita*, as it were – but never truly ‘belonging’ and hamstrung by an overriding ineffectuality. The modern man, as conceptualised in the

*giallo*, is a bohemian and cultural connoisseur, but, as this chapter will demonstrate, deeply conflicted about this identity and his place within the world. Having established the basic characteristics of the M-*giallo* protagonist, I will now explore how these characters are used within this chapter's three core texts to articulate the main concerns of the M-*giallo*.

### 3.3 Urban spaces and 'outsiderness' in *The Fifth Cord*

This first case study uses Luigi Bazzoni's *The Fifth Cord* to examine the ways in which anxieties relating to the urban landscape and its alienating, imprisoning qualities are expressed in the M-*giallo*. Released in 1971, a year after *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, it bears a striking resemblance to Argento's film in many respects, in particular its narrative structure, preoccupations with compromised masculinity and overall visual style. The two films also share the same cinematographer, Vittorio Storaro, whose photography in *The Fifth Cord* continues to place emphasis on urban spaces and their potential to act as prisons for their inhabitants, an idea already mooted in *Bird* and expressed in an even more pronounced form in this later film. Indeed, with its repeated foregrounding of striking modern architecture and the recurrence of specific visual motifs expanded upon below, *The Fifth Cord* demonstrates a level of cohesion in its production design and cinematography that is somewhat atypical among *gialli*, effectively making these themes the film's focal point rather than merely a backdrop to its admittedly threadbare plot. This emphasis on the urban landscape and its prison-like qualities also allows for a more pronounced exploration of the protagonist's own troubled relationship with his surroundings.

The film focuses on Andrea Bild (Franco Nero), a heavy-drinking reporter assigned to report on the brutal assault of John Lubbock (Maurizio Bonuglia), an Australian teacher currently working in Italy, who was attacked on his way home from a New Year party which he and Andrea both attended. As Andrea looks for a potential motive for the assault, a number of other guests from the same party are attacked, this time fatally. As the bodies pile up, Andrea continues his investigation while simultaneously having to contend with his flighty girlfriend Lu (Pamela Tiffin), his hidebound editor Traversi (Guido Alberti), a Detective Inspector (Wolfgang Preiss) who views him as a potential suspect, his own alcoholism, and a yearning for a now unattainable past illustrated through his fractious encounters with old flame Helene (Silvia Monti).

Since the birth of the modern industrial city in the mid-nineteenth century, urban spaces have been depicted as sites of deep-rooted anxiety. Critics have interpreted the sinister metropolises in which so many *films noirs* take place as indications of concerns about modernity, the rise of the ‘concrete jungle’ and its effects on society, with Vivian Sobchack describing them as an expression of “the lived sense of insecurity, instability, and social incoherence Americans experienced during the transitional period that began after the war and Roosevelt’s death in 1945, lasted through the Truman years (1945-52), and declined as the Eisenhower years (1952-60) drew to a prosperous close” (1998: 131). James Naremore, meanwhile, relates *noir*’s depiction of urban spaces to the nineteenth century literary topos of the “Dark City”, in which profoundly conflicting meanings characterise urban spaces. The city is by turns “oppressive and pleasurable, alienating and free” (1998: 44), indicating that its portrayal in *noir* is not characterised by unequivocal negativity but rather by intense uncertainty. Crime-riddled and filled with seedy nightclubs and motels, sinister alleyways and dark corners, the city serves a continual source of danger, but is also a place where the compromised antihero protagonist can gain vital clues or, if need be, melt into the shadows to avoid pursuers on either side of the law. In these films, there is a sense that the city represents the darkest aspects of humanity as well as the loss of a cherished former way of life, but also that it is where its morally ambiguous protagonists can thrive. Edward Dimendberg summarises *noir*’s ambivalent response to contemporary urban development as one of “[n]ostalgia and longing for older urban forms combined with a fear of new alienating urban realities” (2004: 7). He goes on to argue that

[t]he loss of public space, the homogenization of everyday life, the intensification of surveillance, and the eradication of older neighborhoods by urban renewal and redevelopment projects are seldom absent from these films. [...] [T]he protagonists in film noir appear cursed by an inability to dwell comfortably anywhere. (2004: 7)

The feelings of disconcertment relating to the city and the plight of its inhabitants described by Dimendberg and other *noir* critics are similarly evident in the *giallo*, albeit expressed in a different manner. As established in Chapter 2, in the years preceding the *giallo* boom Italy went through its own intense period of urbanisation. This transition, from a largely agricultural nation to one of heavy industrialisation, resulted in mass migration to northern and central cities such as Rome, Milan and Turin. People increasingly found themselves crowded into newly developed urban housing schemes in which the notion of the close-knit community ceased to exist and isolation prevailed (Foot 1995; Ginsborg 1990). The aforementioned three cities are the most frequently recurring locations for *gialli*

set in Italy, and as such these films expose to a significant degree the aftermath of this process of urbanisation and the lifestyle changes which accompanied it.

The notion of urban locations acting as ‘cages’ confining their inhabitants is apparent from the very first scene of *The Fifth Cord*, in which several of the film’s principal characters attend a New Year party in a hotel bar. The camera, representing the viewpoint of the as-yet-unidentified killer, snakes through the throng of revellers: an array of bourgeois city dwellers in their finery. Shot using a fish-eye lens, this lengthy point of view shot is immediately given an eerie quality by virtue of its distortion. In addition to rendering the revellers grotesque by warping their features, the lens also conveys a sense of remoteness, making them seem further away from the camera than they actually are. As the camera continues through the throng, a number of the guests react briefly to its (i.e. the killer’s) presence, smiling and offering inaudible words of greeting before returning to their ongoing conversations without a second glance. Consequently, this social gathering is established as one in which people are casually familiar with one another but lack a deeper connection, evoking the conflicting feelings of being in close proximity to one’s neighbours while lacking any sense of community cohesion experienced in the newly urbanised Italy. The sense of isolation is further conveyed by the lighting, which renders great swathes of the room as nothing more than inky blackness, with small ‘islands’ occupied by isolated groups of party guests illuminated by individual light sources (such as table lamps). During its crawl, the camera briefly comes to a halt facing a dance floor in the middle of the room. Here, several couples are dancing, again isolated from their peers by streamers which hang from the ceiling, taking on the appearance of vertical bars and encasing the dancers in a ‘cage’.

Following this initial point of view sequence, the opening title sequence begins, introducing Andrea Bild. Drinking alone at the bar, Andrea’s ‘outsiderness’ is apparent from the outset: separate from the rest of the party, his scruffy and unshaven appearance further serves to isolate him from his more smartly dressed peers. A series of shot/reverse-shot setups shows Andrea watching the other guests, particularly the dancers, a lengthy tracking shot showing that each has a partner and further emphasising Andrea’s isolation. The streamers surrounding the dancers figure heavily throughout this sequence, ‘imprisoning’ the dancers. In contrast, Andrea is typically not photographed in this manner, with the camera tending to provide clear, unobstructed shots of him. As the credits sequence continues, however, he leaves the bar and crosses the room in a lengthy tracking shot, disappearing momentarily behind the dance ‘cage’ before reappearing in a close-up,

the streamers partially obscuring our view of him. This establishes Andrea's mobility and his liminal position in society, able to move between different locations and social milieus.

The image of prison-like bars is repeated throughout the film, chiefly in the form of window blinds, which appear in virtually interior scene. These blinds often cast long shadows across rooms and the people within them, ensuring that they are impossible to escape, contributing to a sense that these characters are trapped with no escape. Even exterior scenes reflect this motif, with characters frequently photographed through gratings or steps, and with uniform horizontal or vertical lines of one form or another often reflected on windows or indeed the sunglasses Andrea sports in a number of scenes. In these scenes, the urban metropolis as a whole comes to serve as a prison of sorts, surrounding the characters with concrete and glass on all four sides. The uniform, inorganic nature of the architecture, with its seemingly unending parallel straight lines, means that there is never a shortage of allusions to caging. Indeed, the fact that such a cohesive metaphor could be weaved so fully into the film using existing architecture shows the extent to which the Italian urban landscape of 1971 was itself replete with visual signifiers of captivity. As such, it is rare for a scene to pass without the presence of some form of jail-like imagery, some of it subtle but most of it fairly blatant. Even the film's opening credits constitute a 'prison' of sorts, the text and lengthy lines of ellipses partially obscuring the actors behind them and mimicking the horizontal blinds used elsewhere in the film to connote imprisonment. (See Figure 3.2.)



**Figure 3.2 – The recurring motif of horizontal and vertical bars.**

One aspect of the exterior scenes that is particularly striking is the film's apparent refusal to clearly identify the locations in which it takes place. Conventional establishing shots, setting up the geography of each location, are often avoided altogether in favour of going

directly to medium or long shots of characters surrounded by concrete. ‘Travelling’ shots connecting one scene to another are also rare, with Andrea typically appearing in a new location at the start of each scene (often by car) without any explanation of where it is in relation to his previous location, or how far apart they are. While on the one hand emphasising his mobility and the newfound ease of travel that characterised this period, it also serves to further fracture the film’s geography. This, coupled with the overall uniform appearance of the locations, conveys a sense of the characters being lost in a concrete maze devoid of identifiable features and underscores the homogeneity of the modern metropolis. The city itself is never named, and recognisable landmarks are steadfastly avoided in favour of anonymous, ‘new build’ urban areas. These events could be taking place in any modern city in Western Europe, a fact underscored by the *mélange* of different nationalities represented by both the cast and the names of the characters. As Andrea notes in relation to the language school at which Lubbock teaches and its reliance on foreign, non-permanent staff: “They’re coming and going all the time, from all over the world. It’s like a hotel.” Conventional Italian first names and surnames like Andrea, Giulia, Bini and Traversi mingle with a variety of non-Italian ones, among them John Lubbock (this character is specifically identified as Australian), Edouard Vermont (the name and accent appear to be French), Lu and Walter Auer (their surname is of German origin). Sometimes, a non-Italian first name is paired with an Italian surname, or vice versa, further blurring national boundaries: for instance, Richard Bini and Isabel Lancia. Even Andrea’s surname, Bild, appears to be German in origin, which may reflect the fact that the film was an Italian/West German co-production, but also serves to highlight his liminal status: neither completely local or completely foreign. Characters’ nationalities can also create confusion: in an early scene, Andrea’s reporter colleague Vogel (Andrea Scotti) mistakes the Australian Lubbock for English. Errors like this, which recur throughout the *giallo* (for instance, in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Inspector Morosini assumes that the American Sam, too, is English), further add to the impression that nationality is an increasingly unstable concept.

Andrea himself is an intriguing character, and his presence articulates tensions relating to urban spaces and modern society in a particularly pronounced manner. More widely associated with the ‘spaghetti’ western *filone* that preceded the *giallo*, *The Fifth Cord* was the only *giallo* in which Franco Nero appeared, and his role as the eponymous antihero in *Django* (Corbucci 1966) could not fail to have been at the forefront of audience’s minds when the film was released. Because the actor portraying him is so implicitly tied to the spaghetti western, Andrea appears as something of an interloper from the outset. There is a



sense that most *M-giallo* protagonists, no matter how uncomfortable they may be with their identity in a rapidly changing world, at least project an *appearance* of belonging within the environment they inhabit. David Hemmings' Marc Daly seems quite at home at the conservatory where he performs jazz music in *Deep Red*, while Sam Dalmas is content to live the life of the American loafer 'slumming it' in Europe while he awaits inspiration for his next novel. Nero, by contrast, seemingly captive to the character that defined his career, brings with him many characteristics associated with the spaghetti western protagonist which stand in stark contrast to those of the average *M-giallo* leading man. He is unshaven, scruffy and constantly wearing a weather-beaten trenchcoat, not unlike the ragged greatcoat he wears in *Django* (see Figure 3.3).



**Figure 3.3 – Franco Nero as the eponymous antihero in the spaghetti western *Django* (left), and as another roaming outsider in *The Fifth Cord* (right).**

He is also a habitual drunk, in one early scene shown swigging from a bottle of J&B whisky while driving at speed through the city – a far cry from the slick, sophisticated image that Mikel Koven argues was the original intention behind the brand's prominence within the *giallo* canon (2006: 49-50). He is loud and often inarticulate, prone to bouts of shouting and tending to slur his speech – either a by-product of the faltering English of

Nero (who dubs himself in the English-language version) or a deliberate choice in order to make him seem perpetually drunk. Furthermore, he is physically violent, slapping Lu when he suspects her of infidelity, roughing up her brother Walter (Luciano Bartoli) when he discovers the latter's involvement in a sex ring, and finally almost beating the killer to death before throwing him off the side of a multi-storey building. None of these characteristics would describe the normal *M-giallo* protagonist, but they are an effective form of shorthand for conveying that Andrea does not belong in the genteel, stylish world of the modern cosmopolitan city.

Nero's casting makes explicit certain qualities shared between the seemingly disparate spaghetti western and *giallo* protagonists and allows the latter to be conceptualised as a drifting outsider in a manner that echoes his western counterpart. As noted above, the opening credits sequence imbues Andrea with a mobility denied to the other party guests. This motif is carried into the rest of the film as he traverses the city, heading from location to location as he investigates the murders, while the trenchcoat he perpetually wears means that, even when indoors, he gives the impression of either having just arrived from the outside world or being on the verge of departure. The other characters, by contrast, are largely restricted to their specific 'prisons', appearing exclusively or nearly exclusively within the context of the various institutions they inhabit. Traversi, for instance, is only ever seen in his office, barring the scene of his murder in a city park. Andrea is frequently shown standing outdoors, peering through windows as he observes suspects – a wandering outsider who has been excluded (or chooses to exclude himself) from the rest of society. To a considerable extent, his outsidership seems to be treated as a positive, given the visual metaphors for imprisonment that characterise these interior spaces. Additionally, the fact that he is an independent agent rather than a member of the police (and therefore the establishment) allows him to circumvent a lot of 'red tape', going to places and asking questions which the authorities cannot. This is not lost on the Detective Inspector leading the official inquiry, who leaks confidential information to Andrea, allowing him to advance the investigation unofficially. Furthermore, the fact that the film's only representation of a truly cohesive society united by a common interest is in the form of a group of voyeurs who gather to watch underage teenagers having sex suggests that its attitude to social cohesion and 'belongingness' is dubious at best.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sinister portrayals of groups, clubs and cults abound throughout the *gialli* – for example, the satanic cult that entraps Jane Harrison (Edwige Fenech) in *All the Colours of the Dark* (Martino 1972), the 'free love' sect from which Jennifer Lansbury (Fenech) has absconded in *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (Carnimeo 1972), and the gathering of sadomasochists and paedophiles in *Who Saw Her Die?* (Lado 1972).

Despite this apparent celebration of the image of the roving outsider, an air of melancholy surrounds Andrea, and he is ultimately a rather tragic figure. As noted above, he is in a disreputable state throughout much of the film, and several allusions are made to the notion that he drinks to excess to help him forget the past. This past, which weighs heavily on him (he professes to having “a memory like an elephant”) and is never fully elaborated on, is symbolised by Helene, with whom he previously had a relationship. Helene is an independent woman: self-sufficient, separated from her husband and working as a teacher while raising her young son by herself. She is depicted as something of a moderating force in Andrea’s life, enduring his drunken advances but constantly keeping him at arm’s length and chastising him for his poor self-care. In an early scene in Helene’s house, Andrea observes huffily that there have been “a lot of changes here”, focusing on trivial matters like the new décor and the fact that Helene now wears glasses but through this betraying his discomfort with the modern version of femininity which she epitomises. In portraying Helene as a former lover who is no longer attainable, the film can be seen to allude to the contemporaneous women’s liberation movement and the resulting perception of a loss of masculine control. Helene used to ‘belong’ to Andrea; now she is her own woman.

The longing Andrea has for the past that Helene symbolises is also reflected in the design of her house. Wide, airy and expansive, it offers a degree of freedom denied by the urban ‘prisons’ seen elsewhere in the film. With its warm colours (particularly in comparison with the cold blue of the outside world) and distinctive visual design (continuing the emphasis on straight lines seen elsewhere in the film but also incorporating more organic touches such as the round hearth in the centre of the living room), it provides a stark contrast to Andrea’s much smaller apartment, in particular his cramped kitchenette with its uniform cupboards and monochromatic colours (see Figure 3.4.)



**Figure 3.4 – Andrea’s cramped, austere kitchenette (above) contrasted with Helene’s expansive and inviting living room (below).**

Around halfway through the film, a furious argument occurs between Andrea and Traversi, with Traversi letting his employee know just what he really thinks of him. His tirade ends with a stark assessment: “You’re not the man you were, Bild.” While superficially a reference to Andrea’s drinking and consequent loss of self-discipline, when taken in conjunction with his interaction with Helene and the images of imprisonment scattered liberally throughout the film, this statement can be read more broadly in relation to the perception of masculinity as having been negatively transformed by the advancement of women’s rights and the creeping spread of the concrete jungle. Through his drinking,

Andrea has lost his self-control. More broadly, however, the changes that have occurred in society in the last few years have wrested control from him and, by proxy, men in general, casting them adrift in a world they no longer recognise and in which they must struggle to reinvent themselves. The great 'prison' that is the modern metropolis is but one of many signifiers of this anxiety.

*The Fifth Cord* closes with a melancholic piece of music sung by Edda Dell'Orso playing over a series of distorted fish-eye lens shots of the sprawling city in the early hours of the morning. Cold, grey, bleak and characterless, these shots sum up the film's decidedly mixed feelings about modern urban spaces and the raft of social changes that have accompanied their formation. Andrea's masculinity and the crisis of identity he is experiencing are to a large extent defined by his relationship with this urban landscape and its function as a prison, acting to suppress his roaming, rootless tendencies. He himself represents a disreputable, degraded form of masculinity, angry and frustrated by his failure to reconcile himself with the changes that have taken place around him. Juxtaposed against this setting, Andrea underscores both the modern metropolis' confining nature and his sense of dislocation within it. If masculinity in the early 1970s was in transition, then Nero's Andrea arguably represents this process in its clearest form: a partially transformed figure who still bears remnants of his old spaghetti western outlaw persona and continues to resist attempts to incorporate him into the great urban prison that has claimed so many of his acquaintances.

In the next section, I will explore in more details the issues of freedom and individuality raised by this discussion as they are articulated in this chapter's second case study.

### **3.4 Freedom and the individual in *Short Night of Glass Dolls***

Although most M-*gialli*, including *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *The Fifth Cord*, conclude with their killers brought to justice and some form of equilibrium re-established within the urban locales which they previously stalked, these films as a rule tend not to provide 'comfortable' endings. Attempts to impose order and reason, such as the summing up of Monica's psychosis in *Bird* or the blaming of the *Fifth Cord*'s killer's spree on his unrequited homosexual desires, often seem hollow and unconvincing. Many of the films' protagonists are considerably less fortunate than Sam Dalmas and Andrea Bild, both of



whom are able to walk away from their experiences relatively unscathed (though still adrift in a world they do not properly understand), and none more so than Gregory “Greg” Moore (Jean Sorel) in *Short Night of Glass Dolls*.

Continuing the train of thought developed in the previous section, this case study explores *Glass Dolls*’ anxieties surrounding freedom and captivity, which mirror, in a broad sense, the containment of Sam and Andrea in their respective films and the accompanying preoccupation with a perceived loss of male power. In *Glass Dolls*, the feelings of captivity and curtailed freedom that permeate the *M-giallo* are taken to their extreme conclusion, by having Greg, an American journalist working in Soviet-controlled Prague with a number of other Westerners, spend the film’s duration in a state of paralysis, unable to move or speak. The film uses lengthy flashbacks to tell the story of Greg’s investigation into the whereabouts of his Czech girlfriend, Mira (Barbara Bach), who mysteriously disappeared shortly before their plan to elope to the West together could be carried out. In the process of his hunt for the truth, Greg meets with indifference from state officials, which turns into outright hostility as he draws closer to the truth. He eventually discovers that Mira’s disappearance is the work of the mysterious Klub 99 – a cult of elderly dignitaries and establishment figures who cling on to life by literally draining it from the young. By then, however, it is too late to save either himself or Mira, and the cult’s punishment comes in the form of the paralytic state in which he is found when the film begins.

Shot in Prague in 1971, the film’s location places it at the very heart of the conflicts that erupted in the late 1960s and early 1970s over issues of freedom and control. Part of the Soviet-controlled Eastern Bloc, Czechoslovakia had undergone its own version of the Paris uprisings in the spring of 1968, but with even more dramatic consequences. In reaction to social reforms instigated by Czechoslovakia’s First Secretary, Alexander Dubček, Soviet tanks rolled into Prague, ruthlessly crushing the uprising. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was purged of dissenters, political commentary was censored, and the majority of Dubček’s reforms were repealed (Goertz 1995: 154-157). Two years after the so-called ‘Prague Spring’, when *Glass Dolls* was filmed, the ripple effect of these events still resonated. As portrayed in the film, Prague is a meeting point between East and West, a liminal space in which sinister figures of the Communist regime and visitors from the West – like Greg and his colleagues – exist in uneasy harmony.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mira’s surname, Svoboda, is a word common in many of the Slavic languages and serves as an ironic comment on her and Greg’s situation and ultimate fate. Peter M. Wolf quotes the Soviet Academy of

The film's nonlinear structure works to create a sense of immobility and helplessness. Greg first appears as an anonymous corpse discovered by a groundsman in the garden outside a stately home, apparently dead. We then remain with the body as it is transported to the local hospital, the lengthy camera crawl through the streets of Prague conveying a sense of helplessness: Greg is unable to control his destination, and neither is the spectator, passively witnessing the journey but unaware of the destination. At the hospital, Greg is examined and certified dead. This is not an altogether atypical introduction for a *giallo*, almost all of which feature the discovery of a body or the commission of a murder as their inciting incident, and at this stage there is little to suggest that this film will not follow the conventional pattern of subsequently introducing an amateur detective whose role will be to identify and apprehend the killer. It is only after the body has been placed into cold storage that, through the voice-over narration of Greg's internal thoughts, we discover that, although immobile, he is not actually dead.

The remainder of the film continually shifts back and forth in time, juxtaposing the examinations carried out on Greg's body by medical personnel with Greg's earlier investigation into Mira's disappearance. Greg's investigation is broken into several segments of varying duration, with the scenes in between, set in the hospital, serving to fracture the narrative and provide the amnesiac Greg with an opportunity to piece together the events and recall what happened next. On each occasion, his memories come in the form of a series of fragmented images, each displayed on screen for less than a second, and initially incomprehensible. The first of these, for instance, consists of the following series of shots:

- A. A woman biting into an apple. She will later be introduced as Mira, but her name and relationship to Greg are not known at this stage.
- B. A close-up of a spectacled eye. Again, its owner, later revealed as Professor Karting (Fabijan Sovagovic), one of the ringleaders of the group responsible for Mira's disappearance, is unknown at this stage.
- C. A sudden zoom in on an empty bed, the covers astray as if someone left in a hurry.

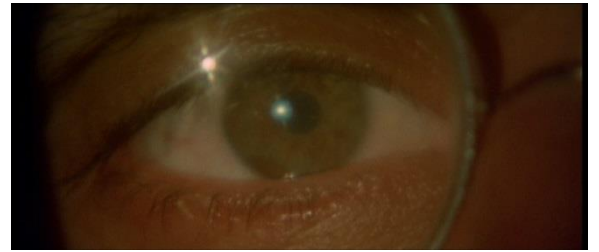
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Sciences Dictionary, which gives its meaning as “[t]he means for man to act in accordance with his own interests and goals, resting upon a perception of objective necessity”, with a secondary meaning describing “the absence of political and economic oppression” (1997: 88-89). In what may be one of the *giallo*'s more direct allusions to the then-current sociocultural context, it is also the surname of the Czechoslovakian President responsible for approving the reforms of 1968 which led to the Prague Spring (Golan 1973: 153).

- D. An elderly man lying injured on a railway line. He will later be revealed as a key witness interviewed by Greg.
- E. A close-up of a grey-haired man, his head tilted back, seemingly asleep, his mouth twitching slightly.
- F. A slow pan over the faces of various men and women, uncannily static and distorted as they stare at the camera through a frosted glass window.



A



B



C



D



E



F

**Figure 3.5 – Greg's fragmented memories, displaced in space and time.**

Devoid of context, these brief images, reproduced above in Figure 3.5, have no clear meaning. The overall effect is extremely disorienting, with the images displaced in space and time: the locations in which they take place are as inexplicable as the characters and events they depict, and it is unclear at which point in the narrative timeline they are meant to have occurred. Are we witnessing events that have already taken place or that are yet to occur; are they, therefore, flashbacks or 'flash-forwards'? It is only at the end of this montage that answers to some of these questions are finally provided as the camera settles



on the grey-haired man glimpsed in shot 5, now revealed to be a colleague of Greg's, found dead in his chair at the news office. As he is moved on to a stretcher by paramedics, the men and women in shot 6 are revealed to be watching the grisly proceedings – colleagues, presumably, or merely curious (but oddly indifferent) onlookers. As the body is removed, Greg dictates an article by telephone, seemingly uninterested in the death of his colleague. Neither the man's death nor his identity is ever explained: he is simply an anonymous fatality, no longer an individual but instead little more than an item to be clerked and disposed of, much as Greg will later be. Even when these images are finally placed in their proper context, the knowledge that, regardless of what happened beforehand, Greg has ended up in a state of 'undeath', means that the spectator knows he is incapable of affecting the outcome of these events. Instead, he is forced to experience the events of his life unfolding as a powerless observer.

A juxtaposition of freedom and captivity is at the film's core, symbolised by the recurrence of butterflies as a visual motif. Butterflies in glass display cages are seen in various locations throughout the film, including on the wall of Greg's apartment (a present from Mira) and in the cult's stately manor. In an interview accompanying the US Anchor Bay DVD release of the film, director Aldo Lado explains that the film was originally intended to be released under the title of *La corta notte delle farfalle* – 'the short night of the butterflies' – but that this was changed to avoid confusion with *The Bloodstained Butterfly*, another *giallo* released in the same year (Hertz 2002a). The plural 'butterflies' is, I feel, significant. While it is Mira who would most likely be considered to have butterfly-like qualities – beautiful, flighty, delicate – within the context of the film she and Greg are *both* figurative butterflies, attempting to fly (beyond the Iron Curtain) but ultimately imprisoned. One can even argue that Greg's situation throughout much of the film directly mirrors that of the butterflies on his apartment wall: like them, and indeed like Andrea Bild in *The Fifth Cord*, he is a prisoner within the city of Prague, but the walls of his prison are invisible, much like the glass of the butterflies' display cage.

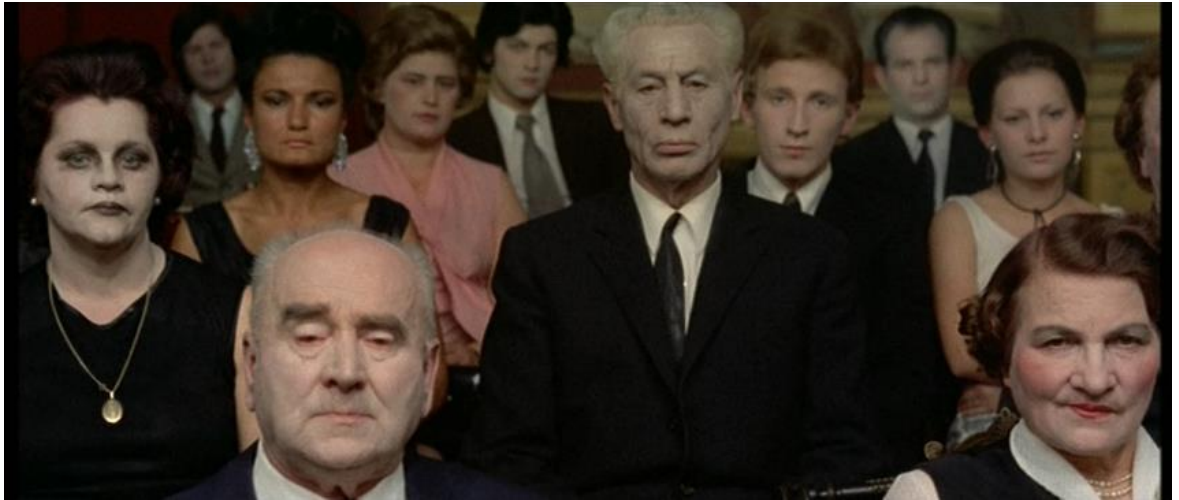
In one early scene, Greg comments on how nice the butterflies look on his wall. Mira's response to this is illuminating:

Yes, they are beautiful. The species has one peculiar trait, though. They haven't any instinct at all to fly. In spite of their brilliant wings, they only know how to play on the ground.

On one level, Mira's dialogue can be interpreted as a reference to the citizens of Prague who, living under the yoke of Soviet oppression, have had their metaphorical wings 'clipped' and their aspirations crushed, leaving them apathetic towards their own situation. To do this is to take the material at face value, however. Throughout the film there is a marked ambivalence regarding the precise target of its overt political commentary. Despite being set in occupied Prague, the words 'Communist' and 'Soviet' are never used; the closest the film ever comes to directly acknowledging the city's occupation following the Prague Spring is Greg's passing reference to "the oppression of the Party". Instead, the nefarious goings-on are displaced on to an exclusive club populated by establishment figures from all walks of life – diplomats, members of the medical profession, and so on. In his analysis of the film, K. H. Brown speculates that direct criticism may have been intentionally avoided so that the film could be shot "under the auspices of the hard-line regime" (2007). Whether deliberate or not, the lack of specificity allows the film to resonate more broadly with the sense of frustration that prevailed in the aftermath of the failure of attempts to reshape society in the late 1960s. Greg and Mira's ultimate fate – murder at the hands of decrepit elderly dignitaries who have determined that, if they cannot force the young to "become as [them]", then they must be destroyed – serves as a symbol for establishment oppression of the young. In the film, just as in Western Europe in the early 1970s, the old order remained in charge, stifling the aspirations of the revolutionary generation.

Greg and Mira, youthful and full of vigour, stand in stark contrast to the other inhabitants of Prague, most of whom are elderly and/or disabled: one of the first arrivals on the scene of the discovery of Greg's 'body' is a double amputee, and two of the people Greg encounters during his search for Mira are blind. As with Andrea Bild in *The Fifth Cord*, the couple's relative freedom – particularly Greg's, as the film spends the most time with him – is manifested in how active they are in comparison to the rest of the city's population. Shortly after Mira is first introduced, a montage is shown in which she and Greg pass through various landmark locations in Prague, culminating in them chasing one another through a graveyard. In an example of the sort of heavy-handed symbolism in which the *giallo* tends to indulge, the dilapidated architecture of the 'old town' and the tombstones in the graveyard create a striking juxtaposition between Greg and Mira's vivacity and the spectre of agedness and death that surrounds them. As with Andrea, Greg seems to be constantly on the move, shown walking or running from one location to another, whereas virtually every other character in the film tends to move slowly if at all, with many of them taking on the appearance of statues. This is particularly pronounced in a scene where Greg

infiltrates a meeting at the Klub 99 manor. In this scene, a series of static tableau shots, almost like still frames, shows the members of an audience listening to a musical performance. Not only is the audience comprised predominantly of elderly men and women, all of them stationary, many of the actors are wearing heavy make-up which gives their skin a pallid, deathly look. This, coupled with their inactivity, causes them to resemble corpses, their very life drained from them (see Figure 3.6).



**Figure 3.6 – Figurative statues: the establishment, like the living dead.**

A similar effect is created later in a scene set in the city's Old Town Square, in which the camera focuses on a variety of humanoid sculptures and figures carved in stone, the latter moving around on a mechanical apparatus, the banality and lifelessness of their movements echoing that of the city's inhabitants (see Figure 3.7).



**Figure 3.7 – Literal statues, part of the city itself, never to escape.**

While the heavy-handed nature of these images is readily apparent to the spectator, their obviousness contrasts with the naïveté Greg exhibits throughout much of the film. In the aforementioned scene in which his colleague's body is removed from the office by paramedics, Greg is shown dictating an article about the arrest of several dissidents, in which he blithely regurgitates the official Party line that "no-one arrested yet has been declared a prisoner". Likewise, prior to her disappearance, Mira makes several comments along similar lines to the one about butterflies quoted above, indirectly alluding to the state oppression under which the people of Prague live. Yet in each case, Greg, ever the naïve Westerner, laughs at her, calling her riddles "adorable" and insisting on the ability of "the average man" to "survive [the oppression of the establishment] and keep individualism alive" in the face of "the oppression of the Party". In perhaps the most direct reference to the realities of life behind the Iron Curtain, Mira declares:

You know, sometimes, when I try to think what my life would be a year or ten years from now, it's like... well, as if I were walking between two high walls. They won't let me imagine anything, or hope for anything.

This motif of being incarcerated between high walls is repeated throughout the film by frequently showing the sky from low angles, the tall buildings of Prague rising up in front of it and seeming to render it distant and unreachable. On several occasions, Greg is seen to be surrounded on all sides by concrete, such as when he visits the former home of another young woman who, like Mira, vanished without a trace. After being forcibly ejected by the woman's father, who claims (rather too insistently to be convincing) not to know anything, we see Greg standing in the courtyard, boxed in by apartment blocks on all four sides, gazing up at the sky and at the various locals who stare suspiciously at him from the windows of their apartments. The entirety of the film's duration takes place within the walls of the city, save for a brief sojourn into the countryside, supervised by a Party official, Wolenski (José Quaglio). The urban metropolis therefore once again figures large in the *M-giallo* protagonist's life, constituting a prison in which Greg is incarcerated without even realising it.

Unusual in the *giallo* canon in its relatively direct engagement with the contemporary social and political situation in Cold War Europe, *Glass Dolls* amplifies anxieties relating to a loss of liberty and individuality that are nonetheless present throughout the *M-giallo*. Greg is ultimately punished for his idealism and individualism by being forced to endure a living death, forcibly rendered as inert as the statues in the Square and the patrons of the Klub 99. As such, his fate evokes the ultimate fear of the bohemian rebel: to be

incorporated into the same establishment from which he sought to break free. For *M-giallo* protagonists like Greg, their own naïveté, which allows them to survive for so long (in Greg's case because he fails to realise the lengths to which the establishment will go to stifle his dissent), turns out to be their undoing, as their dogged determination to get to the bottom of the mysteries facing them leads to them blundering into harm's way, not realising until too late just how perilous their situation is. While, for most *M-giallo* protagonists, survival is still a possibility, no matter how troubled and unsatisfying a form of existence that may entail, Greg cannot even escape with his life. In what is probably the bleakest conclusion to any *giallo*, he is dissected alive in front of an impassive audience: a final, brutal assault, in response to which he is unable to even cry out in pain: his nonconformist voice has literally been silenced by the establishment.

### **3.5 Trophy girlfriends and monstrous women in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage***

So far in this chapter, I have avoided defining masculinity in the *M-giallo* solely in opposition to femininity, hence my decision to initially focus on broader concerns relating to urban spaces and individuality rather than the protagonists' dealings with female characters. However, it would be remiss of me not to talk about women in the *M-giallo* and the protagonist's interaction with them at all. Indeed, the depiction of women in these films provides a useful conclusion to this discussion, both because it offers a particularly vivid example of the anxieties these films articulate about their sociocultural context and because it serves as an effective segue into my largely female-centric discussion of the *F-giallo* in the next chapter. This final case study returns to *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* to examine its two most prominent female characters and the ways in which they simultaneously undermine and reinforce traditional (male-privileging) values relating to the role of women in society.

The film finds its protagonist, Sam Dalmas, an American novelist, in Rome while a series of brutal, sexualised murders is being perpetrated against women throughout the city. In the first of the two iconic scenes discussed earlier in the chapter, Sam witnesses what is assumed to be an attack perpetrated by the same killer, although the victim, Monica Ranieri, survives. Sam becomes obsessed with the scene he witnessed, convinced that something was "wrong" with it. He and his girlfriend Giulia investigate the murders, ultimately following a trail of clues to the Ranieris' apartment, where, after a struggle,

Monica's husband Alberto (Umberto Raho) falls from the balcony and, shortly before dying, confesses to the murders. In the confusion, however, both Monica and Giulia disappear. Sam eventually trails them to an apartment adjacent to the gallery, where Giulia is held prisoner and Monica reveals herself as the true killer, a "latent madness" having been awakened within her when she encountered a painting depicting a violent assault she herself endured several years earlier. The film concludes with Monica imprisoned and classified as "hopelessly insane" while Sam and Giulia leave Italy, a form of equilibrium having been restored.

Writing on *film noir* often divides female characters into two categories with very different functions: the virtuous "nurturing woman", who represents domesticity and the conflicted male protagonist's potential for the redemption, and the devious *femme fatale* or "spider woman", who seeks to entrap the protagonist in her web of duplicity (Place 1998; see also Bell 2010, Krutnik 1991). While not directly analogous to Monica and Giulia in *Bird* or indeed representations of women in the *giallo* as a whole, these two archetypes nonetheless provide a useful starting point to this discussion. Janey Place contends that these archetypes represent the 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' sides of femininity respectively, with the spider woman enjoying access to her sexuality that is denied to the nurturing woman (1998: 47). However, this distinction between an asexual nurturing woman and an eroticised, aggressively sexual spider women is less applicable to the world the *gialli* inhabit, which is not one of such clear-cut sexual morality. Indeed, throughout much of *Bird*'s running time Giulia, occupying the 'virtuous' role, is clearly sexualised. In her first appearance, she is introduced lying naked in bed waiting for him, the shot aligned with Sam's point of view as he enters the apartment they share (see Figure 3.8).



Figure 3.8 – Giulia's first appearance: sexualised but passive.

Throughout the film, it is Giulia rather than Sam who initiates their various romantic exchanges, inviting him into bed in her introductory scene and in numerous scenes thereafter draping herself around him and kissing him passionately. Produced in the aftermath of the sexual revolution, the *gialli* embrace sexual openness in ways that *film noir*, confined by a more rigid sense of morality and the strict requirements of the Hays Code, did not and could not.

Despite these differences, the basic principle of *noir*'s distinction between nurturing women and spider women does hold true for the *giallo* to a certain extent. While Giulia is eroticised and enthusiastic in her propositioning of Sam for sex, she remains fundamentally a passive figure within the narrative, serving as a sidekick to Sam in his investigation rather than taking the lead. She is identified as a model by profession, intended to lounge around and be looked at, with the deliberately posed nature of her first appearance (see Figure 3.8, above) even evoking a photo-shoot. Giulia rarely leaves the apartment, and on the few occasions when she does, it is to pick up groceries (aligning her with a domestic, nurturing role) or go walking arm in arm with Sam. There is a degree of neediness and even desperation to her amorous advances, most of which constitute attempts to divert Sam from his potentially dangerous pursuit of the killer. Furthermore, there remains something relatively chaste and innocent about the form of sexuality that Giulia conveys. In her introductory scene, although naked, she is covered by a sheet at all times, and the actual act of intercourse between her and Sam is not shown. The scene instead cuts from Giulia kissing Sam in bed to a flashback of Monica lying bleeding on the gallery floor, before returning to Sam and Giulia, presumably post-coitus, pulling back the bed-sheet that previously covered them completely to reveal their faces as they giggle almost childishly and briefly kiss.

That is not to suggest that Monica is more eroticised than Giulia in an overt sense, although the sexually violent nature of the murders she commits (including, on one occasion, ripping off a victim's underwear and, it is implied, thrusting a knife into her vagina) does imbue her with a certain sexualised aggressiveness that Giulia lacks. Rather, it is her active nature in general that marks Monica as different from Giulia, and thus transgressive in a male-dominated culture which expects women to be passive and compliant. When interviewed by Morosini in the aftermath of the gallery attack, Sam states that there was "something wrong with that scene – something odd. I can't pin it down but I have a definite feeling that something didn't fit." This statement, which evokes the recurring *giallo* trope of an eyewitness misremembering or misunderstanding an important

clue, is in itself very revealing, given that the aspect of the scene that ‘doesn’t fit’ is later revealed to be Monica, and her true role in the struggle. In failing to comprehend that Monica was in fact the one attacking her husband, Sam (and by proxy the spectator, who is privy to the exact same information as Sam and invited to draw his/her own conclusions) reveals his own inherent prejudices. When presented with the sight of a man and a woman engaged in a struggle, he is unable to conceive of the possibility that the woman rather than the man is the aggressor. In doing so, he reveals the social preconditioning imposed on him by a culture that conceives of women as passive and men as active.<sup>25</sup> This incapacity extends beyond the reveal of Monica as the killer: even when Monica is leering over Sam and threatening him with her knife, he still cries “Help me!” to her, as if still unable to fully acknowledge her role as aggressor.

As with the *femme fatale*, Monica’s unknowability thus becomes another signifier of her transgression, although the *giallo* differs from *film noir* in its masking of the “spider woman’s” true nature. In *noir*, despite the *femme fatale*’s status as an object of investigation, her malice is typically apparent from the outset (either because the film itself makes her ‘badness’ clear or because the archetype is so widely recognised that viewers instantly identify her based on her similarity to other *femmes fatales*). Conversely, Monica is not overtly coded in this manner until she unmask herself as the killer in the film’s final scenes. She is initially presented as a helpless victim, staggering about and collapsing on the floor, crying for help as she bleeds profusely. After this scene, she appears in only two more before her unmasking. In the first of these, she and Alberto are shown overseeing the installation of a new exhibit in the gallery (the structure beneath which Sam will later be trapped). Throughout the scene, Monica’s demeanour is that of a submissive ‘kept woman’, nervously flexing her arms and eyeing her husband warily, then scurrying after him when he orders her to “please come here”. It is scarcely possible to reconcile this timorous Monica with the gleeful, cackling maniac who later emerges and comes close to killing Sam.

The weak, submissive Monica is, of course, not the ‘real’ Monica, and the seemingly ‘normal’ marriage that she and her husband present to the world, with Alberto in control, is eventually revealed as a charade. In reality, Alberto is in thrall to his wife, shielding her from the authorities, committing additional murders on her behalf and ultimately making a false confession – yet another example of masculinity as weak and ineffective. This

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<sup>25</sup> As Peter Bondanella points out, exactly the same assumption is also made later in the film when Sam and the police burst into the Ranieris’ apartment to find Monica and Alberto once again struggling for control of a knife: a “replay” of the initial gallery scene (2009: 382).



ineffectiveness extends to the ‘official’ murder investigation conducted by the (exclusively male) police force, throughout which assumptions are repeatedly made that the killer is male, thereby rendering useless the advanced computer technology employed to narrow down the list of suspects. The world of technology, representative of (male) logic and rationality, is therefore depicted as being destabilised and obfuscated by Monica’s (female) madness. Monica’s transgression is therefore twofold. She not only contravenes the expectations society has placed on her as a woman but is also duplicitous, engaging in a charade of passivity and helplessness – a pastiche of ‘proper’ femininity. The failure of Sam and the police to properly read the clues presented to them therefore becomes the woman’s ‘fault’ rather than being acknowledged as an indictment of deeply ingrained prejudices instilled in them by societal norms.

As noted in Chapter 2, *film noir* is characterised by a need for men to “control women’s sexuality in order not to be destroyed by it” (Place 1998: 49), articulated in the ultimate defeat of the *femme fatale* via her death, imprisonment or domestication. Similarly, *Bird* concludes with Monica interred in a psychiatric facility, the threat posed by her transgression of ‘normal’ feminine behaviour subdued and the ‘proper’ (i.e. male-privileged) social order reinstated. What is interesting, however, is the extent to which both Monica and Giulia symbolise attempts to control women. In one of the few existing readings of a *giallo* that attempts to place the film within the sociocultural context of its production, Frank Burke argues that Sam’s often indifferent treatment of Giulia constitutes “a milder, more subtle version” of the brutal attack Monica endured a decade prior to the events of the film. He goes on to suggest that

[b]oth derive from being female in a male world. Monica responds to her abuse with rage and becomes a serial killer. Julia [sic] responds to hers with frustration and, at a couple of points, even anger. However, her anger remains contained, female, even ‘cute,’ while Monica’s rage is lethal, male-identified, and thoroughly threatening to a world in which violence is a male prerogative. (2006: 202)

The centrepiece of Burke’s argument is a close reading of the film’s final scene, in which the summing up of Monica’s condition by a psychiatrist, Rinaldi (Giovanni Di Benedetto), in a television interview, is jarringly juxtaposed with footage of Sam and Giulia aboard an aeroplane, about to depart Italy. Burke uses this to argue that

the story of Monica and Ranieri gets re-enacted with Julia and Sam becoming its protagonists, by association, implying strongly that underneath the seeming normalcy of their relationship lies the potential for the same homicidal violence that characterized the other couple. [...] We can perhaps hope [...] that Julia may one day awaken within her patriarchal cage and bring her own 'latent madness' to light in a revolution in consciousness and action far more effective than Monica's. (2006: 209)

As intriguing as this interpretation is, it is dependent on an assumption that the film subscribes to a radical feminist agenda that is not borne out by either the *M-giallo* as a whole or even *Bird* in particular. In effectively elevating Monica to the position of hero, Burke glosses over the fact that most of her victims are themselves women, severely undercutting the notion that Monica's actions strike a blow against patriarchal tyranny. Rather than suggesting, as Burke does, that the final scene (which is indeed unsettling and bewildering in its jarring, seemingly unmotivated jump cuts between Sam, Giulia and the exterior of the aeroplane) raises the hope that Giulia will one day fight back against male oppression, I argue that it indicates a profound sense of uncertainty – a sense that the unveiling of Monica as the killer and her subsequent containment open up more problems than they close down. This is articulated in the indecisive nature of the television interview, in which Morosini, asked by the presenter to explain what led Monica to commit the murders, falters and turns to Rinaldi to provide context. Rinaldi's monologue, despite its authoritative tone, is so muddled and filled with self-contradictions that it becomes increasingly clear that he has no more of an idea what to make of Monica than Morosini:

For the moment, we can only make conjectures. Ten years ago, Monica Ranieri, who had already evident paranoid tendencies, was brutally attacked and suffered severe trauma. Nevertheless, she recovered sufficiently to return to a normal life. Her mental disturbance remained dormant for ten years, until the day she came across the painting which depicted the horrible scene of which she had been the protagonist. Her latent madness came to life, violent and irresistible. Strangely, she did not identify herself with the victim, but with her attacker. In order to explain the behaviour of her husband, who attempted murder on various occasions to protect his wife, we must assume that he suffered from an induced psychosis. He was influenced by his paranoid wife to the point of becoming homicidally psychotic himself.

Neither Morosini nor Rinaldi, therefore, is able to offer a truly satisfying explanation for Monica's actions. Rinaldi acknowledges Monica's assault as a defining moment of trauma in her life but insists that she already showed "paranoid tendencies" prior to this, thereby partially displacing the blame for her mental instability from her original attacker back on to Monica herself. Similarly, she is held entirely responsible for her husband's actions, having "induced" a state of "psychosis" in him, thereby diminishing his responsibility to

the point of implying that he has no agency of his own. Most pertinent to this discussion, however, is Rinaldi's obvious bemusement regarding Monica's identification with her attacker: even now, Monica's contravention of the traditional female role of passive victim provokes confusion, with the supposedly expert Rinaldi falling back on vague labels such as "madness" and "mental disturbance" in an attempt to dismiss the wider implications of this act of transgression.

Rather than adopting a specific stance on women's place in society, therefore, the film instead reveals an excess of unease and ambivalence about the complications which arise from the growing discourse on women's oppression within a male-dominated society. Caught between these two differing representations of femininity is Sam. Like Andrea Bild in *The Fifth Cord* and Greg Moore in *Short Night of Glass Dolls*, he occupies a liminal position within society: an American adrift in Rome, part of the counterculture. What is striking about Sam's interaction with both Monica and Giulia, however, is the way in which both serve to align him with the very establishment from which he and other *M-giallo* protagonists seek to distance themselves. Although Sam's initial interactions with Morosini are fraught with tension (particularly when Morosini confiscates his passport to prevent him from leaving the country), they go on to form something approaching an amicable alliance, with Morosini assisting Sam's amateur investigation by keeping him informed about the progress of the official police inquiry and Sam returning the favour, much like the relationship between Andrea and the Inspector in *The Fifth Cord*. Through its aligning of all its principal male characters – Sam, the police, Rinaldi – with a common goal, the film essentially becomes a narrative about men seeking to apprehend, contain and classify a 'rogue woman' who has defied the constraints placed on her by society.

What is particularly interesting is that these attempts at control extend to Sam's treatment of Giulia, and in this respect I agree with Burke's assessment that both Monica and Giulia are, to varying degrees, the subjects of patriarchal control structures. Throughout the film, Giulia is repeatedly commodified, beginning before she has even appeared on screen when Sam mentions that he plans on "taking her back to the States" with him. Before Giulia is even seen, therefore, she has already been reduced to little more than a commodity – a souvenir of Sam's time in Italy. This commodification extends to the layout of Sam and Giulia's apartment, an 'open plan' affair in which the main room doubles up as both a bedroom and a living room. The bed in which Sam and Giulia sleep and have sex is the centrepiece of the room, thereby thrusting the private aspects of their relationship into the public eye (see Figure 3.9).



**Figure 3.9 – The personal made public: Sam and Giulia's apartment.**

This becomes significant on the only occasion on which Sam instigates a romantic exchange with Giulia rather than the other way around. While Sam and his friend Carlo (Renato Romano) discuss a threatening telephone call received from the killer, Giulia is by the bed, packing their belongings prior to their planned departure from Italy. Mid-conversation, Sam approaches Giulia, ostensibly to help her to shut the overfull case. They begin fooling around and he flings her on to the bed and begins kissing her passionately. By the time Carlo gets up to leave, Sam has partially undressed and he and Giulia are in the throes of passion. Within moments of Carlo's departure, however, Sam abruptly loses interest in Giulia and once again turns his attention to his amateur investigation, leaping off the bed and hurrying out to follow a lead, ignoring Giulia's protestations. The fact that Sam's amorous intentions towards Giulia seem to begin and end with Carlo's presence is incredibly revealing, suggesting that Giulia is only of interest to him in so far as she is something that he can 'show off' to his friend. His seduction of Giulia in this scene therefore reads as him putting on a show for Carlo, 'claiming' Giulia as his own while simultaneously displaying his own sexual potency. Sam's 'ownership' of Giulia, and the curiously insistent way in which he proclaims it in this scene, can be interpreted as a somewhat desperate attempt to reassert control in a society in which the dominance of men is increasingly under threat. Elsewhere in the film, masculinity is presented as weak and compromised, beginning with Sam's encasement in a glass cage and ending with him in tears, hugging Morosini after almost meeting his end at the hands of the crazed, knife-wielding Monica. It is only through his control over the passive Giulia, and Monica's eventual containment, that any semblance of male dominance can be asserted.

To summarise, through Giulia and Monica the film presents two conflicting forms of femininity: one contained and therefore deemed 'acceptable', the other not. Anxieties about femininity dominate the landscape of these films, although any solutions that they offer to the 'woman problem' are, like Rinaldi's final assessment of the nature of Monica's madness, unconvincing and fail to resolve the problems raised by the presence of these characters. As such, women constitute yet another site of ambivalence and uncertainty in these films, contributing, in much the same way as urban spaces and the hostile establishment, to undermining the confidence of the modern man and throwing into doubt the stability of his position in the world.

### 3.6 Conclusion

While *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* marked the beginning of both the *giallo* boom and this chapter, it also serves as an appropriate point at which to bring this discussion to a close, given the extent to which it anticipates and draws together the anxieties expressed in subsequent *M-gialli*. The three films explored in this chapter all situate their protagonists as outsiders caught between established order and their own idealistic desire to assert their independence and individuality. Despite *Short Night of Glass Dolls*' shift in setting from 'liberal' Western Europe to Soviet Prague, Greg Moore is, like his counterparts in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *The Fifth Cord*, a man questioning his own identity and struggling to retain his independence in the face of the machinations of the 'old guard'. The latter appears in many manifestations, from the disbelieving or downright hostile law enforcement figures in all three films to the sinister gatherings of high-ranking establishment figures in both *The Fifth Cord* and *Glass Dolls*.

Central to all three films is the conception of masculinity in the context of the social changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While Greg's plight in *Glass Dolls* is less explicitly gendered than that of Sam Dalmas in *Bird* (whose nemesis is a monstrous, sexual woman) or Andrea Bild in *The Fifth Cord* (whose interaction with his former lover is laced with anxiety), all three films nonetheless throw into sharp relief the plight of men in an uncertain and changing world. Masculinity as conceived in the *M-giallo* is in a process of transition, struggling to adapt to the new expectations placed on it by the ongoing processes of sociocultural transformation. Great pains are taken to establish the *M-gialli*'s protagonists as either literal or metaphorical outsiders, often either foreigners or locals who are estranged from the rest of society. They are shown to cultivate an image of rebelling

against the values of conventional society, while at the same time betraying a powerful anxiety regarding their rootlessness and inability to make sense of the way in which the world and their place in it have changed radically. As with much of *film noir*, the protagonist's quest for meaning and attempts to reassert control are displaced on to the films' investigative framework, through the process of which he tries to impose order on a world disordered by social change. It is through the fact that solving the mystery fails to provide the protagonist with the sense of closure and certainty he craves that the *M-gialli* most strongly reveal their anxieties about the contemporary sociocultural situation and how little control these men have over their own existence. In short, they depict masculinity as compromised and ineffectual.

Prone to inconclusive endings and often exhibiting an overpowering sense of hopelessness, the *M-gialli* make little effort to offer solutions to the anxieties they reveal. Indeed, the fact that the films were so 'of the moment' and the concerns with which they engaged still ongoing at the time of their production means that they are not in a position to offer solutions to problems that remained unresolved in the real world. Rather, they acknowledge and engage with contemporary concerns in an open-ended manner, opening up a discourse on the sociocultural situation in Western Europe in the early 1970s, responding to tensions within society without necessarily being seen to 'take sides'. As a result, the films are laced with contradictions, in particular the protagonist's vacillation between anti-establishment radicalism and latent reactionary tendencies. The latter is most readily apparent in his yearning for the past and in the films' anxieties about women's empowerment, implicit in *Bird*'s depiction of Monica Ranieri as a crazy, castrating 'spider woman' and also expressed through Andrea's disapproval of the changes in Helene's life in *The Fifth Cord*.

As such, *M-giallo* protagonists are portrayed as being between a rock and a hard place, railing against the old establishment while at the same time struggling with feelings of disillusionment and displacement brought about by recent social change. On the one hand, therefore, these films and their protagonists reject the (patriarchal) establishment and all its trappings, while on the other they reinforce it through their treatment of women and lionisation of an apparently more straightforward past, thereby revealing a marked ambivalence towards the then-present sociocultural situation. In the next chapter, this tension will again resurface as I continue to explore the 'woman problem' through the problematic positioning of the central woman within the *F-giallo*, examining the ways in which these films reassert the male power deemed to have been lost as a result of social

change through their victimisation, repression and ultimate exertion of control over these fragile and easily influenced women.

## 4 Central women and fatal men: “Degradation and vice” in the *F-giallo*

### 4.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter investigated the ways in which the *giallo* articulates anxieties about the sociocultural landscape of the early 1970s through its male protagonists and the films in which they feature, this chapter examines how these same concerns are manifested in the films in which female characters take central stage. These films and their brittle, panic-stricken ‘heroines’ (I use quotation marks advisedly) arguably represent the *giallo* in its most immediately recognisable form, exemplified by the films of Sergio Martino and Luciano Ercoli, featuring such icons of the *filoni* as Edwige Fenech and Nieves Navarro/Susan Scott and characterised by their convoluted narratives of paranoia, conspiracy, degradation and vice. In Chapter 3, I illustrated the ways in which the *M-gialli* engage with fears relating to male powerlessness and a loss of traditional, male-privileged structures of control, with their protagonists attempting to negotiate a world in which their roles and identities have become increasingly uncertain. As this chapter will demonstrate, the same concerns also lie at the heart of the *F-gialli*. With the shift in focus from a male to a female central character, however, comes a change in the manner in which these anxieties are articulated.

This chapter begins by establishing the main characteristics of the *F-gialli* and its ‘central woman’, and expanding on my use of this term in place of the more conventional ‘protagonist’. Like the previous chapter, it then examines three core texts in turn, selected from the broader corpus of study. Through examining these texts, I aim to test my hypothesis that, whereas the *M-giallo* constituted an engagement with and ‘opening up’ of contemporary anxieties surrounding sociocultural changes, bringing them to the foreground without necessarily adopting a clear-cut ideological perspective on these developments, the *F-giallo* instead seeks to close them down, and as such represents what Stephen Thrower describes as “a somewhat hardened retrenching into conservatism after the liberal idealism of the late sixties” (2002: 73). I argue that this process of “active recuperation”, to borrow a phrase used by Mary Ann Doane in relation to the ‘women’s films’ of the 1940s (1987: 19-20), is achieved through the deployment of two strategies. The first, dubbed the ‘pathologising’ process, destabilises the central woman by presenting her as unreliable, mentally ill and even dangerous to herself and/or others. This process is



explored in Section 4.3 through the example of *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971), expounding on the dual role of the central woman as both the film's main character and the main 'problem' to be solved. The second strategy, the 'passifying' process, involves placing the central woman in a position of helplessness, using the plot, *mise en scène* and her relationships with other characters to reinforce her lack of power. To that end, in Section 4.4 I examine *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (Martino 1971) and its fragile central woman, exploring the ways in which her powerlessness is conveyed. This section also considers the nature of the F-*giallo*'s male characters and the ways in which they (and their narrative function) differ from the M-*giallo*'s protagonists.

Employed in tandem, these two strategies of exerting control over the central woman constitute a far more proactive, not to mention more overtly reactionary, attempt to redress masculinity and femininity's changing fortunes, and one that recurs repeatedly across the F-*giallo* spectrum. There are exceptions, however, and Section 4.5 acknowledges this by examining *Death Walks at Midnight* (Ercoli 1972), in which these strategies of control are problematized by the presence of a heroine who does not conform to the traditional template of the weak, submissive central woman.

## 4.2 Conceptualising the F-*giallo* central woman

While the names Barbara Bouchet, Edwige Fenech, Marina Malfatti, Nieves Navarro and Anita Strindberg may lack the mainstream recognition of the male actors who headlined numerous M-*gialli*, they are nonetheless the main stars of the F-*giallo*, receiving top billing on the posters and opening credits of the films in which they appeared and boasting a cult following among aficionados of popular Italian cinema. This section aims to establish the main characteristics shared by the characters played by these stars and the ways in which the narrative structure of the F-*giallo* tends to differ from that of the M-*giallo*.

In the previous chapter, I referred to Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), Andrea Bild (Franco Nero) and Greg Moore (Jean Sorel) as the protagonists of their respective films. Typically, the protagonist is considered to be the primary active force in any dramatic work, propelling the plot forward through their actions. In cinema, the spectator typically shares the point of view of the protagonist, who serves as their "avatar" within the world of the film (Devereaux 2002: 387; Yorke 2013: 3). However, as will become clear, these conventions do not apply to the main female characters of the F-*giallo*, making such

terminology unhelpful for the purposes of this discussion. The replacement term that I use throughout this chapter, ‘central woman’, is borrowed from Angela Martin’s essay “‘Gilda Didn’t Do Any of Those Things You’ve Been Losing Sleep Over!’: The Central Women of 40s Films Noirs”.

Martin uses the terms “central woman” and “central female character” interchangeably in reference to the principal female characters in *films noirs*, acknowledging that “not all of them can necessarily be counted as *protagonists*” (1998: 227; see also Cowie 1993: 132-136). Martin’s criteria for a character being labelled a protagonist or not is unclear, though I take her disavowal of the term to stem mainly from the fact that the characters in question are often denied subjectivity and are not necessarily the principal investigators in the films in which they appear. As noted in my discussion of the pre-boom F-*giallo* *The Sweet Body of Deborah* (Guerrieri 1968) in Chapter 1, this is also true of the F-*giallo* central woman, who usually adopts a passive role while the investigation of the central mystery falls instead to the film’s male characters. Some F-*gialli*, among them the Nieves Navarro vehicles *Death Walks at Midnight* and *Death Carries a Cane* (Pradeaux 1973), echo the M-*giallo* in launching the main thrust of the narrative by making the central woman the inadvertent eyewitness to a crime. In most F-*gialli*, however, the inciting incident consists of the central woman herself being attacked or threatened, which establishes her primary narrative function from the outset: to be a victim.

Typical of the *filoni*’s reliance on easily repeatable formulae, the F-*giallo*’s central women remain much the same from one film to the next. As with their male counterparts in the M-*gialli*, much emphasis is placed on their physical attractiveness – in fact arguably more so, given the tendency to cast former or current glamour models and the frequency with which they are shown naked or semi-naked. They are almost always tall, slender and long-haired, and wear ornate, expensive and often outlandish clothing; indeed, as Gary Needham observes, the *giallo* derives considerable appeal from its camp sensibility and the anticipation of the central woman’s “next fabulous outfit” being unveiled (2002).



**Figure 4.1 – Collage of F-giallo central women: Barbara Bouchet in *The Red Queen Kills Seven Times*, Edwige Fenech in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, Dagmar Lassander in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* and Nieves Navarro in *Death Walks at Midnight*.**

Figure 4.1, above, shows a number of *giallo* central women in situations typical of the role. The selection of these images is, to a certain extent, deliberately provocative – as are the films themselves, which put considerable emphasis on the central woman being placed in situations which maximise her erotic appeal and victim status. As such, the central woman is frequently to be seen being terrorised by ruthless, knife-wielding attackers (Figure 4.1, above left), in a state of undress (above right), or bloodied, battered and beaten down, often with her “fabulous outfit” torn to shreds (below right). Typically, she is either unemployed or has a job that requires a minimum level of commitment, allowing plenty of free time for sightseeing, parties and contemplating her boredom with *la dolce vita*. As Kier-La Janisse notes, “[t]he lifestyle depicted in most gialli is one of leisure: women are seen lying down – wearing muumuus, lingerie or other items of lounging attire that imply that they don’t leave the house much – more than they are seen standing up” (2012: 38). The films feature copious scenes in which the central woman relaxes in her swank, modish apartment,

painting her toenails, admiring her reflection in the mirror and emphasising her role as a passive spectacle to be enjoyed by the viewer (Figure 4.1, below left). To further this agenda, modelling is a common profession for the central woman, presumably because of the justification it provides filmmakers for showing her in various provocative poses and stages of undress. In spite of her limited or non-existent income, however, the central woman lives comfortably, often at the expense of a benevolent husband, boyfriend or father. In the absence of these figures, the films rely on artistic license: for instance, no explanation is ever given for how Valentina (Nieves Navarro), *Death Walks at Midnight's* central woman, can afford such a lavish apartment in the heart of Milan, since at no point does this supposed model do any actual modelling work! The support these characters draw from the men in their lives is rarely just financial, however: scenes in which the central woman breaks down and begs her significant other for reassurance and protection are a common sight.

Feminist writing on so-called ‘women’s films’ – primarily melodramas with female central characters, which were designed to appeal to a female audience and experienced considerable popularity in the 1940s – has examined the ways in which such films attempt to explore female subjectivity within the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema, which typically privileges a male point of view. Mary Ann Doane, for example, argues that women’s films concern themselves with “certain psychical mechanisms which have been associated with the female (chiefly masochism, hysteria, and paranoia)”, and that they “attempt in some way to trace female subjectivity and desire”. Nonetheless, she goes on to argue, “because this attempt is made within the traditional forms and conventions of the Hollywood narrative – forms which cannot sustain such an exploration – certain contradictions within patriarchal ideology become apparent” (1999: 70-71). While the main influence on my approach throughout this thesis has been writing on *film noir*, literature on the ‘female gothic’ tradition, a subset of the women’s film that enjoyed considerable popularity in the 1940s and is closely related to *noir*, is also relevant to this discussion. Indeed, in *Hollywood Heroines: Women in Film Noir and the Female Gothic Film* (2007), Helen Hanson opts to cover both traditions within the same volume, drawing attention to their intertextuality and the shared positioning of their heroines.<sup>26</sup> Tania Modleski describes the female gothic film as being about “women who fall in love with or marry men they subsequently begin to fear” (1988: 57). These men “are often suspected of

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, pre-1970s critics also adopted this approach, tending to refer to both the female gothic film and what is now known as *film noir* as ‘melodramas’ (Naremore 2008: 17; Neale 2000: 166).

trying to drive their wives insane, or to murder them as they have murdered other women in the past” (Modleski 2008: 12).

With their central women constantly harangued and on the verge of a nervous breakdown, the *F-giallo* clearly owes something of a debt to this tradition. Indeed, Modleski’s summaries of the typical female gothic plot could almost have been written in response to any number of films featuring Edwige Fenech or her various contemporaries. In the typical *F-giallo*, the central woman is fragile and often sexually repressed, with an emotionally distant or frequently absent husband or boyfriend. Bored by her partner’s lack of attention, she looks further afield and encounters a lifestyle that is more exciting and more decadent than her own, often represented by a suave and enticingly dangerous seducer. This seducer is usually male, though sometimes she is a woman, as in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin* and *All the Colours of the Dark* (Martino 1972). Although initially conflicted, the central woman ultimately gives into the allure of this alternative world and forsakes the trappings of her dull everyday existence. At this point, however, the trap is sprung, and it becomes clear that the aforementioned seducer in fact means the central woman grievous harm. Sometimes, it falls to her previously ineffectual husband or boyfriend to rescue her from her tormenters, although just as often it turns out that he has in fact been in on the scheme all along, having hatched a plan with his co-conspirators to do his wife/girlfriend in, often for financial gain. Various permutations of this overall formula exist, but the core philosophy remains remarkably consistent: to paraphrase Modleski, the central woman falls in love with a greedy, sadistic man who conspires to drive her insane and murder her.

Having now established the principal features of the *F-gialli* and their central women, the remainder of this chapter will examine in more detail the techniques the films employ to contain and disempower these characters.

### **4.3 Pathologising the central woman in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin***

The majority of writing on gender in the *giallo* adopts the tactic, directly or indirectly, of assuming that its female characters conform to one of two distinct archetypes, similar to the tendency of critics of *film noir* to distinguish between virtuous ‘nurturing women’ and deviant *femmes fatales*. This is the approach that Chris Gallant applies to his examination of the heroines and villainesses of the films of Dario Argento, which he argues are strongly

linked to gothic literature in its representation of gender with its “three recurrent character types: the virtuous heroine, the male paranoiac and the sexual woman” (2001c: 50). However, I am unconvinced by this approach’s applicability to the *giallo*, not so much because female characters who predominantly display characteristics considered either virtuous or deviant do not exist in these films, but rather because these differences serve to obfuscate the striking similarities in the way both types of woman are used. In Chapter 3’s discussion of Giulia (Suzy Kendall) and Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Argento 1970), I argued that, while these characters echo many of the traits exhibited by nurturing women and *femmes fatales* respectively, the differences between them are less rigidly defined, and that both are ultimately contained and controlled by men in similar ways. With this section, I aim to go even further, suggesting that, regardless of whether a woman is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, her function within the *giallo* remains broadly the same: that of a ‘problem’ to be solved by the male establishment. In order to most clearly demonstrate this theory in practice, I have opted to examine an F-*giallo* in which the roles of central woman and main villain are occupied by a single character.

Lucio Fulci’s *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin* inhabits what Peter Bondanella describes as “a dysfunctional, fashionable world that rests upon a substratum of drugs, blackmail, self-indulgence, and homosexuality” within the opulent London district of Belgravia (2009: 391). The central woman, Carol Hammond (Florinda Bolkan), is the repressed wife of a highflying lawyer, whose erotically-charged dreams involving sexual encounters between herself and her next door neighbour Julia Durer (Anita Strindberg) are a source of deep anxiety for her. In one such dream, Carol stabs Julia to death and flees, leaving her fur coat at the scene of the crime. The following day, she confesses the dream to her psychiatrist, Dr. Kerr (George Rigaud), who explains it as her subconscious’ way of resolving the conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion she feels towards Julia. Meanwhile, Julia is found dead – murdered in exactly the way Carol described in her dream, with Carol’s coat by the body. Shortly thereafter, Carol is arrested and charged with murder. The remainder of the film unfolds as a classic ‘wrong woman’ scenario, with various male characters – Carol’s husband Frank (Jean Sorel), her father Edmond Brighton (Leo Genn), and the detective in charge of the investigation, Inspector Corvin (Stanley Baker) – first seeking to have the charges against Carol dropped on grounds of insanity and later to prove her innocence. However, the great twist, revealed in the final moments of the film, is that Carol *is* guilty. In reality, she had attempted to escape from the tedium and repression of her everyday life via an affair with Julia. However, when Julia threatened to make the

relationship public, Carol murdered her and then fabricated the dream as an elaborate double bluff.

From the beginning, Carol is clearly established as the central focus of the narrative, with the film going to considerable lengths to imply that the events depicted on the screen are being shown from her point of view. The opening scene consists of what purports to be Carol's dream: a privileged insight into her psyche. From then on, the entire film revolves around her, showing her daily life and then her ordeal as she is accused of murder and then subjected to various threats that may or may not be figments of her imagination. Although its structure is more inventive than that of the cavalcade of F-*gialli* that merely re-appropriate the model established by *The Sweet Body of Deborah*, at its heart *Lizard* conforms to the archetypal premise described in Section 4.2, with Carol giving in to the temptation of a more exciting way of life (Julia Durer and her exotic, drug-fuelled lifestyle) and having to be 'saved' from the consequences of her transgression. This narrative, already densely layered with numerous red herrings and subplots exposing the transgressions of the rich and famous (Frank, for instance, is having an affair with Deborah [Silvia Monti], while it is intimated that his daughter Joan [Ely Galleani] has sexual relations with the hippy Jenny [Penny Brown]), is complicated further by its melding of fantasy and reality.

Bondanella claims that this complexity stems from the fact that "the film basically reflects Carol's point of view, which is totally unreliable" (2009: 392). While I agree that Carol's point of view is unreliable and that she does everything possible to mislead those around her, the fact that so much of what purports to be her point of view is later revealed to be the fabrication of a manipulative but perfectly sane liar renders Bondanella's assertion somewhat questionable. I would argue instead that the film initially *appears to* reflect Carol's point of view, but that this is proven to be false when it is revealed that Carol has in fact deliberately deceived both the spectator and the rest of the film's characters. The point of view reflected by the film is not, therefore, that of Carol but rather of someone taken in by her lies. Over the course of the film, the three characters who are most prepared to believe Carol's account, most adamant that she is telling the truth and most determined to prove her innocence are Frank, Edmond and Inspector Corvin – in other words, the film's principal male characters. I suggest, therefore, that it is *their* point of view that is most strongly conveyed.

Carol therefore succeeds in misleading both the film's amateur and professional sleuths *and* the spectator. In that respect, her immediate counterpart in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, despite her nominal status as *Lizard*'s protagonist, is not Sam Dalmas but rather Monica Ranieri. Within the context of *Lizard*, the spectator fulfils the role of Sam, witnessing but failing to properly interpret the actions of a female character, until her lies are revealed in the film's final moments.<sup>27</sup> Carol, like Monica, presents one face to the world – that of a respectable upper middle class housewife. At the same time, however, she secretly harbours another – one that is not only capable of murder but also threatens both the conception of women as passive victims *and* the heteronormative order.<sup>28</sup> There are, in effect, two Carols, both inhabiting the same body: the mentally disturbed victim of justice gone awry and the manipulative, cold-blooded killer.

This duality is conveyed visually throughout the film, most notably through the white and black striped coat Carol wears in the two dream sequences. The intermingling of these two contrasting colours – symbolic in western culture of 'good' and 'bad' – allude to the contrast between her outwardly respectable appearance and her true nature, which lurks beneath the surface. The coat itself serves as a significant prop, its appearance at the scene of Julia's murder one of the crucial pieces of evidence which alerts the police to Carol's involvement: in a sense, this signifier of her duality becomes one of the vital clues required to decode her true nature. Equally significant is the fact that, in the two dreams, each revelation about hidden aspects of Carol's personality – that she is having an affair with Julia, that she is a murderer – are preceded by the coat being shed, as if that which was previously hidden is being laid bare. Furthermore, the film's title, while essentially nonsensical and presumably selected simply to conform to the trend of including the names of animals in the titles of *gialli* (started by *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*), also alludes to the notion of its central character having an external skin that, over the course of the film, is 'shed'. (See Figure 4.2.)

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<sup>27</sup> A further parallel between Monica and Carol is to be found in the form of a false confession: in *Bird*, Monica's husband Alberto (Umberto Raho) claimed to be the murderer shortly before dying; in *Lizard*, Carol's father Edmond writes a letter confessing to Julia's murder and then takes his own life. It was, in fact, this similarity that first led me to consider the other comparisons that could be drawn between the roles of these two women.

<sup>28</sup> The relationship depicted in the *giallo* between criminal behaviour and non-heteronormative sexuality is explored in Chapter 5.





**Figure 4.2 – Carol’s coat, indicative of her dual nature and a ‘skin’ to be shed.**

The two frames reproduced below in Figure 4.3, showing two photographs of Carol placed at either end of the desk in Edmond’s office, hint at the film’s playful, self-aware nature while at the same time foreshadowing Carol’s dual nature. On the left, traditionally symbolic of evil in western tradition, Carol is shown scowling and seeming almost witch-like in a black veil. The veil itself is suggestive of an inversion of the traditional white worn by brides to their weddings, and also indicative of mourning, thereby associating her with death. Also noteworthy are the intensely red flowers in close proximity to the picture, both evoking blood and recalling the colour of the bed-sheets from Carol’s dreams of her seduction by and murder of Julia. On the right, more commonly associated with righteousness, is a smiling Carol, heavily made-up and wearing a bright floral pattern outfit, with white the predominant hue. So striking are the differences between the two photographs that, as with the two ‘sides’ of Monica Ranieri in *Bird*, it is difficult to believe that they are the same person. Positioned between the two photographs, blithely unaware of this harbinger of Carol’s double nature, is her ever-credulous husband Frank.



**Figure 4.3 – The two Carols: black (top) and white (bottom).**

In her analysis of Alfred Hitchcock's *noir*-infused melodrama *Rebecca* (1940), Modleski argues that the reason the character of Rebecca cannot be tolerated is her multiplicity: her ability to both play the part of the model wife and to engage in multiple extramarital affairs (1988: 54). By the same token, it is Carol's use of one persona, i.e. that of an innocent victim, to conceal her real nature as a duplicitous killer that seems to most offend Inspector Corvin's sensibilities when he finally confronts her with the truth. Corvin concludes spitefully that she is "nothing more or less than a murderess", his use of the highly gendered term "murderess" rather than the neutral 'murderer' creating an indelible link between Carol's femininity and her duplicity. The two Carols are therefore not the product

of a “split personality”, as suggested by Dr. Kerr, but rather of a woman who has fabricated a false identity and mental illness in order to get away with murder. A woman with secrets, it is inferred, is dangerous, and as long as her true intentions remain hidden she cannot truly be ‘known’. It is only by unmasking her ‘true face’ and thereby demystifying and explaining her that the threat she poses can be contained.

Of course, the vast majority of the F-*giallo*’s central women are not villains in the mould of Carol Hammond. In *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, for instance, Julie Wardh is a traditional ‘damsel in distress’ who commits no overtly villainous acts, and it is she (and predecessors such as Deborah (Carroll Baker) in *The Sweet Body of Deborah*) rather than Carol who provides the template for the typical central woman. The need to explain and contain, however, is equally pronounced regardless of the central woman’s guilt or innocence, as evinced by that fact that attempts by *Lizard*’s male characters to control Carol and explain what is ‘wrong’ with her precede any suggestion that she is guilty of murder. As the film begins, it is established that Carol makes frequent visits to Dr. Kerr, who interprets her dreams and offers her advice on how to reconcile herself with their troubling nature. The figure of the elder male psychiatrist, who offers reassurance to the emotionally disturbed central woman and attempts to get to the bottom of her anxieties, is a regular fixture in the F-*giallo* and a key instrument in their pathologisation of women. Indeed, in her exploration of female psychosis in horror and exploitation films, Janisse claims that the *gialli* “tend to incapacitate women by medicating them just as often as by killing them” (2012: 38). For instance, a similar figure, played by the same actor, George Rigaud, appears in *All the Colours of the Dark*, advising central woman Jane Harrison (Edwige Fenech) on her sexual dysfunction and the meaning of her lurid nightmares, both of which stem from a combination of the murder of her mother and her own miscarriage following a car accident.

During the therapy sessions in *Lizard*, Carol’s dual nature is once again hinted at in Kerr’s assessment of the role Julia Durer fulfils in her dreams:

Kerr – “In your dreams, you always see her dressed as a striptease artist or a prostitute. In fact, that woman for you represents degradation and vice. [...] You’ve referred to this woman before as someone who is not... *quite* respectable.”

Carol – “No, she certainly isn’t(!)”

Kerr – “That’s it. Your conscience forces you to disapprove of that woman’s way of life. But, at the same time, her freedom excites your curiosity. You feel attracted. This conflict, which is responsible for your actual state of anxiety, explains the recurrence of your dream.”

Two aspects of this conversation are interesting. Firstly, Kerr directly alludes to Carol’s duality through his reference to the “conflict” between her conscience (representative of her dull, ordered, upper middle class life) and her feelings of attraction towards Julia (the more dangerous and exotic alternative world to which so many of the F-*giallo*’s central women find themselves drawn). Secondly, he classifies this duality as a mental disorder upon which her anxieties can be blamed. While Kerr fails to realise at this stage that the ‘repressed’ part of Carol extends not merely to “degradation and vice” but also murder, the self-assured manner in which he pathologises her nonetheless evokes Rinaldi (Giovanni Di Benedetto)’s summing up of Monica Ranieri’s psychosis in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, thereby again linking the F-*giallo* central woman to that film’s antagonist rather than its protagonist.

Kerr is not the only character who attempts to pathologise Carol, although as a psychiatrist his opinion is seen to carry the most ‘official’ weight within the context of the film (as evinced by Frank and Edmond’s reliance on Kerr to validate their theory that Carol has a split personality disorder). Her father Edmond is repeatedly shown expressing concern about his daughter’s state of mind, although his advice is even less practical than the cod-psychoanalysis practiced by Kerr. “If you got a little drunk every night instead of spending all that money on Dr. Kerr,” Edmond advises Carol when she turns down his offer of brandy, “it’d soon cure your insomnia.” Having failed to convince Carol of the merits of drowning her anxieties in brandy, he later draws Frank aside and advises him to “take her away for a bit”, adding that “a little trip might do her the world of good”. These attempts to classify and control Carol extend to Edmond and Frank’s later attempts, in collaboration with Kerr, to demonstrate that she could suffer from a split personality disorder and therefore have killed Julia without being aware of it. Far better, it would seem, to label Carol mentally ill than acknowledge the possibility of her being sane but evil.

This, and the imprecise and often trivial observations made about Carol's state of mind, reveal an intense need on the part of the film's male characters to ascribe a condition to her (insomnia, for instance) and then prescribe a remedy (getting drunk!). In addition to mirroring Kerr's attempts to analyse and treat Carol, they also anticipate the film's denouement, in which Inspector Corvin goes to great lengths to explain Carol's motive for killing Julia and then fabricating such an elaborate cover-up, before leading her away to an awaiting police car. In effect, Corvin too diagnoses Carol's condition – she is “nothing more or less than a murderess” – then prescribes one final and conclusive remedy: prison. As such, just as Monica and Giulia in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* both constituted examples of caged femininity, Carol-as-central-woman and Carol-as-killer both constitute women who signify a problem to be solved, explained and contained by the male establishment.

It must be acknowledged that the pathologisation of women is not a phenomenon specific to the *giallo* or the sociocultural milieu in which they were produced. Throughout history, there has been a tendency to classify ‘transgressive’ women as mentally ill, while at the same time also pathologising women who exhibit characteristics associated with ‘normal’ femininity, for instance passivity and submissiveness. The resulting “double bind” (Gilbert and Rader 2002: 268) is readily apparent in *Lizard* in the pathologising of Carol both before and after she is charged with murder. What distinguishes the *gialli* from other cases of female pathologisation throughout history is the films' harnessing of specific anxieties regarding contemporary late 1960s/early 1970s sociocultural developments as ‘evidence’ of the need to control and contain women. For instance, in *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (Carnimeo 1972), Jennifer Lansbury (Edwige Fenech) has fled a free love ‘flower child’ collective and is still hounded by its sinister leader (Ben Carra), while *All the Colours of the Dark* exploits a then-emergent paranoia regarding Satanists, implying that they prey on vulnerable, emotionally fragile women. The latter also responds to the increasing prevalence of drug-taking in the 1960s and 1970s by revealing the film's satanic cult to be a front for a ring of dealers. Similarly *Lizard*, with its portrayal of Julia Durer's flat as a den of iniquity, populated by drug addicts, hippies and an unscrupulous, blackmailing lesbian, trades in a widespread contemporary fear and distrust of countercultural movements. Early in the film, a dinner party at the Hammonds' residence is contrasted with a party of another sort taking place next door in Julia's flat: a drug-fuelled orgy in which the participants gyrate to Ennio Morricone's jazz-infused score, stare vacantly at the camera in a drug-addled stupor, strip naked and engage in sex acts with multiple partners of both sexes. Despite the strained civility in the Hammonds' flat, it is clear that both

Carol, constantly pensive and distracted, and her stepdaughter Joan, seen surreptitiously tapping her foot to the beat of the music emanating from next door, are at Julia's party in spirit if not in body. The filmmakers employ a combination of crosscutting and split-screen effects to drive home the differences between the debauchery of Julia's party and the strained civility of the Hammonds' soirée.

The generally reactionary nature of these films, and their implicit distrust of all things 'new age', is made all the more striking by the fact that the very counterculture that the *F-gialli* exploit as a threat to their central women is the same one with which *M-giallo* protagonists like Sam Dalmas in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* aligned themselves. Obviously, Sam and his counterparts were never depicted engaging in orgies or satanic rituals, but it is intriguing that, whereas in the *M-gialli* the protagonists themselves are social outcasts, in the *F-gialli* the main threat posed to the central woman so often comes from those that exist on the margins of society. Typical of the *giallo*'s tendency to avoid subscribing to a clear-cut ideological stance, such a reading is problematized by the fact that, in a number of *F-gialli*, the central woman's supposedly 'safe' husband, emblematic of the establishment and patriarchal order, is in fact one of the villains, often working in tandem with 'outside' forces, as in *Wardh* and *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (Ercoli 1970). This does not, however, diminish the fact that, for a sizeable portion of their running time, these films deal in imagery of women being terrorised by hippies, Satanists, drug addicts/dealers and other assorted symbols of 'otherness'. Just as the *femme fatale*'s ultimate destruction does not diminish her enduring image as powerful and unrepressed (Bell 2010: 105; Place 1998: 148), the last-minute revelation of the often bland and forgettable husband's complicity in the central woman's persecution is typically a less potent image than, for instance, the sadistic blackmailer played by the roguish yet charismatic Simón Andreu raping and playing mind games with Minou (Dagmar Lassander) in *Forbidden Photos*. As such, regardless of the considerable amount of cynicism these films direct towards the supposedly civilised society from which their central women try to escape, this is superseded by a far more intense distrust of the 'alternative' lifestyles through which they seek liberation from the mundanity of their everyday existence. This premise also extends to the portrayal of Carol: regardless of Corvin's summation of her as calculating and completely sane in the final scene, the film's defining image of Carol is of a fragile, harried and hopelessly insane 'damsel in distress'. Her fabricated dreams and psychosis are therefore more enduring than the harsh reality.

To summarise, the F-*giallo* effectively present *two* concurrent mysteries to be solved: that posed by the identity of the killer and that posed by the central character. Both must be unmasked and apprehended – literally in the sense of the killer, more figuratively in the sense of the central character and her pathology. By conflating the two roles of killer and central woman, *Lizard* draws particular attention to this phenomenon and sheds considerable light on the general attitude of the *giallo* towards women and their function within these films. Women, in short, are coded as an unknown and therefore dangerous quantity that must be investigated and explained in order that their hidden nature be revealed and demystified. As a result, while the murder-mystery framework of these films is normally geared around the unmasking and apprehending of a psychotic killer, more often than not the true mystery is the central woman herself.

#### **4.4 ‘Passifying’ the central woman in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh***

Having explored the ways in which the F-*gialli* pathologise their central women, I now propose to examine the second of the two strategies employed by these films to ‘close down’ the anxieties generated by the notion of women’s emancipation: the process that I have termed ‘passifying’ the central woman. Note that throughout this section, I use the word ‘passify’ and various derivations thereof, which are not recognised by any dictionary to which I have referred. This is not a misspelling of ‘pacify’ but rather a word that I have devised as a means of conveying the films’ processes of rendering their central women passive and without agency. This section examines the ways in which this ‘passification’ is achieved in the F-*giallo*, referring primarily to Sergio Martino’s *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*.

In contrast to the more structurally adventurous *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin*, *Wardh* follows the F-*giallo* formula described in Section 4.2 almost exactly. In this film, Julie (Edwige Fenech), wife to the First Secretary of the American Embassy in Vienna, Neil Wardh (Alberto de Mendoza), begins receiving veiled threats from Jean (Ivan Rassimov), with whom she once had a sadomasochistic relationship. Julie attempts to escape from Neil’s indifference and Jean’s threats by embarking on a passionate affair with the rakish George Corot (George Hilton), whose specialty is “courting ladies in the presence of their husbands”. However, when Julie and George elope to Spain, Jean follows them, breaking into their villa, subduing Julie and staging her suicide. In the aftermath, with Julie

apparently dead, George, Neil and Jean are revealed as co-conspirators who planned the 'suicide' together in order to split the proceeds of Julie's life insurance policy. George, however, double-crosses Jean and shoots him dead. Later, as George and Neil drive through the countryside, celebrating their success, Neil believes he sees Julie standing by the roadside. As they drive back to confirm the sighting, the police close in and, in the chase that follows, their car skids off the road, killing them both. In the final moments, it is revealed that Julie is indeed still alive, spirited away by the police after they grew suspicious of George and Neil. With order restored, Julie is driven away from the scene by the kindly Dr. Arbe (Manuel Gil), the man who saved her life following the staged suicide and whose guidance, it is intimated, will now provide her with the security she sorely needs.

Even from this brief synopsis, one of the defining features of the *F-giallo* is immediately apparent: the passing of the central woman from one man to another, to each of whom she submits herself totally. Julie's life can be divided into a series of 'stages' of relative harmony, each of which concludes with a 'crisis' which leads to her forsaking her present lover and seeking refuge in the arms of another. This is realised quite literally, given the sheer number of scenes in which Julie clings first to Neil, then George, then finally Arbe, imploring them (explicitly or implicitly) to protect her from the villainy of her previous partner(s). During each of the stages depicted in the film, Julie looks to her current lover as a means to escape from the failings of her previous relationship: Neil, whom she describes as "quiet but like a rock", provides a counterpoint to Jean's sadism, while by the same token the adventurous and passionate George is the polar opposite of the stolid Neil. An early scene demonstrates this dynamic in action and establishes the pattern that the remainder of the film will follow. Julie, having left a raucous party to which she was invited by her friend Carol (Conchita Airoidi), is accosted by Jean in a deserted street. Neil pulls up in his car and approaches Jean, who squares up to him. As Julie watches, Neil punches Jean on the jaw. Jean departs, chuckling sinisterly, and Julie collapses into Neil's arms, overcome by emotion. In effect, this scene serves as a microcosm of the film as a whole: one man ill-treats Julie, another steps in to save her, and they fight for 'ownership' of her while she watches passively from the sidelines.

It is from this cycle of repetition rather than the traditional 'whodunit' investigation that *Wardh* and the *F-gialli* derive the bulk of their tension. As observed in Chapter 1, *Wardh* and numerous subsequent *F-gialli* attempt to meld the psychological melodrama of earlier *F-gialli* like *The Sweet Body of Deborah* with the body count thrills of *Blood and Black*



*Lace* (Bava 1964) and *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. In *Wardh*, the two ‘strands’ remain largely separate, however, with the whodunit element taking the form of a subplot involving a razor-wielding serial killer murdering various women throughout Vienna and only briefly crossing over into the ‘Julie strand’ when she is menaced by the killer in a multi-storey car park. (It is later revealed that the triumvirate of George, Neil and Jean had originally plotted to use these unconnected killings as cover for their own murder of Julie.) This double-stranded approach allows the filmmakers to depict a campaign of victimisation concentrated on a single central woman while still providing a copious amount of blood and bodies, but means that the film adheres less to the murder-mystery tradition than initially appears to be the case. Since Julie never investigates either this secondary mystery or the campaign of terror directed against her, the label of ‘amateur detective’, applicable to virtually every *M-giallo* protagonist, does not apply to her. The film, therefore, surprises the spectator not by usurping expectations as to the killer’s identity but rather by constantly reconfiguring the abuser/rescuer dynamic, revealing each apparent ‘white knight’ who comes to Julie’s aid to be yet another tormenter. In addition to emphasising the crucial difference between the *M-giallo* and the *F-giallo* (i.e. that in the *F-giallo* it is the central woman’s psychosis rather than the killer’s identity that is the main puzzle to be overcome), this also serves to underscore Julie’s passive role within the film.

Throughout the film, this process of passification is also achieved through the *mise en scène*. Julie is frequently photographed from a high angle, often gazing up at the camera in dread, with Fenech’s pallid complexion and heavy mascara accentuating her terror-stricken eyes. Numerous compositions show Julie cowering behind or clinging to one of her male ‘protectors’, and her body language – rigid, often with her arms folded or hugging herself – emphasises her reticent, defensive nature. On several occasions she faints or seems to be on the verge of fainting, leading to her having to be either carried or heavily supported by one or more men. Similarly, when she loses consciousness in the villa in Spain after being drugged by Jean, his staging of her suicide involves posing her as if she were a doll. A lengthy scene in which George takes her for a ride on his moped, showing off the countryside outside Vienna, is also illuminating in regard to Julie’s inability to control or affect the outcome of the narrative. In this scene, she clings to George for dear life and begs him to stop, but her pleas fall on deaf ears. The scene serves as a metaphor for Julie’s plight in the film as a whole: she is literally just ‘along for the ride’, powerless to affect either the journey (i.e. the narrative) or the destination (its ultimate conclusion), both of which are entirely determined by the male characters into whose care she entrusts herself.

In addition to this scene, Julie's passive role is vividly conveyed in the second of the two flashback dream sequences recounting her past. In this sequence, Julie lies on a bed as Jean pours wine over her, then proceeds to smash the bottle and use the jagged stump to rip open her negligée, cutting her in the process. Quite apart from Julie's inherently masochistic role in this dynamic (which, it is alleged on numerous occasions, she at least partially enjoyed – Jean describes her as having “a blood fetish that turns her on”, and George claims that blood “excites and repels her at the same time”), the way in which the sequence is shot also underscores her powerlessness. A long shot shows Julie lying below Jean, unmoving and submissive, while subsequent high-angle close-ups show her staring up at the camera in terror, frozen like a rabbit in the headlights. These close-ups emphasise her overall passivity and her position of helplessness, which is further underscored when Jean opens her torn negligée, exposing her breast and increasing the sense of her vulnerability. Meanwhile, the intercut shots of Jean, photographed from a low angle, emphasise the control he wields over her. (See Figure 4.4.)



**Figure 4.4 – *Mise en scène* emphasises Julia's passivity.**

Also crucial to undermining the central woman's agency is her tendency to disappear for lengthy stretches of the *F-giallo*'s running time, during which the focus falls on other (typically male) characters who advance the narrative in her absence. Of course, cutaways to scenes involving secondary characters can be found in every *giallo*, whether their central

character is male or female. Often, these are designed to build tension, especially in the case of the ubiquitous stalking scenes in which the killer targets his/her next victim. However, many *F-gialli* go one step further, jettisoning the central woman from the narrative entirely once she has served her initial purpose as damsel in distress, only bringing her back for the requisite coda in order to demonstrate that she has been 'contained'. For instance, barring the denouement in which her guilt is revealed, Carol only appears in a single scene during the final twenty minutes of *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, the remaining material consisting almost exclusively of the police investigation led by Inspector Corvin.

The same technique is employed to striking effect in *Wardh*, in which, with fifteen minutes remaining before the film's end, Julie appears to die. Following a brief scene in which her 'death' is communicated to the seemingly bereft George and Neil, the action relocates to the desert, where a showdown between George and Jean takes place. What is particularly interesting about this scene is that, along with jettisoning its central woman, it also abandons the traditional iconography of the *giallo* (confining modernist architecture, black-gloved assassins, gory knife attacks, and so on) in favour of that of "the most 'male' of all popular genres" (Schneider 1998: 149): the western. Numerous *giallo* filmmakers, including *Wardh*'s director, Sergio Martino, previously plied their trade in the 'spaghetti' western *filone*, and the influence of this earlier cycle can be keenly felt in this scene. Multiple western mainstays are apparent: the stark, wide open desert setting; the plot device of a tense stand-off between two men; tight close-ups of the characters' faces and eyes as they stare at one another from across the plain; and also the introduction, in a film in which the primary murder weapon seen thus far has been a safety razor, of a gun. (See Figure 4.5.)



**Figure 4.5 – Western iconography re-appropriated in the *giallo*.**

This process is also evident on a lesser scale in *Death Walks at Midnight*, in which the climactic battle between the film's drug cartel villains and the male lead, Gio Baldi (Simón Andreu), takes place on the rooftops of Milan. Like the desert stand-off in *Wardh*, this sequence abandons the enclosed interior locales and bloody stabbings that have dominated the previous ninety minutes, instead emphasising the expansive open spaces afforded by the rooftop setting, along with kicks, punches and gunfire.

The replacement in both films of knives with guns makes for a particularly interesting departure. The subsequent deaths of George and Neil, which occur off-screen as their car plunges off a cliff, are also strikingly different from those of their female counterparts. This trend is, in fact, repeated across all three of this chapter's core texts: male villains tend to be dispatched by gunshot or tumbling from a precipice, but they are rarely stabbed. Their female victims, on the other hand, are typically subjected to visceral stabbings carried out at close range. Many would no doubt be tempted to apply a psychoanalytical

reading to this distinction, suggesting a Freudian relationship between the killer's knife penetrating his female victims' flesh and penetration of a sexual nature. There is unquestionably a degree of 'intimacy' to the act of stabbing, in that it requires the attacker to get close to his/her victim, and these carnal connotations were certainly not lost on the *giallo*'s filmmakers, with their tendency to eroticise the murders of women.<sup>29</sup> My own interpretation, however, is somewhat less abstract. By its very nature, stabbing is a messy and chaotic act, in keeping with the tangled and confusing nature of the F-*giallo* narrative and the central woman's mental trauma. A bullet, on the other hand, is cleaner and more impersonal, fired from a distance. Therefore, while George's killing of Jean is devoid of any of the sexual symbolism that could be inferred from the previous murders, it also lacks their messiness and confusion. It is somehow more definitive; more authoritative. Similarly, while the aforementioned rooftop fight in *Midnight* is frenetically paced and extremely physical with its copious kicks and punches, the absence of music and the obviously rehearsed choreography make it seem far more ordered and controlled than the gory murders of women that take place earlier in the film, most of which are accompanied by dissonant, atonal music.

Therefore, although *Wardh*'s clear re-appropriation of western iconography is the exception rather than the rule, it does reflect a broader shift that takes place towards the end of the majority of F-*gialli*. In these scenes, the central woman is typically absent entirely or at least subdued to the point of being incapable of impacting the proceedings (in a particularly striking example, Minou spends the duration of *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*'s climax lying unconscious on the floor). This leaves the male characters, both bad and good, to resolve the film's central conflict amongst themselves, fighting over the central woman – the bad men so that they can kill her, the good men so that they can save her. It is almost too coincidental that it is in these scenes, with the central woman 'out of action', that the truth about the villains' scheme is finally revealed or, in the case of *Lizard*, the police investigation is allowed to take centre stage, displacing the feminine-coded confusion and disorder that has so far defined the film in favour of masculine-coded logic and order. At no other point in these films is it clearer that the F-*giallo* is not really about the central woman's subjective experience but rather that of the various men who seek to control her.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for instance, the infamous 'panty-ripping' scene in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, in which the victim, after having her underwear torn off, is penetrated vaginally by the killer's blade, or indeed the sheer number of murders of female characters across the *giallo* spectrum in which the victim is at least partially undressed.

In *Wardh*, as in the *F-giallo* as a whole, these men can typically be divided into three categories: the seemingly unthreatening husband from whose blandness and/or lack of affection the central woman seeks to escape (in this case Neil), the overtly sinister “pervert” who lurks on the sidelines and threatens her (Jean), and the debonair playboy who seems genuine in his affections but is often revealed to have malign intentions (George). That is not to suggest that all three archetypes appear without fail in every *F-giallo*, but broadly speaking each significant male character will correspond to one of these models. Each bears little resemblance to the *M-giallo* protagonist, whose defining characteristics are his compromised and self-doubting nature. The *F-giallo*’s men, in contrast, show remarkable self-confidence and ease in their own skin. The term ‘*homme fatal*’ – literally, ‘fatal man’ – has gained traction in recent years as a means of describing a man who uses his masculinity to entrap and engineer the downfall of women – an inversion of the role performed by the *femme fatale* in *film noir*. A number of actors who appeared in *noirs* have been associated with the *homme fatal* persona, among them Jean Gabin (Vincendeau 2000: 62) and Alain Delon (Straayer 2004: 371). The latter is, in Chris Straayer’s words, “handsome, covetous, enticing, duplicitous, unknowable, and fatal. His soon-to-be-victim [...] is irresistibly drawn to him. The attraction is her downfall” (2004: 371). I would suggest that this description is also perfectly suited to George and to a lesser extent Jean in *Wardh*: charismatic ‘bad boys’ who seduce Julie and then betray her. Theirs is not a troubled masculinity, but it is a *troubling* one.

Relating the *F-giallo*’s ‘*hommes fatals*’ to the *femme fatale* phenomenon within *film noir* is instructive because it sheds light on the function these male characters fulfil within the wider context of the *giallo*’s engagement with contemporary sociocultural concerns. Just as numerous *noir* critics have theorised that the *femme fatale* does not literally reflect a fear of powerful female sexuality but rather broader uncertainties surrounding masculinity and its displacement (see Chapter 2), it would be overly simplistic to take the *F-gialli* at face value and read them as treatises on the dangers awaiting women who become involved with unscrupulous men. At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that the *F-gialli* attempt to close down rather than open up anxieties surrounding sociocultural change. In attempting to return women to their ‘proper’ place – i.e. the traditional heteronormative pairing in which they are subordinate to a protective male partner<sup>30</sup> – a threat must be created from which they can be saved. The *hommes fatals* serve as a symbol of this threat, but are not

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<sup>30</sup> As with all of the conventions observed throughout the thesis, it is important to acknowledge that they are to an extent generalisations and that exceptions do exist. *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, discussed in Chapter 5, concludes with a playful and genuinely daring inversion of the typical ‘heterosexual happy ending’.

scrutinised in the same way that the central woman's mental state is picked apart and pathologised. As Steve Neale observes, in assuming a male norm, mainstream cinema continually subjects women to investigation while failing to subject men to the same level of scrutiny (1993: 19; see Chapter 2). This phenomenon is readily apparent in the *F-giallo*, whereby the threat posed by the *homme fatal* is not gendered in the way that the central woman's psychosis is, meaning that they, and more broadly their domination and victimisation of the central woman, avoid scrutiny while the central woman is labelled unstable, mentally ill and in need of saving – both from the *homme fatal* and from herself. (Julie explicitly tells Carol that “what I need is protection against myself”, which might be read as a reference to her run of bad luck with her lovers, or to the masochistic tendencies she attempts to suppress.) The *F-giallo* thereby reveals one of its inherent contradictions: its defining image of its male characters is a profoundly negative one, and yet the overarching desire to return to the *status quo* at the end requires that the film conclude with a male character ‘getting the girl’. This means that even when the closing credits roll, a sense of uncertainty remains implicit: it is tempting to suggest that a sequel to *Wardh* could easily have been produced in which Arbe too turns out to have villainous intentions towards Julie.

In the final scene of *All the Colours of the Dark*, just before the image freezes and the credits roll, the film's central woman, Jane Harrison, clings to her partner Richard (George Hilton), who has just killed the main villain in order to save her, and declares: “Oh Richard, I'm so frightened. I feel as if some strange force were controlling me. Oh darling, help me!” While the “force” to which Jane refers is her apparent ‘second sight’,<sup>31</sup> which causes her to witness events before they have actually occurred but leaves her powerless to affect their outcome, her comment is quite prescient to the themes of this section. She, like all *F-giallo* central women, is subject to various controlling forces in the form of the men who exert power over her and shape the direction of her life. Throughout its running time, the *F-giallo* pits one male lover against another in an unending battle for control over the central woman, rendering her an ineffectual and passive figure within her own film. In the end, the various methods of control employed throughout the *F-giallo* – medication, psychoanalysis, drinking, etc. – all fail. It is only a return to the conventional heterosexual pairing at the end of the film, reinforcing traditional patriarchal order without the aid of modern medicine or new age therapy, that signals closure.

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<sup>31</sup> *All the Colours of the Dark* is unusual in the *giallo* canon in its marriage of a conventional ‘whodunit’ plot with a number of supernatural elements, including Jane's clairvoyance. Bearing a striking resemblance to *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski 1968), it was reedited for its American release, with many of the typical *giallo* elements removed in order to present the film as a more purely supernatural horror movie (Totaro 2007).



As these two sections have demonstrated, the central woman is the focal point of the *F-giallo* but is neither an avatar for the spectator nor the primary active force that drives the narrative forward. Rather, she is presented a mystery to be first solved and then contained by the film's male characters. Having now demonstrated both of these processes in action, I propose, for this chapter's final case study, to examine *Death Walks at Midnight*, a film which usurps many of the conventions that have so far been established. While I do not believe that an exception necessarily always proves the rule, *Midnight* does lay bare the *F-giallo*'s 'inner workings' through its inclusion of a heroine who is quite blatantly incompatible with the underlying narrative framework. This final section thereby serves as an ideal point at which to conclude this discussion of the *F-giallo*.

#### **4.5 Broken windows, broken rules: Valentina in *Death Walks at Midnight***

At the height of the *giallo* boom, producer turned director Luciano Ercoli attempted to launch his wife, Spanish actress Nieves Navarro, as a rival to Edwige Fenech (Smith 1999: 29). Billed as "Susan Scott", she appeared in numerous *gialli*, often in supporting roles. After a memorable turn as the central woman's bisexual best friend in Ercoli's first *giallo*, *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, Navarro went on to play the central woman in three subsequent *gialli*, the first two of which were also directed by her husband: *Death Walks on High Heels* (Ercoli 1971), *Death Walks at Midnight* and *Death Carries a Cane*. In each of these films, Navarro plays largely the same character: a feisty, sassy, sexually assertive socialite who, if not self-sufficient, then certainly succeeds in manipulating the men in her life into providing everything she needs.

In *Midnight*, the third and final *giallo* on which she collaborated with her husband, Navarro plays Valentina, a Milanese fashion model who is persuaded by her friend, roguish reporter Gio Baldi, to sample a new hallucinogenic, "HDS", for his exclusive report on its effects. While under the influence of the drug, Valentina sees a man wearing dark glasses (Claudio Pellegrini) bludgeoning a woman to death with a medieval spiked glove. Everyone, from Gio to Valentina's laidback sculptor boyfriend Stefano (Peter Martell) to the gruff Inspector Seripa (Carlo Gentili), dismisses what she saw as a hallucination brought on by the drug, but Valentina insists that she witnessed an actual murder taking place in the apartment adjacent to hers. Refusing to back down, she carries out her own investigation in the face of scorn and condescension from all and sundry, who continue to disbelieve her



even when she is herself threatened on numerous occasions. Eventually, the campaign of terror against Valentina is revealed as the work of Stefano, who turns out to be a local drug boss who started his relationship with her because of the view provided of a competitor's base of operations by her apartment. A showdown occurs as Gio comes to Valentina's aid, drawing Stefano and his two henchmen, Juan (Raúl Aparici) and Hans (Luciano Rossi), to the rooftops, where a vicious fight ensues. Gio manages to dispatch Juan, but is himself only saved at the last minute by a timely intervention by Valentina, who shoots Stefano dead. They in turn are rescued by the arrival of the police, who shoot Hans from an adjacent building.

In his review in *Blood and Black Lace*, Adrian Luther Smith disparages the film's "frankly risible" storyline, lamenting that "[a]lthough spunky Susan is chased and menaced throughout the film we never really believe that she will come to any lasting harm" (1999: 29). While I share Smith's observation about the lack of any palpable threat to "spunky Susan", I feel that this actually makes the film far more interesting than he gives it credit for being. Navarro's screen persona, which remains broadly consistent throughout all the *gialli* in which she appeared,<sup>32</sup> seems almost designed to be incompatible with the role of *F-giallo* central woman which, as established in the previous section, calls upon her to be almost entirely passive, reacting to events orchestrated by others. As if in recognition of this incongruity, the film's premise, revolving around Valentina inadvertently witnessing a murder, owes more to the 'compromised eyewitness' tradition of the *M-giallo* than the *F-giallo*, as does her active role in the investigation which follows. Indeed, for the bulk of the film's duration, Valentina is the *only* active investigator, given that everyone else, including the comically incompetent police force, refuses to take her seriously or act on her information.

Valentina's active rather than passive nature in comparison to other central women is not restricted to her role in the murder investigation. The *mise en scène*, too, contributes on numerous occasions to conveying a sense of her being in control. The opening title sequence, for instance, shows her moving from one area to another in her chic, open plan apartment, drawing the curtains and repositioning various accoutrements in preparation for Gio's arrival for the HDS experiment. While the setting and her activities within it incontrovertibly align Valentina with the domestic in the same manner as many other *F-giallo* central women, her control of the apartment space (in which she lives alone, unlike

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<sup>32</sup> In addition to the *gialli* already mentioned in this section, Navarro also appears in secondary roles in *All the Colours of the Dark*, as the duplicitous sister of the central woman, ironically enough played by her 'rival', Edwige Fenech, and *So Sweet, So Dead* (Montero 1972), as an adulteress.

most central women) through her movement and sense of purpose are readily evident. This is further emphasised by the fact that Gio and his two assistants are forced to wait outside the apartment while Valentina finishes her preparations, before finally opening the door just as Gio leans against it. This leads to the film's first pratfall as Gio lands on the floor while Valentina smiles and laughs knowingly, emphasising the power she wields not just over the setting but also over Gio. The décor, too, strongly asserts Valentina's control of the apartment in the form of the massive portrait of her which hangs on the wall over her futon, dominating every shot in which it appears and emphasising the power of her gaze (see Figure 4.6).



**Figure 4.6 – Valentina's likeness dominates her apartment.**

It is through Valentina's fiery personality, however, that her difference from the typical *F-giallo* central woman is most vividly conveyed. Throughout the film, she responds to the hurdles she encounters not in the central woman's typically retiring manner but rather with displays of indignance, righteous anger and even violence. Shortly after losing a modelling

job due to negative publicity stemming from Gio's article about her drug-taking, she turns up at Gio's office, throws an ashtray at him, tries to physically assault him and, after being forced from the premises, smashes his window by hurling a rock through it. Throughout this scene and her subsequent police interview after being arrested, Navarro's body language stands in stark contrast to that of Edwige Fenech in *Wardh*. While Fenech portrays Julie Wardh as guarded and subdued, Valentina is imbued with a confidence that borders on arrogance: she struts with her shoulders flung back and her head held high, leans insolently on Inspector Seripa's desk, and rolls her eyes as he chastises her for her behaviour.

As the film progresses, Valentina's tendency towards action rather than reaction is apparent in her habit of running headlong into danger rather than avoiding it. For instance, when she spots the killer she saw in her 'hallucination' in a crowded street, *she* pursues *him* rather than the other way round, in stark contrast to Julie Wardh, who repeatedly hurries into the arms of either George or Neil whenever Jean materialises. This scene, with its pounding music and swift intercutting between shots of the killer fleeing and Valentina leading the pursuit while Gio trails behind her, play as an inversion of many a scene in which the harried F-*giallo* central woman is pursued by her assailant. On another occasion, she fights off a rape attempt by kicking her attacker in the testicles, leaving him writhing as she rushes to alert the police. That is not to suggest that there are not plenty of instances in which Valentina is menaced and forced to run away in fear of her life, but the fact that the film has established her as so plucky and able to take care of herself means that the character never truly feels like a victim. As a result, typical F-*giallo* shorthand such as trapping her and the killer in an abandoned building lacks the potency of similar situations involving other central women.

Smith's comment that "we never really believe that [Valentina] will come to any lasting harm" (1999: 29) is revealing in this regard. While his assertion is to a large degree subjective, the fact that the film's failure to elicit either terror from its central woman or concern on her behalf is treated as such a fundamental flaw in his review says a great deal about the way the F-*giallo* formula functions. In attempting to exploit typical 'damsel in distress' situations despite the fact that they are blatantly incompatible with Valentina/Navarro's persona, *Midnight* fails the litmus test that Smith's review implicitly applies to it – i.e. do we fear for the central woman's safety? If she is not in danger, the film is perceived as a lesser example of the form. In contrast, in his review of *The Fifth Cord* (1999: 47-48), whose male protagonist is never directly threatened by the killer,

Smith makes no mention of the fact that ‘we never really believe that Andrea Bild will come to any lasting harm’. An *M-giallo*, we may infer, does not require its central character to be victimised and helpless in order for it to be enjoyed, whereas an *F-giallo* does.

The lack of vulnerability projected by Valentina is underscored further by the costume design. While, true to *F-giallo* form, she models many of the “fabulous” outfits noted by Needham (2002), for the most part the clothes she wears tend to be atypically conservative. In the opening sequence, she wears a long-sleeved blouse and ankle-length skirt, and in numerous scenes thereafter is seen sporting trousers, pullovers and suit jackets. Furthermore, although Navarro appeared naked in every other *giallo* in which she featured, she keeps her clothes on throughout *Midnight* – a highly uncharacteristic state of affairs, given the frequency with which Edwige Fenech and her contemporaries would bare all. As demonstrated by the frequency with which female characters in the *gialli* tend to be menaced or killed in a state of at least partial undress, nudity is often used by these films to emphasise their vulnerability. Therefore, the fact that Valentina remains clothed throughout, in spite of her profession as a model (which is often used as a convenient excuse for gratuitous nudity in *gialli*), only adds to the sense that she is far less exposed and open to attack than her counterparts in other *F-gialli*.

All of this serves to convey the sense of a central character that is anything but passive and helpless – indeed, one for whom the label of ‘protagonist’ would not be inappropriate. There is, however, a sense that the film is not entirely comfortable with the presence of such a forthright, capable central woman. Lurches in tone and characterisation abound, in particular an extended section during the middle of the film in which Valentina’s investigation is completely abandoned to concentrate on her relationship with Stefano, during which she becomes weepy and fragile, adopting a far more passive, Fenech-like role as she tearfully asks him what she should do about the murderer. Stefano comforts her, addressing her as “little girl” and carrying her to bed, in effect reducing her to the role of a child. Depicting the relationship between the central woman and her husband or boyfriend as akin to that of a child and her parent is common in the *F-giallo*. In *All the Colours of the Dark*, for instance, after Jane awakens from a nightmare, her partner Richard chastises her for not taking her medicine, then proceeds to feed it to her as a parent would a young child, before telling her to “close your eyes and go to sleep”.

This has the effect of once again emphasising the male characters' power relative to that of their female counterparts, as well as furthering the notion that they are a problem to be dealt with. In *Midnight*, Valentina is continually presented as a nuisance, repeating her seemingly absurd story of having witnessed a murder to an array of disbelieving and increasingly disapproving male characters. This, coupled with her tendency towards expressing her frustration in a destructive manner (smashing lamps and windows or resorting to physical violence), has the effect of equating her self-sufficiency and refusal to accept platitudes with childish petulance, allowing the film to effectively dismiss the image of a strong, autonomous woman (at least in comparison to other F-*giallo* central women) as something silly and irritating. This is further underscored by the film's foregrounding of broad physical comedy, much of it involving Valentina. While for the most part she tends to be the one who dishes out the slapstick as opposed to receiving it, this does not diminish the fact that the film packages female autonomy with comic relief, conflating the two. Comedy of this sort is highly atypical in a *giallo*, and indeed the only other occurrence of this type of material in the corpus is *Deep Red* (Argento 1975), which also happens to be the only other film in the corpus to depict a similarly tough, independent female character, reporter Gianna Brezzi (Daria Nicolodi). While I do not propose to draw any definite conclusions from such a limited sample, it is hard to escape the fact that the *giallo*'s most potent depictions of strong, assertive women are both presented in a manner that renders them comical and absurd.

In the end, *Midnight* seemingly cannot help but return to the archetypal F-*giallo* denouement described in the previous section. As the film draws to a close, Valentina is held captive and helpless in her apartment by Stefano, leaving it up to Gio, until now coded as an *homme fatal* in the George Hilton mould, to save her. While the battle between Gio and Stefano's thugs rages on the rooftop, Valentina spends the bulk of this climactic sequence lying on the floor, out cold and effectively forgotten while the film concentrates on Gio's fisticuffs. Even so, Valentina briefly casts off the shackles imposed on her by narrative convention when, before being knocked unconscious by Stefano, she makes a last desperate attempt to fight back against him. As she scrambles to her feet and lurches towards him, bloodied and battered but still refusing to give up, it is as if she is struggling against the limitations of the F-*giallo* framework itself, trying desperately to break out of its confines but ultimately being forced back into the role of damsel in distress. While Valentina does rebound once again, saving Gio's life and thereby undermining his status as her knight in shining armour, such is the film's need to ensure a return to traditional order

that the final gunshot, which brings a definitive end to the chaos, is fired by a potent symbol of the old establishment: the cigar-chewing Inspector Seripa.

In spite of this, the film ends on a final subtle subversion of the *F-giallo*'s conventions. In the last few shots, the battered Valentina cradles the equally battered Gio's head in her arms, before they help each other to their feet and stumble unsteadily towards Seripa, who shakes Gio's hand and lights his cigarette for him, effectively 'blessing' this seemingly conventional heteronormative union. Theirs, however, is a less one-sided pairing than is typical: unable to stand without the other's support, they are mutually dependent in a way that, for instance, Julie Wardh and Dr. Arbe in *Wardh* are not. And, in the final shot, as the credits begin to roll, Valentina leads the way off the rooftop, with Gio trailing behind her in a vaguely bewildered state. Like the film as a whole, this final scene may not definitively break the boundaries of the *F-giallo* formula, but it does at least challenge them, and in doing so draws attention to the format and its limitations. As such, however "risible" *Midnight*'s story might be, it is at least *different* enough to subvert the 'rules' established elsewhere, and in doing so offers the potential for the formula to be used in a more progressive manner.

## 4.6 Conclusion

In his analysis of the *M-giallo* *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Frank Burke identifies a new female figure that emerged in the Italian cinema of the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s: "the bourgeois or bourgeois-aspiring protagonist seeking or forced to seek a new identity as woman in an Italy experiencing unprecedented prosperity, industrialization, and modernization" (2006: 211). There was, Burke argues, "a significant shift, even within the role of housewife, from submission and sacrifice to self-gratification, which, in turn, reflects a growing urge for self-expression" (2006: 211). The central woman of the *F-giallo* can be situated firmly within this context, and these films, through their narratives of her victimisation and eventual containment, reveal their ambivalence towards women's emancipation and its transformative effect on society. Just as the *femme fatale* of *film noir* is not merely a manifestation of literal fears of powerful, sexual women but rather an articulation of a fear of male disempowerment in general, the *F-gialli* and their central women should not be viewed simply as stories about unscrupulous blackmailers and cults preying on vulnerable women. Rather, they articulate widespread unease stemming from

the changing roles of men and women in society, as well as more general anxieties regarding the increasingly dangerous and unpredictable nature of the world.

While the *M-gialli* present their male protagonists with an external problem to be solved in the shape of the murder investigation (which they may or may not accomplish successfully), in the *F-giallo* the central woman *is* the problem. Throughout these films, attempts are made to explain the ‘mystery’ that is the central woman through process of pathologising her various emotional and mental problems. No equivalent process exists for the *M-giallo* protagonist who, in keeping with his position as a figure of identification for the spectator, is largely deemed to be a bastion of integrity and sense in the face of a society gone awry. Furthermore, although both the *F-giallo*’s central woman and the *M-giallo*’s male protagonist are frequently rendered diagetically powerless, the spectator is still invited to identify with the male protagonist in his role as the spectator’s avatar within the film world. For the *F-giallo*’s central woman, however, there is no such process of identification. As such, the efforts Doane observed in the ‘women’s films’ of the 1940s to “trace female subjectivity and desire” (1999: 70), however limited they might have been, are entirely absent in the *F-giallo*. Instead, the spectator remains removed from the central woman, allowing her to be analysed and explained in a far more detached manner within the parameters of the murder-mystery narrative. Modleski describes this process as “demystifying” the woman (1988: 52): in other words, rendering that which was previously unknown knowable. By exploring the threat to the central woman and spelling out, often in obsessive detail, the motivation for the campaign of terror waged against her (why the villain selected her as his victim, what he was hoping to achieve and, where multiple villains are involved, who was responsible for which of the various attacks), the *F-giallo* objectifies, investigates and explains her, defeating the external threat against her (the killer or killers) but also, more implicitly, the threat that her waywardness poses to the *status quo*.

With a handful of exceptions, the women of the *F-giallo* are weak and helpless almost by default – the better for the filmmakers to exploit the unpleasantness directed towards them to its fullest potential. Their roles tend to be primarily passive and reactive: despite being the central characters in murder-mystery narratives, they do little actual sleuthing, generally waiting for danger to find them rather than actively seeking it out. As such, all too often these films become about good men and bad men fighting for control of a helpless woman. Even female killers, such as Carol in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin*, tend to be depicted as passive victims for the bulk of their films’ duration, meaning that it is this

guise that endures rather than their 'true', proactive identities. It would be all too easy to claim that the good men represent the *status quo* and traditional social order while the bad men directly stand in for the modern world with all its vices and uncertainties. However, such a reading is complicated by the dense nature of the films' plots, with their multiple layers of deception and double-crossing. In many F-*gialli*, the seemingly good husband, representing the *status quo* in this hypothetical paradigm, turns out to be in league with the bad men, while in *Death Walks at Midnight* the apparent *homme fatal* turns out to be the central woman's unlikely saviour. Instead, the confused and often contradictory nature of the F-*gialli* articulates the confusion and contradictions of a sociocultural milieu in which the *status quo* is increasingly under attack and old assumptions about the way the world works can no longer be relied upon.

In the next chapter, these contradictions will come to the fore once more as I examine the portrayal of the non-heteronormative characters who lurk on the sidelines, rarely occupying centre stage but ever-present and ever-troubling, blurring established gender boundaries and further threatening the established order.



## 5 “Perverts – filthy, slimy perverts!”: Queer sexuality in the *giallo*

### 5.1 Introduction

So far, in examining the male protagonists and central women of the *gialli*, this thesis has concentrated primarily on depictions of gender that reinforce conventional heteronormative structures. This chapter aims to shed light on those characters whose sexual practices and/or gender identities run contrary to what conventional society deems ‘normal’ – those typically grouped under the umbrella label ‘queer’.

The chapter’s title is derived from an epithet whispered by one of the killers in Dario Argento’s self-reflexive neo-*giallo* *Tenebrae* (1982), in which an author of *giallo* novels becomes embroiled in a murder spree perpetrated by a madman whose mission is to eliminate “human perversion” from society. In one scene the killer, conservative critic Cristiano Berti (John Steiner), asks author Peter Neal (Anthony Franciosa) – in Rome to promote his latest book, also called *Tenebrae* – to explain his views on “the effects of deviant behaviour on our lives”. However, even as Neal defends *Tenebrae* the novel (“Who says they’re deviants? One of them is gay, but so what?”), *Tenebrae* the film has already dispatched its two most prominent examples of what Berti would term ‘deviants’ – Tilde (Mirella D’Angelo), a lesbian feminist journalist, and her partner Marion (Mirella Banti) – in a bloody double murder. Clearly, the film’s attitude to its queer characters is as ambiguous as that of Neal’s novel.

I reference *Tenebrae* because, in spite of (or indeed perhaps because of) its distance from the main boom of 1970-1975, it arguably foregrounds the *giallo*’s complex relationship with queer gender and sexuality more clearly than any other film. If most *gialli* are modernist from a 1970s standpoint, then *Tenebrae*, released a decade after the *filone*’s peak and in the privileged position of being able to acknowledge and respond to the criticisms levelled against its 1970s counterparts, is positively *postmodern*. It depicts Neal (a clear stand-in for Argento)<sup>33</sup> having to justify his work to both conservative and liberal critics, while at the same time implicating him in the carnage that unfolds, ultimately revealing him to be responsible for around half of the murders perpetrated. Therefore,

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<sup>33</sup> The notion that Neal is an Argento surrogate is emphasised by the fact that Neal is the recipient of harassing letters and telephone calls from the killer, an avowed fan, based on an incident Argento himself experienced shortly before making the film (Mendik 2000: 4).

while one can read *Tenebrae* as a frustrated rebuttal by a filmmaker tired of his work being denigrated and misunderstood, it is more complex than that. By indicting its *giallo* author (and Argento surrogate) in the murders, the film seems to tacitly admit the *giallo*'s often problematic treatment of its victims.

This chapter aims to shed light on this problematic treatment, exploring the *giallo*'s frequently ambivalent attitude towards its queer characters (including, though not limited to, those who are killed and those who kill), contextualised in relation to the sociocultural climate at the time of the *giallo* boom. After first defining the term 'queer', I will go on to examine in detail the characteristics of both male and female queer characters, drawing on existing literature investigating screen portrayals of queer gender and sexuality. The chapter concludes with a closer examination of three films specifically chosen because they each illustrate something interesting about the *giallo*'s treatment of its queer characters: *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* (Ercoli 1970), *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* (Argento 1971) and *Deep Red* (Argento 1975). Although this discussion is framed around queer *characters*, it is my intention to also examine how the films themselves can be read as queer, using the visual and aural language of the *giallo* to create an atmosphere of unease and difference.

## 5.2 Contextualising 'queer'

Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin describe patriarchal hegemony as constructing a single sexuality that is "normal and desirable": "married-straight-white-man-on-top-of-woman-for-procreation-only" (2004: 5-6). As much of a mouthful as this multi-hyphenate phrase is, it is a useful means of conveying how restrictive conventional notions of 'normality' are, and therefore the breadth of the different gender and sexual identities that are positioned as 'abnormal'. While a variety of terms have been used to describe this collective other, the word that has arguably been most widely adopted is 'queer'.

As Benshoff and Griffin emphasise, 'queer' is not "simply the latest trendy word used to describe homosexuals", but rather "can be used to describe any sexuality not defined as heterosexual procreative monogamy" (2004: 1). Annamarie Jagose expands on this, explaining that 'queer'

describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatises incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability – which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect – queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender and desire. Institutionally, queer has been associated most prominently with lesbian and gay subjects, but its analytic framework also includes such topics as cross-dressing, hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity and gender-corrective surgery. Whether as transvestite performance or academic deconstruction, queer locates and exploits the incoherencies in those three terms which stabilise heterosexuality. Demonstrating the impossibility of any ‘natural’ sexuality, it calls into question even such apparently unproblematic terms as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. (1996: 3)

Those whose sexual preferences would typically be described as heterosexual, therefore, can also be queer if their sexual or gender identity runs contrary to what is considered ‘normal’ within the confines of heteronormativity. Robert Heasley, for instance, has written about what he terms “queer-straight” males who “disrupt hetero-normative constructions of masculinity, and in the process, disrupt what it means to be straight, as well as gay” (2005: 110). Similarly, Barbara Mennel describes ‘queer’ as “an umbrella term signifying a range of non-normative sexual and gender identities, including gay, lesbian, bisexual, cross-dressing, transvestite, transgender, intersex, effeminate men and butch women” (2012: 3), while Benschhoff and Griffin also include interracial couples, disabled and sadomasochistic sexualities, both homosexual and heterosexual (2004: 5). Indeed, it is the fact that the term ‘queer’ is not aligned to any single identity or group of individuals (Jagose 1996: 2) that allows it to be harnessed in this discussion of a body of films in which distinctions between heteronormative and non-heteronormative characters (and characteristics) are not always rigidly defined.

Before exploring the films themselves, however, I aim to first provide a degree of context for this discussion, establishing both the precedent for depictions of queer people in cinema and the literature on which my analysis draws.

By the time Italy was unified in 1861, homosexual activity was already legal in all but two states, and in 1889 the *Codice Zanardelli* abolished any difference in the treatment of homosexuality and heterosexuality (Albanese 2006: 57), almost a century before the legalisation of homosexuality in Scotland. Despite this, and despite a prevalence of references to homosexual desire in Italian art and literature dating back centuries (Cestaro 2004), queerness in Italian cinema is a subject that has generally been afforded little attention by critics, beyond references to the work of a handful of critically acclaimed directors like Pier Paolo Pasolini and Liliana Cavani (O’Healy 2004; Duncan 2006).

Writing on gender in Italian cinema tends to mention queer sexualities fleetingly if at all, and literature specifically focusing on the *giallo* even more so. Mikel Koven, for example, discusses homosexuality only in a single paragraph of a chapter about murder and criminal activity, limiting his observations to the scopophilic role occupied by lesbians and these films' tendency to blur the lines between homosexuality and paedophilia (2006: 71-72). This oversight seems particularly problematic given the sheer *amount* of queer sexuality to be found in the *gialli*.

In his introduction to *Queer Italia: Same-Sex Desire in Italian Literature and Film*, one of the few publications to cover queerness in Italian cinema in detail, Gary Cestaro describes the "difficult positioning" of homosexuality in Italian culture: a conflict "between the classical and the Catholic, between ancient organizations of human sexual activity that left some space for same-sex desire and Christian efforts to redefine and delimit" (2004: 1). The various essays in *Queer Italia* show that homosexual desire has been present throughout Italy's literary and filmic history; it was not, as is tempting to assume, something that only emerged recently in more 'enlightened' times. As such, while the *gialli* certainly depict non-heteronormative sexualities more openly than the films of previous decades, it would be a mistake to characterise this as something that only emerged in a post-1968 climate. The growing visibility of homosexuality in cinema in the 1970s certainly coincided with gay and lesbian groups taking to the streets in the 'real world' to agitate for change (Malegreca 2007: 190). This, along with the relaxation of film censorship laws in various countries, allowing more overt depictions of all forms of sexuality, contributed to the higher profile that those identified as queer were afforded in the films of the late 1960s onwards (including but not limited to *gialli*). Clearly, however, they were simply shining a light more directly on something that had long been present in the arts, albeit lurking in the shadows. As Vito Russo states in *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (1981, revised 1987), arguably the defining text on homosexuality in American films, gay characters "have always been visible. It's *how* they have been visible that has remained offensive for almost a century" (1987: 325).

As with the rest of this thesis, this chapter draws primarily on literature focusing on American cinema, which has typically been characterised as less willing to depict on-screen sexuality than its European counterparts (Benshoff 1997: 183). As will be seen, however, the *giallo*'s more overt depictions of sexuality in general and queer sexuality in particular, compared to either concurrent American cinema or Italian cinema prior to the relaxation of censorship, do not necessarily translate into more enlightened attitudes.

Indeed, Benschhoff asserts that the newfound visibility of homosexuals in the horror films of the late 1960s and 1970s only served to further equate homosexuality with the monstrous, making explicit what had previously been implicit (1997: 185). In a series of essays published in the 1970s and later collated as *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, Robin Wood interpreted the horror genre as an arena exploring the relationship between 'normality' and the Other. Otherness, Wood argued, "represents that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with [...] either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it" (1986: 73). This Otherness could take many forms, including that of a literal monster in the manner of Dracula or Frankenstein's monster, but could also appear in the form of an ethnic or sexual Other. The latter was often represented by women, but gay, lesbian and bisexual characters also figured heavily. Wood's theory of Otherness in the horror film has been expanded upon by Benschhoff, who suggests that one of the Other's primary roles is to reinforce the notion of normality. Benschhoff quotes Simon Watney, who argues that "straight society needs [homosexuals] [...] Without gays, straights are not straight" (1987: 26, quoted in Benschhoff 2004: 65). In other words, it is through the depiction of the Other's difference that the power of heteronormativity is bolstered and its privileged position is confirmed. In the previous chapter, I illustrated how the *giallo* depicted women, and more specifically the prospect of women's autonomy, as a threat to the *status quo* and a potential barrier to narrative equilibrium, and intend to show that many of the same principles are in play with regard to these films' representation of queer sexuality.

Particularly during the 1950s, American culture as a whole experienced "a new paranoia surrounding difference, be it political or sexual" and operated under a strict Self/Other dichotomy, reflected in the cinema of the period (Benschhoff 1997: 122). *Film noir* in particular is replete with depictions of sexual otherness in the form of "veiled stereotypes of gays" that are "everywhere apparent" and treated with "a mixture of contempt and fascination" (Naremore 1997: 221-222). These portrayals, repressive though they often are, constitute what Richard Dyer refers to as many of "the first available images of homosexuality in our time" (1977) and provide a "historically accurate depiction of the 'queer eye' as it focused on defining the space for homosexuality in pre- and post-war America" (Stoddart 2004). Dyer presents gay characters in *noir* as "a further amplification of images of sexual 'decadence' and 'perversion'" that are already widespread among the films' straight characters (1977), suggesting that homosexuality as conceived in these films is merely part of a broader landscape of aberrant behaviour. Uncertainty, he argues,

is built into noir's central narrative organization. These are films about finding out. In most cases, what is to be found out is eventually found out, but in the process a world profoundly deceptive and disorienting is revealed: you can't rely on how things look or what people say (not even the innocent); the process of unravelling the mystery is confusing, full of deceptions, detours, blind alleys... (2004: 89)

Dyer relates this uncertainty to the multitude of characters in *film noir* who exhibit queer characteristics and yet are not identified upfront as queer, arguing that it is precisely this degree of ambiguity that makes these characters "so noir" (2004: 91). These characters "constitute a disturbance in knowledge; they unsettle the process of knowing that drives the narrative and contribute to the experience of not knowing that is such a characteristic flavor of noir" (2004: 101). So too in the *giallo*, in which "[t]he general tone is one of moral decay and cynicism" and "*everyone* is hiding something" (Thrower 2002: 63), is queer sexuality one of a large number of behaviours that are regarded as aberrant, with a significant degree of crossover between what Cristiano Berti would term deviant sexuality and deviant behaviour of a non-sexual nature. While society has historically constructed non-heteronormative sexuality as objectionable in and of itself, it is through tying it to other forms of aberrant behaviour that it is most successfully marginalised in these films. It is not enough, for example, for Julia Durer (Anita Strindberg) in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971) to have sex with another woman: she is also a blackmailer, a drug addict and an adulterer. Indicative of the "kill 'em or cure 'em climate" described by Russo (1987: 162), this collation of queerness with criminal behaviour in both *film noir* and the *giallo* also allows it to be punished, most often via imprisonment or death.

In *film noir*, gay and lesbian characters, while more prevalent than in other contemporaneous genres or cycles, are not identified as homosexual with any degree of explicitness. These films, produced under the auspices of the Hays Code with its strict prohibitions against "sex perversion" (Benshoff 1997: 56; Naremore 1998: 96; Weiss 1992: 52), could not depict homosexuality in an overt manner, relying instead on indirect signifiers that observant viewers would spot. Often, a character would become queer by virtue of the inflections of the actor playing him, even if the character was written as heterosexual. As such, a significant portion of the literature on homosexuality in these films focuses on reading them 'against the grain', applying queer readings to characters that are nominally straight. Dyer's identification of an implied relationship between Johnny (Glenn Ford) and Ballin (George Macready) in *Gilda* (Vidor 1946) is characteristic of this approach, noting "the exchanges of glances and the innuendoes of the dialogue between the two of them" and Johnny's submissive, 'feminine' role in their interaction (Dyer

1998a: 117-118; see also Dyer 1998b). So too is Robert Lang's reading of *Kiss Me Deadly* (Aldrich 1955), in which he identifies "a kind of disguised homosexual fantasy" (1998: 33) lurking beneath the film's overt displays of macho violence. In many instances, the characters in question are the films' villains, for whom connotations of queerness are "used to further delineate [their] depravity" (Benshoff 2004: 67).

While this approach is also valid for the *gialli*, which, as will be shown, do not always place their queer characters in plain view, it is important to stress that, in stark contrast to *noir*, a considerable amount of queer sexuality in the *giallo* is explicit rather than implicit. Produced under the auspices of considerably greater freedom from censorship, it was possible in these films for a character to be depicted as (for example) gay and clearly stated as such. While less overt portrayals of queer sexuality do occur in the *giallo* and will be explored in due course, I intend for the time being to concentrate primarily on those characters that are more or less explicitly constructed as queer, examining their characterisation and the ways in which their queerness is conveyed. As with my division of the *giallo* into its M-*giallo* and F-*giallo* variants, I argue that the most significant distinction drawn between the vast array of queer characters depicted in the *gialli* is their biological sex, which dictates their narrative function and overall treatment. As such, I have opted to divide this discussion into two sections, one focusing on queer women and the other on men.

### 5.3 Women

The word 'bisexual' is never actually uttered in any of the films in the corpus. However, it is a description that could justifiably be applied to the majority of female characters in these films who are portrayed as being attracted to and/or engaging in sexual activity with other women, given that most of them also have sex with (or at least show an interest in) men at some point. In his study of bisexuality in film, Wayne Bryant writes about the difficulty in identifying characters shown to be in monogamous relationships, whether with the same or the opposite sex, as bisexual (1997: 3). A character may be attracted to both men and women, but unless this is explicitly stated or depicted, it is impossible to be certain, and there is a general inclination towards assuming strict heterosexuality or homosexuality in the absence of evidence to the contrary. Equally well, I argue, just because a character is shown to engage in sexual activity with both men and women does not necessarily mean that they are *attracted* to both men and women. For instance, Carol

Hammond (Florinda Bolkan) may be married to Frank (Jean Sorel) in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* at the same time as her affair with Julia Durer, but there is no evidence of any affection or sexual activity between husband and wife. (As if to underscore this point, Frank's daughter is the product of a previous marriage.) The fact that 'lesbian' and the more pejorative 'dyke' are both used with some degree of frequency in the films themselves to describe women who have sex with both other women *and* men shows the problem with becoming overly attached to specific terminology when discussing these films. For example, in *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Dallamano 1972), photographer Philip Sullivan boasts about his conquests with a number teenage girls, laughing about how "they sure stick together [...] even in bed [...] the little dykes", recalling the "old stereotype" that homosexuality is somehow "only to do with sex" (Russo 1987: 132), making it an activity rather than an identity.

Given that the films themselves are non-specific regarding the sexualities of these characters, I would argue that stressing over whether they are lesbian or bisexual is a largely pointless endeavour. Therefore, I have opted to avoid these terms, instead taking my cue from the films and relying instead on the all-encompassing 'queer woman'. As will be shown, the films themselves make little attempt to differentiate one queer woman from another. Even the process of identifying queer women as distinct from the films' non-queer women is not always straightforward, given that the *gialli* do little to distinguish between them visually. Figure 5.1 below, showing a selection of queer women, demonstrates that in terms of their appearance they are essentially the same as the predominantly heterosexual central women explored in the previous chapter, and indeed are played by many of the same actors.





**Figure 5.1 – Collage of queer female characters: Barbara Bach in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula*, Femi Benussi in *Strip Nude for your Killer*, Nieves Navarro in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* and Anita Strindberg in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*.**

The stereotypes traditionally associated with lesbian women in *film noir* and in western culture more generally, such as short hair, a lack of makeup and an overall masculine appearance, are completely absent in the *giallo*. In their place is what might be described as a form of ‘hyperfemininity’: because queer women tend to be sexually assertive in a way that their straight counterparts are not, typical signifiers of female beauty such as heavy makeup and revealing, figure-hugging skirts and dresses become accentuated to an even greater extent than is the case for the films’ other female characters. This is particularly apparent when comparing the central woman in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*, Minou (Dagmar Lassander), with her best friend Dominique (Nieves Navarro), whose promiscuity and implied attraction to both men and women mark her out as transgressive. Whereas Minou often dresses fairly conservatively, favouring high-necked, long-sleeved tops, Dominique sports an array of low-cut and split-side or thigh-length dresses that show off her breasts and legs. That is not to suggest that Dominique’s clothing is consistently revealing and that Minou’s is consistently not: on a

number of occasions throughout the film, Minou wears short skirts and sleeveless tops. On balance, however, Dominique exposes considerably more flesh than her friend, and her outfits tend to be the most ostentatious and eye-catching. (See Figure 5.2.)



**Figure 5.2 – Two examples of Dominique’s revealing outfits (left in both images) contrasted with Minou’s more conservative attire.**

This ‘hyperfeminisation’ of queer women is not without precedent. Indeed, the horror genre is rife with representations of lesbians as attractive, sleek and highly sexual – images that, as Andrea Weiss points out, “easily lend themselves to heterosexual male fantasy” (1992: 76). As established in the previous chapter, rather than serving as an avatar for the viewer within the film world, the *F-giallo* central woman is typically positioned as a spectacle for the enjoyment of a male spectator. The same, too, is true of these films’ queer women, with the more assertive form of female sexuality they represent offering increased opportunities for them to be photographed provocatively, whether by virtue of their more revealing attire or their increased sexual activity (particularly when it involves other

women). Given that these films primarily target male viewers, it is unsurprising that their queer female characters are depicted as idealised portraits of femininity in the same manner as their straight women.

This also explains why so many of the characters referred to in these films as 'lesbians' also engage in sexual activity with men. Weiss argues that the predatory, fanged women in Hammer's lesbian vampire horror films "lack the lesbian verisimilitude that would enable them to 'pass' as lesbians; they flirt with men and dress (and undress) to appeal to male desire" (1992: 106). Stephen Thrower makes a similar point in his discussion of *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin*, relating the sex scenes between Carol Hammond and Julia Durer to 'lesbian' sex scenes in pornography, noting how often they conclude with "the appearance of a male performer who 'therapeutically' supplies a penis to the scenario", thereby deflecting any potential unease derived from the sight of two women who do not require a man for sexual gratification (2002: 80). As such, a 'lesbian' character who also has sex with men reassures the male spectator, reassuring him that she is still a valid object of desire.

Queer women are, for the most part, more likely to be found in *F-gialli* than *M-gialli*, in stark contrast to *film noir*, in which the powerful, sexually assertive *femme fatale*'s ensnaring of the male protagonist serves as a potent symbol of male anxiety. While Monica Ranieri (Eva Renzi), the killer in the *M-giallo* *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Argento 1970), is clearly coded as transgressive by virtue of her active rather than passive persona and identification with the man who assaulted her years earlier, she is the exception rather than the rule. Female *giallo* killers are actually relatively rare (though they have received disproportionate critical attention due to their abundance in Dario Argento's films), with women in *M-gialli* for the most part following the Giulia (Suzy Kendall) model of passivity. Instead, queer women interact predominantly with the *F-gialli*'s central women, the combination of a passive central woman and a queer woman with an active lesbian desire (albeit one frequently tempered by a simultaneous attraction to men) providing an ideal template for the films to play out their scopophilic fantasies.

This dynamic is strongly reminiscent of that of the lesbian vampire horror film described by Weiss. First conveyed through metaphor and subtext and, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, rendered explicit (1992: 88), these films infuse erotic relationships between their female characters with a 'predator/victim' dynamic, adhering to a rigid formula in which the vampire "disrupt[s] and invert[s] the 'natural order'", then "engages in vampirism as

entertainment and sexual titillation for the prolonged middle section of the narrative; and finally [...] is destroyed and the ‘natural order’ reaffirmed” (1992: 91-92). A markedly similar formula can be observed in the significant number of *F-gialli* that feature the recurring figure of the seductive queer neighbour, spying on the central woman through the curtains and seeking to ensnare her – thereby offering the potential for the spectacle of lesbianism, even if it is never fulfilled. In each case, the pattern is the same: a bored housewife escapes from her dull and unsympathetic husband, drawn to the sensual allure of the woman next door. Queer women are characterised as seductive temptresses, luring ‘good girls’ away from the straight and narrow and inducting them into the world of depravity. This is made explicit in both *Lizard* and *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (Carnimeo 1972). In the latter, central woman Jennifer Lansbury (Edwige Fenech)’s neighbour, Sheila Hendricks (Annabella Incontrera), is depicted as an oversexed predator who refuses to take no for an answer and comes close to taking advantage of Jennifer when she arrives shirtless and in a state of terror on her doorstep. Mary Weil (Marina Malfatti), the predatory female neighbour in *All the Colours of the Dark* (Martino 1972), adopts a more subtle approach, befriending Jane Harrison (Fenech) and luring her into a satanic cult. The sexual undertones to this seduction, however, are hard to ignore: the long, lustful glances Mary directs towards Jane; her disdainful reaction to the mention of Jane’s husband; the fact that she spends a significant portion of their first encounter with one of her breasts exposed. Queerness is implicitly tied here to another form of transgressive behaviour, in this case membership of a dangerous cult, just as it is connected to madness, murder and drug-taking in *Lizard*.

This lack of a straightforward distinction between queer and non-queer women, and the suggestion that non-queer women, through their exposure to queer women, can themselves ‘become’ queer, suggests that female queerness in these films is a continuum rather than a clear-cut queer/straight binary. Indeed, the *F-gialli* as a whole are replete with references to their central women possessing a hidden nature that is often stirred by their contact with either a queer woman or an *homme fatal*, whose heterosexual appeal nonetheless served a similar purpose to that of the queer neighbour by virtue of his unsettling of the central woman’s marriage or other long-term relationship. The former is most vividly exemplified by Carol in *Lizard*, whose affair with Julia leads to her committing murder. The latter is apparent in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (Martino 1971), in which Julie Wardh (Edwige Fenech) is stated to have a “blood fetish” dating back to her relationship with the sadist Jean (Ivan Rassimov). This tendency is also present in a less insidious form in *Forbidden Photos*, in which Dominique guides Minou through something of a sexual

awakening, extolling the virtues of ‘no-strings’ sex and introducing her to the delights of erotic art, culminating in an ending in which Minou, having seemingly embraced a previously repressed aspect of her personality, eagerly agrees to join Dominique and peruse her latest haul of Danish pornography.

In the *giallo*, therefore, women’s sexuality is not an easily defined quantity. Imprecisely defined and malleable to the requirements of plot, it resists labels such as ‘bisexual’ and ‘lesbian’, consisting instead of a broad continuum within which *all* female sexuality and desire can be placed. As the next section will demonstrate, it is this facet more than anything else that distinguishes these characters’ portrayal from that of queer men.

## 5.4 Men

“Right, bring in the perverts!” orders Inspector Morosini (Enrico Maria Salerno) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. A diverse array of awkward and shifty-looking men, identified by the police as potential perpetrators of the attack on Monica Ranieri, troops in and waits as Morosini lists their various misdemeanours. These offences range from exhibitionism to “corrupting the morals of minors”, concluding with the cross-dressing “Ursula Andress” (given name Luigi Rumatelli), whom Morosini angrily informs his subordinate “belongs with the transvestites, *not* the perverts”. (“I should hope so!” snorts Ursula Andress, before leaving the room, presumably to join a coinciding line-up of transvestites.)





**Figure 5.3 – Collage of queer male characters: Gabriele Lavia in *Deep Red*, Werner Peters in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Elio Veller in *Death Walks at Midnight* and Eugene Walter in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula*.**

This scene, while obviously played for comedic effect, mocking the hapless police force's obsession with cataloguing and data collection, foregrounds two interesting facets of the *giallo*'s depiction of its queer men, a selection of whom are shown above in Figure 5.3. First, they are far more diverse than their female counterparts, with their individual misdemeanours clearly identified. Second, despite these distinctions, they share many of the same visual signifiers of 'otherness' and can easily be identified as distinct from 'normal', straight masculinity. This ties into the third point: an overwhelming need to criminalise queer characters, regardless of the specific nature of their misdemeanours.

If the *gialli*'s queer and non-queer women can be hard to differentiate (that is, if there *is* any meaningful difference between them), such difficulties tend to be less of an issue for their queer men, many of whom, whether or not they are actually gay, take their cues from the well-known stereotype of the effeminate homosexual. Described by Derek Duncan as "a stock character in the comedies of post-war Italian cinema" (2006: 5) and by Russo as

“a useful tool for putting homosexuality back in its place” (1987: 154), this persona is a mainstay of both *M-gialli* and *F-gialli*, typically wheeled out as a comic sideshow to the main narrative. These characters, with their multitude of incidental roles, generally exhibit the most predictable clichés associated with the gay male: extremely effeminate and theatrically spoken, often dubbed with fey English accents, and frequently to be found associating mainly with and dispensing fashion advice to women. Indeed, their feminisation recalls Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo’s observation that femininity in men is conceived as particularly threatening in *film noir* because it “calls into question the borders of identity” (2003: 30). Numerous examples of this stereotype exist in the *giallo*, from the preening antique dealer (played by Werner Peters) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, whose advances are a source of discomfort for protagonist Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), to the buffoonish, shrieking Pino (Elio Veller) in *Death Walks at Midnight* (Ercoli 1972). Despite their plenitude, however, they are almost always restricted to minor roles with little screen time or narrative significance, echoing Dyer’s comments about the “marginal yet insidiously present” status of queer characters in *noir* (2004: 90). These characters “frequently constitute one of the blind alleys of the labyrinth, lengthening the process of solving the mystery” (1977), thereby positioning them as distractions or irritants rather than outright villains.

The archetype is exemplified by Gino “Ginetto” Perlotto (Eugene Walter) in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula* (Cavara 1971). Employed as a waiter at an upmarket women’s spa, Ginetto, an ageing queen with a neat quiff and lilting English drawl, swans around the saunas and swimming pool, gazing disdainfully at the naked and semi-naked women lounging about and informing a customer with prominent upper lip hair that she need not bother having it waxed as “today the moustache is in”. His subordinate position in the spa’s hierarchy, and the general lack of notice paid to him by its clientele, emphasise his subsidiary role within the film. The treatment of Ginetto when the police arrive to interview the staff about the murder of one of the establishment’s employees, Jenny (Barbara Bach), is particularly interesting. The protagonist, Inspector Tellini (Giancarlo Giannini), asks Ginetto his job, name and whether he is married, to which Ginetto, disgusted by the very idea, snorts “Oh my God, no.” At this point Tellini, who has so far shown considerable diligence in his approach to the investigation, questioning the proprietor, Laura (Claudine Auger), at great length, abruptly tells Ginetto he is free to go. The inference is clear: by revealing his sexuality, Ginetto has eliminated himself as a suspect, either because the psychosexual nature of Jenny’s murder precludes a gay man from being the culprit or because he is considered too much of a ‘sissy’ to kill anyone. The

fact that Laura, who is also identified as queer (she was having an affair with Jenny and refers to her young female employees as her “protégées”, potentially an inference that she ‘inducts’ them all into lesbianism), is subjected to a far more intensive interrogation than Ginetto highlights the perception of female queerness as more of a threat (or at least demanding more investigation) than its male equivalent.

At this point, Ginetto exits the narrative unscathed, never to appear again. Russo observes that in the Hollywood films of the same period, “survival was an option only for nonthreatening characters”, and that gay characters who appeared as obvious caricatures were generally spared a grisly fate “when they happened to be passing through only to provide color or to present a strong contrast to a sexy hero” (1987: 156). Ginetto clearly conforms to this tradition. With his submissive demeanour, he is presented as someone who ‘knows his place’: a seemingly celibate, sexless queen at the beck and call of over-privileged socialites who clearly view him as something of a joke (“They call me... Ginetto,” he smirks ruefully, implying that the nickname itself is demeaning). There is genuine despondency in Eugene Walter’s performance, conveying the character’s resignation to his lot in life, and it is not hard to see Walter, who enjoyed a rich and varied career before spending the twilight years of his acting life appearing in minor and often demeaning roles such as this and an even more distasteful one in the later *giallo* *The Pyjama Girl Case* (Mogherini 1977), injecting some personal dissatisfaction into the role.

In *The Pyjama Girl Case*, Walter plays Mr. Dorsey, another gay man under investigation by the law. Unlike the depiction of Ginetto, however, Dorsey’s portrayal is a long way from that of a harmless fop, with the film strongly implying paedophilic tendencies, despite once again constructing the character out of many of the clichés associated with male homosexuality. The protagonist, the retired Inspector Thompson (Ray Milland), arrives at Dorsey’s house to find him in the bath: an ageing, overweight, simpering queen clearly intended to arouse disgust in the spectator. He addresses the visibly repelled Thompson as “my dear”, and explains that unless he has a bath twice a day, he becomes “*absolutely* hysterical.” The corpulent Dorsey spends the entirety of Thompson’s interrogation wandering about wearing only a towel, boasting about how he got married back in the 1950s to secure residency in Australia, thereby underscoring both his otherness – Dorsey is a foreigner – and threat to social order – by marrying under false pretences, he subverts the law.



As the interrogation continues, Dorsey makes various unsubtle advances on Thompson, inviting him to sit next to him. Their discussion is then interrupted by the arrival of Alex, a much younger man who is clearly having a relationship with Dorsey. While the moustachioed Alex is not literally a child, the age difference between him and Dorsey and the fact that he is wearing dungarees, not to mention Dorsey's reference to him as a "naughty boy", mean that we are clearly invited to view him in those terms (see Figure 5.4). The film is therefore able to imply paedophilia without actually showing Dorsey in the company of a literal child.



**Figure 5.4 – Alex, Dorsey's "naughty boy" companion.**

This apparent linking of paedophilia with homosexuality occurs in various other *gialli*, but is far from unique to these films. Numerous authors, among them Benshoff (1997) and Russo (1987), have noted a tendency to depict gay men preying on younger men, particularly adolescents and on occasions children. Benshoff in particular refers to "homosexuality-as-seductive-pederasty" and the notion, prevalent in the post-war years, that "'normal' young men [...] would only turn into 'true' homosexuals if older 'true' homosexuals continued to lead them astray" (1997: 139). This not only blurs the boundaries between homosexuality and paedophilia but also depicts it as something viral which can be transferred from one 'practitioner' to another. Straight men can in effect be 'corrupted' through contact with queer men, echoing the image of the 'good' central woman being led astray by her debauched neighbour in *F-gialli* such as *All the Colours of the Dark* and thereby once again emphasising queer sexuality's threat to the established boundaries of identity.

In many respects, the slovenly Dorsey and his messy house contrast with conventional stereotypes of gay men as obsessively neat and well-groomed. This deviation is apparent in a number of other *gialli*, including *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, in which gay private investigator Arrosio (Jean-Pierre Marielle) is, despite his primness and penchant for interior decorating (giving him much in common with other stereotyped gay characters), shown to have atrocious table manners. This dichotomy reveals the *giallo*'s dual challenge of emphasising gay men's otherness while at the same time contending with the fact that what it meant to be a straight man was, in the early 1970s, undergoing dramatic change. As described in Chapter 3, the *gialli* depict the emergence of a new type of masculinity in the 1970s: slick, sophisticated, cosmopolitan, immaculately groomed and sporting the latest fabulous fashions. When combined with the tendency for M-*giallo* protagonists to be involved in "sensitive" (to quote *Deep Red*) professions such as painting and writing, a situation emerges in which the image of the notionally straight male protagonist in the *giallo* is not far removed from conventional stereotypes of male homosexuality. There is something decidedly queer about the supposedly heterosexual male characters of a number of *gialli*, a point to which I return in the case studies of the next section. The lack of traditional signifiers of idealised heterosexual masculinity in the *giallo*'s leading men echoes a similar situation in *film noir*, in which, as James Naremore notes, the films' "typically rootless, unmarried heroes provide a somewhat tenuous standard of normative masculine behavior", with the archetypal *noir* protagonist characterised by "his quasi-gay relationships with men, by his masochistic love affairs with women, and by his more general weakness of character" (1997: 222).

Homosexuality in cinema "has always been seen in terms of what is or is not masculine" (Russo 1987: 4), with gay characters serving as "yardsticks for the masculinity of the men around them" (1987: 59), their lack of typical masculine traits thereby accentuating those of their straight counterparts.<sup>34</sup> In the M-*giallo*, the protagonist's lack of 'macho' qualities subverts this relationship, threatening the 'us/them' distinction upon which so many screen representations of homosexuality are predicated. It is perhaps this that accounts for the appropriation of characteristics not normally associated with gay men in popular culture, such as slovenliness, as a means of reinstating this difference in a world lacking examples of 'classical' heterosexual masculinity.

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<sup>34</sup> Weiss notes a similar tendency in representations of lesbianism in Hollywood cinema, arguing that it "occasionally surfaces as a form of defiance in order that heterosexuality [...] may appear the more natural and desirable" (1992: 54).

This also helps explain why, unlike its queer women, explicit evidence of male bisexuality is virtually unheard of in the *giallo*. There are admittedly exceptions, which will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies which follow, but these are generally restricted to the *gialli* of Dario Argento and are largely a product of reading ‘against the grain’ rather than explicitly visible on the films’ surface. If male homosexuality serves to bolster male heterosexuality, then consequently the disavowal of a strict gay/straight binary with the inclusion of bisexuality would overly complicate matters, while at the same time denying the straight male spectator the sense of security derived from the belief that straight and gay men can be separated into two distinct groups with no potential crosspollination. The role fulfilled by gay men in the *giallo* requires that they be both clearly visible and clearly different, thereby mitigating any threat which they might pose. One of only a handful of exceptions to this rule is the closeted John Lubbock (Maurizio Bonuglia) in *The Fifth Cord* (Bazzoni 1971), whose sexuality is not revealed until he is unmasked as the film’s killer at the climax. Ironically Lubbock, with his trendy, tight-fitting clothes, slicked back hair and general air of debonair elegance, would probably have immediately stood out as gay in most other genres. In the *giallo*, however, he is able to go undetected precisely because he is so like many of the film’s other male characters. Only in relation to Andrea Bild (Franco Nero) who, as noted in Chapter 3, is unusually rugged and scruffy for an M-*giallo* protagonist, does Lubbock appear unusually effeminate. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that this rare example of a male character whose queerness is concealed from the spectator coincides with the equally rare example of a queer male killer, thereby conflating his sexuality and his villainy in much the same manner as queer women like Carol Hammond in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin*.

In addition to their sexual predilections, cross-dressing is another area in which men in the *giallo* are coded as queer. At first glance, there are few transvestites in these films, and their roles tend to be even more incidental than those of other queer men. One of the few overt cross-dressers is Hallory (Luciano Rossi) in *Death Walks on High Heels* (Ercoli 1971), a handyman who is apprehended wearing a wig and clothes that belonged to the deceased Nicole (Nieves Navarro). Hallory is portrayed unflatteringly throughout the film, introduced as a wide-eyed, unshaven lout sneaking furtive glances at Nicole’s bare legs, immediately identifying him as predatory and transgressive. When he is caught wearing Nicole’s clothes, the dichotomy between the elegant female wig and dress and his unshaven face and legs is clearly intended to provoke disgust. The revelation of his aberrant behaviour (“I’m sorry, it comes over me like that,” he cries) is treated with little

more than contempt, as the stolid Inspector Baxter (Carlo Gentili) orders a police officer to “give a hand with Myra Breckenridge”.



**Figure 5.5 – Massimo, the transvestite in *Deep Red*.**

A second notable transvestite character, albeit one who is treated considerably more sensitively, is Massimo Ricci in *Deep Red* (see Figure 5.5). Massimo is particularly interesting because although the character is clearly intended to be a male transvestite, wearing a woman’s gown and brassiere, the actor portraying him is actually a woman, Geraldine Hooper. The character has a pencil moustache and is dubbed by a relatively deep-voiced male actor in both the English and Italian versions, and yet significant aspects of his appearance are unmistakably feminine, including his long slender neck and the cleavage visible beneath his gown. As with the queer women described in Section 5.3, it is difficult to identify a label which adequately describes Massimo, but suffice it to say that there is an overwhelming sense of otherness about the character. Neither fully male nor fully female, it is tempting to argue that his portrayal illustrates any number of fallacies about homosexuals and transvestites, including the misconception that all transvestites are gay and the belief that homosexuals are people trapped in the body of the wrong sex. As will be shown in the case study of this film, however, Massimo is just one of many characters in *Deep Red* who disrupt conventional notions of gender, and as such is better understood in that context.

These rare displays of transvestism are overshadowed by a far more widespread example of cross-dressing that occurs in almost every *giallo*. In his “historical-theoretical introduction” to the *giallo*, Gary Needham (2002) argues that the black raincoat typically worn by the killer is the result of fashion trends in the 1960s, tracing its first appearance to

*Blood and Black Lace* (Bava 1964)'s fashion house, filled with women sporting modern, upmarket attire – including coats similar to the one worn by the killer. This choice of disguise, which would become one of the *giallo*'s most enduring trademarks, allows *Black Lace*'s killer to blend in with the models and go unnoticed. While the costume's historical context is interesting in its own right, far more pertinent to this discussion is that fact that, in *Black Lace*, it is, with the exception of the killer, worn exclusively by women. Given that the majority of *giallo* killers are male, it can be argued that they are all indulging in a form of transvestism – a fact which neither Needham nor other critics of the *giallo* emphasise. Conversely, the black coat is frequently augmented in these films by a black fedora, a form of attire more typically associated with men. It is also worth noting that the vast majority of *giallo* killers, even the ones that turn out to be women, are, when disguised, played by actors whose physiques strongly suggest that they are male. The gender confusion inherent in the killer's outfit is made explicit in *Who Saw Her Die?* (Lado 1972), in which the priest Father James (Alessandro Haber) is revealed in the final reel as the film's villain, wearing a black veil, laced gloves, a woman's wig and makeup in place of the usual black coat, hat and gloves. In addition to his cross-dressing, he is also a foreigner, a killer – of children no less, which, although paedophilia is not implied, further underscores his transgressive nature – and a member of a sadomasochistic sex cult. As with many of the characters discussed in this chapter, therefore, Father James' portrayal conflates multiple different forms of 'deviance', both sexual and otherwise. Like Massimo, therefore, the *giallo* killer breaks down conventional gender barriers by being neither fully male nor fully female, while the positioning of a figure of indeterminate gender as the strongest threat once again betrays the films' distrust of non-heteronormative identities.

The increased variety encapsulated within the spectrum of male as compared to female queer characters presents certain challenges in summarising this section's findings. Nonetheless, certain broad patterns are apparent. Whereas female queerness is presented as more of a continuum of which all women are a part, male queerness is the domain of a select few individuals who are, for the most part, readily identifiable by their otherness. Queer men can be seen to fall into two broad categories: the harmless eccentrics who are exploited for comedic purposes and the killers and perverts who threaten social order. While all of them are subject to crude and obvious stereotyping, rendering their portrayal intrinsically problematic, male queerness in the *giallo* is more multifaceted than a cursory examination of these clichéd and often absurd characters would suggest. In the case studies which follow, I will attempt to shed light on the ways in which both male and female queer characters can transcend such apparently simplistic stereotyping.

## 5.5 Case studies

To conclude this exploration of queer sexuality, I have selected three films for examination in greater detail. In these films, queer characters are more heavily foregrounded than in most *gialli*, both in terms of the roles they play in the narrative and, in the cases of *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* and *Deep Red*, the sheer number of characters to whom the label ‘queer’ applies. As such, they bring to the forefront the deeply ambivalent attitudes to gender and sexual difference simmering beneath the surface of the *giallo* as a whole. Furthermore, all three films problematize in some way the notion that the *gialli* are purely regressive and reactionary in their portrayal of queer characters.

### 5.5.1 Case study 1: *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*

The central woman in Luciano Ercoli’s 1970 *giallo* *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion* is Minou, a housewife who has become jaded by the ennui of her everyday existence. One night, while out walking alone, she is approached by a man (Simón Andreu) who informs her that he has evidence that her husband Peter (Pier Paolo Capponi) has murdered someone. Feeling duty-bound to protect her husband, Minou buys the man’s silence by submitting to his degrading sexual demands, but when she finally confesses all to Peter, there is no evidence that Peter killed anyone or that the blackmailer ever existed. Convinced that she is mad, Minou slips deeper and deeper into hysteria, until eventually both Peter and the blackmailer are revealed as co-conspirators who plotted to drive Minou to suicide. At the last moment, the day is saved by Minou’s best friend Dominique, who works out what is going on and alerts the police in time for them to rescue Minou. It is on Dominique and her interaction with Minou that this section focuses.

*Forbidden Photos* is a curious film, on the one hand revelling in many of the *giallo*’s established clichés relating to queer women, while on the other subverting many of the trends that have been established in this chapter regarding queer sexuality in these films. Upon initial inspection, Dominique appears to conform to the archetype of the lecherous neighbour established in Section 5.3. She is presented as a sultry, alluring temptress living a hedonistic lifestyle, and is older and more worldly-wise than Minou. Like the *femme fatale* of *film noir*, she also possesses a sense of agency that is typically denied to the *giallo* central woman. She tends to control the frame, with the camera often moving with her or focusing on her rather than the other characters, and is typically the most visually

striking aspect of the scenes in which she appears, thanks to her eye-catching and often revealing costumes. Many of her conversations with Minou focus on how much sex she has and how much she enjoys it, to the extent that the identities of her numerous sexual partners scarcely seem to matter. At one point, she reacts with jealousy upon hearing about an encounter between Minou and her blackmailer that nearly resulted in rape, wistfully declaring “I’d have *adored* being violated!” She also has a self-confessed “weakness for erotic art”, boasting to Minou about the high standard of the pornographic photographs that she receives direct from Copenhagen – “quality is important in every profession”. Throughout the film, she sleeps with or propositions various men, but by far her most sustained sexual advances are towards Minou.

Hints as to Dominique’s sexual attraction to Minou abound throughout the film, although they never actually lead to an on-screen consummation. Throughout the film, the interaction between the two characters is very tactile, with them frequently hugging, kissing one another on the cheek and stroking each other’s arms and hair. While this sort of physical intimacy is typically seen as more socially acceptable between women than between men, it takes on greater significance given the repeated sexual innuendos that occur elsewhere in the film. These are particularly pronounced in a scene in which Dominique invites Minou to her home and shows her various erotic photographs of herself, displaying her naked body to Minou, albeit by proxy. The musical accompaniment, consisting of a sultry vocal by Edda Dell’Orso, has a decidedly seductive quality. Meanwhile, the *mise en scène* – lights dimmed, Dominique dressed in a striking red (traditionally the colour of passion) dress, the two women sitting side by side with Dominique’s cigarette smoke wafting around them – is highly evocative of a seduction scene (see Figure 5.6).



**Figure 5.6 – Dominique’s seduction of Minou.**

Minou seems more puzzled than anything else, looking at each photograph projected on the wall with a bemused smile, while Dominique continually steals furtive glances at her, gauging her reaction. When the lights are turned back on, Dominique offers Minou a drink and they retreat to the sofa, whereupon Dominique presents Minou with her latest collection of pornographic photos from Copenhagen. While the dialogue suggests that the pictures are of men (“I’ll bet you’ll dream about him”), it is clear that Dominique merely intends these pictures as an *aperitif* to her true aim: her seduction of Minou. With each picture she hands to Minou, she leans closer. When Minou expresses surprise at Dominique’s interest in “this kind of thing”, Dominique responds that she is “ready for anything... with the right person”, lowering her head and looking meaningfully at Minou. Later in the same scene, when discussing why her past relationship with Peter failed, Dominique admits that their breakup may have been her fault, saying she “believe[s] in plenty of variety”. This is presumably a reference to her inability to restrict herself to a single sexual partner. However, immediately after delivering this line, she makes eye contact with the seemingly oblivious Minou and giggles seductively. As Dominique continues to gaze at Minou, the camera slowly zooms in towards the latter, leaving little doubt as to where Dominique’s real interests lie.

Similar hints occur during Dominique’s first appearance in the film, in which she encounters Minou at a nightclub. In this scene, Dominique, arriving with her date, Alex, spots Minou dancing with George (Salvador Huguet), one of Peter’s work colleagues. She sneaks up behind Minou, covering her eyes and asking her “And who is the most beautiful girl of them all?” “You!” responds Minou, laughing joyously. Following this light-hearted banter, Minou invites Dominique to dance. At this point, the two women trade partners,



Minou going with Alex and Dominique with George. The obvious affection between the two women, contrasted with the interchangeability of their male partners, whom they trade without a second thought, provides the first indication in the film that their relationship runs deeper than mere friendship. During the remainder of this scene, as the two couples continue to dance, the camera lingers on Dominique's face in close-up, resting her chin on George's shoulder and gazing for an extended period of time in Minou's direction. This interchangeability is underscored by the fact that Dominique has had a previous relationship with Minou's husband, and by her recognition of Minou's blackmailer from a previous encounter in Copenhagen. In a sense, all the significant male characters in the film are transient, passed between Minou and Dominique, with only the relationship between the two women possessing any degree of permanence. This sense that Dominique and Minou constitute the film's 'real' couple is compounded in a later scene in which Dominique and George are disturbed post-coitus by a telephone call from a frantic Minou, who has just been menaced by the blackmailer. Dominique shoos George out the back door, telling him that "Minou better not find you here", clearly underscoring the disposability of Dominique's male partners but also, in inferring potential jealousy on the part of Minou, inviting us to view her as a jilted lover arriving to find her partner engaged in a tryst with someone else.

A tense dinner scene involving Minou, Dominique and Peter also takes on an added layer of meaning if one considers the possibility that the fact that Minou has just had sex with her blackmailer is not all that the two women are hiding from Peter. ("We all need a few secrets to keep happy," Dominique beams at Peter, standing side by side with the decidedly nervy Minou.) Seated between the two women, the oblivious Peter looks every inch the cuckold, but given all that has been shown before regarding Dominique's attraction to Minou, it is worth considering that his greatest rival for his wife's affections may in fact be seated next to him at the table (see Figure 5.7).



**Figure 5.7 – Peter, the oblivious cuckold in the middle.**

The hints that occur throughout the film regarding the nature of Dominique and Minou's relationship are reinforced in the final scene. While the denouement initially seems to set up a conventional heterosexual pairing between Minou and George, she swiftly parts company with him, claiming that she just wants to rest and promising to call him later, and then joins Dominique in her car. At this point, the two women, looking resplendent in matching summer dresses and sunhats, set off for Dominique's house to look at more pornographic photographs freshly arrived from Copenhagen. Minou's enthusiastic reaction, compared to her more muted and confused response to the same proposition earlier in the film, indicates that she has undergone a transformation of sorts. In short, she has been successfully 'seduced' by Dominique and has become more like her, evinced by their similar outfits (see Figure 5.8).



**Figure 5.8 – The heterosexual coda subverted.**

The sight of the two women driving off into the distance together, to the swelling romantic strains of Dell'Orso's vocal accompaniment, is highly reminiscent of similar final scenes in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* and *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (Martino 1971), both of which featured the central woman departing in the 'custody' of a male protector. By replacing the typical patriarchal authority figure with an unabashedly promiscuous, sexually assertive bisexual woman, however, *Forbidden Photos* provides a rare subversion of the conventional heterosexual coda and an equally rare example of a central woman's sexual awakening being rewarded rather than punished. As such, much like the later *Death Walks at Midnight* with its feisty, forthright central woman (also, perhaps not coincidentally, played by Navarro), Dominique's presence in *Forbidden Photos* usurps and problematizes the *giallo*'s conventions. Although the film does not directly assert a sexual union between the two women, the remarkability of this final shot deserves emphasis. In keeping with the film's generally irreverent tone, queer sexuality is allowed to survive and even flourish.

As previously established, the *gialli* are not confined by *film noir*'s need to restrict depictions of queer sexuality to the language of metaphor and subtext. Lacking the strict control of the Hays Code, there was no need for *gialli* to conceal queer characters or their desires, and yet this is precisely what *Forbidden Photos* does, albeit rather half-heartedly. In keeping with Ercoli's other *gialli* (including *Death Walks at Midnight*, discussed in the previous chapter), *Forbidden Photos* has an intrinsically playful quality, and this goes some way towards explaining the 'half-hidden' nature of Dominique's attraction to Minou. It is as if the film is sharing a joke with its audience, superficially concealing it as subtext but simultaneously drawing attention to it at every opportunity, in a manner akin to speaking in an overly theatrical whisper. This unconvincing charade is at the expense of the film's non-queer characters, who respond in a variety of ways, from bemusement in the case of Minou to obliviousness in the case of Peter. The latter's lack of awareness is particularly apparent in the frame captured in Figure 5.7 above, whereby his ignorance of the secret being kept from him by Dominique and Minou causes him to look incredibly foolish.

This process of obfuscation has another, less innocent effect, however, and one that can be related back to Benshoff's assessment of homosexual characters as "lurk[ing] around the edges" of cinema (1997: 15). By simultaneously drawing attention to queerness and making a show of concealing it, the film reinforces its marginalised position, acknowledging its existence but emphasising it as something that should not be articulated

openly. In reference to reading queerness as subtext, Benshoff quotes Alexander Doty, who cites concerns with this type of reading because it marginalises gay and lesbian concerns, “allow[ing] straight culture to use queerness for pleasure and profit in mass culture without admitting to it” (Doty 1993: xi-xii, quoted in Benshoff 1997: 15). In effect, subtextualising queerness can itself be a form of repression, forcing it to remain something that can only be whispered about. In adopting this approach, *Forbidden Photos* reveals itself to be more complex than a clear-cut case of disrupting the ‘rules’ of the *giallo* and its treatment of its queer characters. In spite of its conception of Dominique as a force for good rather than the predatory female ‘deviant’ typically depicted in films of this type, it can still be seen to contribute in its own way to the process of repression, albeit in a less overtly malicious manner than many of its contemporaries. Nonetheless, it demonstrates the potential for the *giallo* formula to be used in a more subversive manner.

### 5.5.2 Case study 2: *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*

The third and final instalment in Dario Argento’s so-called ‘animal trilogy’,<sup>35</sup> *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* amplifies issues concerning sexuality and gender identity that were already apparent in the two previous films, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* and *The Cat O’ Nine Tails* (1971), placing them at the forefront of the narrative. The plot concerns Roberto Tobias (Michael Brandon), a drummer in a progressive rock band who becomes aware that a man in dark glasses (Calisto Calisti) is following him. One night, Roberto lures his pursuer into an abandoned theatre and, in the scuffle that ensues, accidentally stabs him. This is witnessed by a mysterious masked figure, who photographs the ‘murder’ and thereafter proceeds to blackmail the increasingly paranoid Roberto, who ignores his wife Nina (Mimsy Farmer)’s pleas for him to confide in her, instead seeking help from an array of colourful characters, including his eccentric friends “God” (Bud Spencer) – short for Godfrey – and “the Professor” (Oreste Lionelli), and an outrageously camp private eye, Gianni Arrosio. The killer turns out to be Nina herself, who married Roberto and proceeded to emotionally torment him because of the resemblance he bore to her abusive father.

Early in the film, during a party at Roberto’s house, one of the guests recounts his own particular take on Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, in which the scientist creates a monster whose first act is to attempt to rape him. “The Baron escapes in the nick of time,” he

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<sup>35</sup> A reference to the fact that all three films include references to animals in their titles and as prominent clues.

concludes, “but he’s bucked by the thought that... maybe his monster’s queer.” In this brief and seemingly throwaway exchange, the film shows that, despite their frequent crudeness and lack of subtlety, the *gialli* could occasionally be quite astute: released in 1971, *Four Flies* predates by a number of years Robin Wood’s observation that classical horror films such as F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu* (1922) and James Whale’s adaptation of *Frankenstein* (1931) identify their monsters with repressed homosexuality (1986: 69). This subversive retelling of the Frankenstein story foreshadows the extent to which *Four Flies* is steeped in concerns relating to gender identity. The film features at least two characters who challenge notions of heteronormativity in interesting ways. The first and most obvious is the openly gay Arrosio; the second is Nina. Like a number of queer characters in the *gialli*, both ultimately end up dead, meaning that both ‘problems’ posed to the heteronormative *status quo* are neatly resolved. As such, *Four Flies* remains a deeply problematic text, albeit one that entrenches Argento’s oft-observed (for instance in Needham 2001: 92) penchant for exploring non-fixed gender identities.

Arrosio is introduced as a gay caricature very much in the mould of Ginetto in *The Black Belly of the Tarantula* when Roberto arrives at his office to seek his assistance in identifying the killer. He first appears wearing an apron while diligently repainting his wall and, with his fey hand gestures and theatrical drawl, the film marks him out as gay even before he refers to himself as a “fairy”, lest there was any doubt. Even during this first appearance, though, the film plays with the spectator’s expectations, using Roberto’s obvious disappointment at being faced with a gay man to mock his (and, by proxy, the spectator’s) assumptions about homosexuality:

Roberto – “Well, it’s a bit risky and I don’t—”

Arrosio (knowingly) – “Ah yes, and you’re thinking this fairy is going to jump on a chair and scream bloody murder if he sees a mouse... huh? Right?”

Roberto – “Yes, that’s what I thought—”

Arrosio – “Oh, you heterosexuals!”

As the film progresses, it continually challenges the clichéd image of gay men as ‘shrinking violets’ while at the same time presenting Arrosio as a broad caricature. He sees sexual innuendos everywhere, flirts with every man he encounters, and the combination of his campness, greed and proudness of failure (he boasts that he has yet to solve a single case, as if this is an accomplishment) indicate that he is very much intended to be a figure

of fun. Despite the broad comedy, however, his role transcends that of mere comic relief, distancing him significantly from characters like Ginetto. Disproving Roberto's belief that he is not macho enough for the job, he is shown to be a resourceful and determined investigator who manages something that virtually no character ever does in a *giallo*: correctly identify the killer using logical deduction. His greatest act of defiance, therefore, is perhaps not his sexuality but the fact that he attempts to impose order and rationality on the *giallo*'s notoriously disordered and irrational world. Arrosio in effect becomes something of a tragic hero and, as he lies dying in a public toilet after being fatally wounded by the killer and muses "I was right... I did it this time", invokes a level of empathy that is rare for any character in a *giallo*, let alone one identified as queer.

The portrayal of Nina, meanwhile, is considerably more complex and nuanced. At first glance she appears to be just one of a long line of the sort of deranged female killers who so often appear in Argento's *gialli*. However, she does more than any other to challenge notions of gender as a binary construct. In keeping with the *giallo*'s affinity for cod-psychoanalysis, Nina's pathology is decidedly Freudian: she was raised as a boy by a violent father who "wanted a son, not a weakling", and uses Roberto, the man she married, as a paternal substitute, taking out her anger on him in her father's absence. Like so many portrayals of queer women in the *gialli*, therefore, Nina's gender 'confusion', and the allusions to incest that are implicit in her marrying her father's double, are implicitly tied to mental illness: she kills because gender confusion has driven her insane.

Although this back-story is not revealed until the climax, Nina's gender otherness is implied from the very beginning through both the casting of Mimsy Farmer, flat chested and with a boyish shock of bleached blonde hair, and the costume design, with her outfits often consisting of trousers, plain high-necked shirts and waistcoats. In silhouette, Nina's build, clothing and hairstyle are sufficiently masculine that, when her shape is seen through a screen door shortly before her guilt comes to light during the climax, it briefly appears that the killer will be revealed to be a man (see Figure 5.9). Whenever Nina appears on screen with other women, such as in her scenes with her cousin Dalia (Francine Racette) and at the party held at the Tobias' residence near the start of the film, she appears noticeably more masculine than them. The film's other female characters are all characterised by their long flowing hair and dresses with floral patterns and low necklines, as is typical for women in the *giallo*. Furthermore, Nina's tendency to flit around at the edge of the frame (particularly pronounced in the aforementioned party scene) further denotes her outsider status.



**Figure 5.9 – Nina’s masculine silhouette.**

A rare exception to Nina’s typically masculine mode of dress comes in the form of the loose, V-necked nightdress she wears in bed. A degree of performance is associated with this item of clothing, for it is when she is wearing it that she initially attempts to get Roberto to open up to her about what is worrying him. In the scene in question, she attempts to break through the seemingly impenetrable wall that prevents them from expressing their emotions to one another. By providing an opportunity for Roberto to be honest with her, she places both of them in a position of vulnerability, underscored by the fact that she is wearing only a thin nightdress and he is shirtless. In a later scene, in which she tries to convince Roberto to leave town with her, once more offering him a way out, her costume design is again more feminine, consisting of a skirt and a long woman’s coat. Nina’s attempts to show a more open and vulnerable side to her personality therefore coincide with her wearing more feminine clothing, codifying emotion as feminine and lack of emotion as masculine in much the same way that her father did, as evinced in the flashbacks in which he is heard striking her and shouting “I never want to see you cry!” As such, it is not possible to easily codify Nina: she is not simply a woman who dresses as a man, instead defying categorisation along the lines of a male/female binary.

One final point of interest in *Four Flies* with regard to its portrayal of gender roles is Roberto himself. I previously mentioned both the absence of gay and bisexual protagonists in the *M-gialli* and conversely the “gay male sensibility” that can be seen in the portrayal of so many nominally straight male protagonists. As Maitland McDonagh notes, Roberto, with his long hair and decidedly unmuscular physique, has a noticeably androgynous appearance (2010: 81), which, while not precisely the same thing, means that the character is imbued with a similar lack of traditional signifiers of masculinity. As a result, in the



scenes in which he appears with Nina, the typical distinctions between masculine husband and feminine wife are blurred, if not to the point of a straightforward reversal then certainly enough to render traditional gender boundaries uncertain (see Figure 5.10).



**Figure 5.10 – Roberto and Nina, the androgynous couple.**

This uncertainty is underscored by the fact that Roberto’s heterosexuality, like that of Marc Daly (David Hemmings) in the later *Deep Red*, is called into question on numerous occasions. In the most obvious example, Arrosio asks the already flustered Roberto if he has “ever had a homosexual experience”, at which point Roberto immediately tries to change the subject. In a later scene, when Roberto receives a phone call from Nina during band practice, two reaction shots show both Dalia (with whom he is having an affair) and his band’s keyboardist, Mirko (Fabrizio Moroni), watching him. From their facial expressions, it is clear that neither Dalia nor Mirko is pleased by the fact that Roberto is talking to his wife – in particular Mirko, who seems to simmer with rage.

The meaning of Mirko’s response, and the emphasis placed on it by framing him in an isolated shot, is difficult to gauge, as the character’s role in the plot is insignificant and the precise nature of his relationship with Roberto is never elaborated on. A brief shot of a minor character appearing shifty could simply be a red herring, designed to cast suspicion on his involvement with the murders, but at the same time his look can also be read as one of jealousy. Throughout the film, Roberto is shown to be more comfortable around men than with Nina, going as far as to allow Arrosio to link arms with him as they walk down the street together. During the aforementioned party scene, Mirko is shown sitting next to Roberto, his arm slung casually over the back of the sofa. Compared to the physical intimacy shown in this shot, Roberto’s subsequent interaction with Nina, visibly distressed



at the news that their housemaid is dead, seems positively cold. Faced with his wife on the verge of tears, he can do nothing but stand there looking helpless, before feebly patting her shoulder. When considered in light of the scene immediately following the film's opening credits, in which Mirko desperately seeks reassurance from Roberto regarding his musical performance, it is not hard to conceive of a situation in which the two men are involved in a relationship more intimate than mere friendship, with the approval-seeking Mirko as a submissive partner.

Such an interpretation is, obviously, heavily reliant on subtext, calling for a more nuanced reading than that which was required to detect the obvious innuendos of *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*. There is considerably more to be said about this approach, but this subject is best reserved for this chapter's final case study, perhaps the most complex and nuanced *giallo* of all.

### 5.5.3 Case study 3: *Deep Red*

As previously noted, the identification of subtextual traces of queerness has a long and varied history in film criticism, and carries with it its own connotations of repression and marginalisation. Throughout this chapter, I have concentrated primarily on characters that are either expressly identified as queer by the text itself or at least so heavily implied to be so that little effort is required to identify a queer subtext (for instance, Dominique in *The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion*). Argento's 1975 film *Deep Red*, however, is so loaded with visual and narrative signifiers of queerness that it positively invites a more interpretative reading. Rather than restricting this reading to its cast of characters, however, I aim to show that the film itself becomes queer by virtue of the pronounced sense of otherness that is instilled by its unconventional *mise en scène*.

Returning to the formula he crafted five years earlier with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, Argento casts David Hemmings as Marc Daly, an English jazz pianist living in Rome, where he becomes the unwitting witness to the murder of his neighbour, the psychic Helga Ulmann (Macha Méril). Convinced that he saw an important clue to the killer's identity but unable to work out what it is, Marc launches his own investigation, teaming up with a tenacious journalist, Gianna Brezzi (Daria Nicolodi), with whom he enjoys a fractious but amiable partnership. After pursuing a series of leads and red herrings, Marc realises the truth: that he saw the killer's reflection in a mirror in Helga's apartment, and

that she is Marta (Clara Calamai), the mother of his best friend Carlo (Gabriele Lavia). A struggle ensues and Marta is accidentally decapitated when her necklace becomes caught in an elevator mechanism, leaving Marc gazing at his own reflection in a pool of her blood, shaken by his narrow escape.

More than any other *giallo*, queer sexualities and gender identities are ubiquitous in *Deep Red*, to the extent that virtually every significant character, and several of the more minor characters, is coded as queer in some way. The two most obvious examples are Carlo and his transvestite boyfriend Massimo, both of whom are portrayed with a distinct lack of overt caricature, suggestive of a more nuanced approach than that given to Arrosio in Argento's previous film, *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*.<sup>36</sup> Less obviously, Marc is himself imbued with a sense of queerness in several respects. Like many M-*giallo* protagonists, he is involved in the arts, and as with Roberto in *Four Flies*, numerous aspersions are cast on his sexuality and supposed lack of 'manliness' by various characters. Most of these come from Gianna, who, when commenting on her current lack of a boyfriend, takes Marc's response – "Neither do I" – in the most literal fashion, declaring "I should hope not!" "A girlfriend, I mean," he replies, just a little too insistently.

As the film progresses, numerous references are made which undermine Marc's 'manliness', some by himself and some by others. He refers to himself as "sensitive", professes to suffer from claustrophobia, and is described by Gianna as "nervous". He stakes his belief in the superiority of masculine strength on an arm-wrestling contest with Gianna (he loses), begs her in a delirious panic to come to his aid after being menaced by the killer in his apartment, and is later, in a direct inversion of the archetypal 'damsel in distress' scenario, saved by her from a burning building. Much of Marc's interaction with Gianna takes the form of slapstick comedy and invariably results in him looking ridiculous: for instance, the aforementioned wrestling contest and a recurring series of gags involving him falling afoul of Gianna's wreck of a car. That so much of this slapstick is framed around their discussions of masculinity and femininity (which culminate in him grudgingly conceding that "women have the brute force, the muscles [...] but [...] men have the monopoly on intelligence") means that the masculinity he claims to speak for is made to look incredibly foolish. As established in Chapter 3, disempowerment of the protagonist is typical of the M-*giallo*. What is atypical, however, is the sense of mischief with which

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<sup>36</sup> This does not, however, indicate an overall trend towards less clichéd depictions of homosexuals in the *giallo* as a whole. Mr. Dorsey in *The Pyjama Girl Case* remains far more typical of the latter-day *giallo*'s portrayal of such characters.

Marc's emasculation is infused, with the spectator frequently invited to laugh alongside Gianna at his expense.

It is with Marc's relationship with Carlo, however, that the ambiguity of his identity is most dramatically brought to the fore. The precise nature of the characters' relationship is never spelled out and seems to invite the reading of a homoerotic subtext. In their interaction, there is a great deal of physical contact, touching each other's hands and faces. Additionally, while Carlo talks about being "caught red-handed" when his sexuality is revealed, Marc does not give the impression of being either surprised or concerned. (His clear discomfort around Massimo, however, indicates that gender indeterminacy is a taboo to him even if homosexuality is not.) Once it is known that Carlo is gay, it is hard not to interpret Carlo's earlier statement that "the difference between you and me is purely political" as a suggestion that in all respects – including sexuality – he and Marc are the same. Moreover, throughout the film, Marc and Carlo are subtly established as each other's doubles, with McDonagh describing their linkage as "so obsessive and pervasive that it demands structural resolution" (2010: 99). McDonagh's reading relies heavily on psychoanalytical theory, and while it is not my intention to impose a Freudian or Jungian interpretation on the film, McDonagh's establishment of Carlo as Marc's *doppelgänger* is borne out textually in numerous other respects. They often wear clothes whose colours are inversions of each other, with Marc's light jacket/trousers and dark shirt contrasting with Carlo's dark jacket/trousers and light shirt throughout much of the first half of the film. This is used to striking effect in an iconic scene photographed in the Piazza Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale in Turin, in which the two men are shown in extreme long shot as near mirror images of one another at either side of the frame (see Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.11 – Marc (left) and Carlo as inversions of one another.

Given the *gialli*'s imprecision regarding their queer characters' specific 'vices', it would be overly simplistic to suggest that, in presenting Marc as "sensitive" and establishing him as Carlo's double, the film unequivocally depicts him as a repressed homosexual. However, the very fact that the character is open to such an interpretation demonstrates the extent to which *Deep Red*, like *Four Flies* before it, usurps the *giallo*'s tendency to mark its queer men as separate from its 'normal' male characters.

Further examples of characters that fail to conform to conventional gender roles proliferate throughout the film. These range from obvious examples like the effeminate Professor Bardi (Piero Mazzinghi) and Gianna, who wears her feminist credentials on her sleeve and thrives in a male-dominated workplace, to a number of minor background characters whose gender is indeterminate, such as the concierge of the apartment block in which Massimo lives. The appearance of the female killer, too, plays on notions of gender indeterminacy, combining the traditional raincoat with slacks and shoes (typically seen as male attire) and heavy eye make-up (typically female). This make-up, seen being applied in a series of extreme close-ups of the killer's eye, serves as a playful 'double bluff', engaging with an audience who in 1975, after two of Argento's three previous *gialli* had featured a female killer, would have been aware of his tendency to subvert gender expectations. The degree to which the eyeliner is exaggerated, and the fetishistic depiction of its application, are suggestive of performance, as if the killer is creating an excessively feminine look to compensate for a lack of femininity. In other words, the look is almost *too* feminine to actually be female.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Marta herself, even when not in 'killer costume', is so heavily made up with mascara and chalk-white foundation that her very appearance evokes the notion of performance – compounded by the association of both the character and the actor playing her with the neorealist films of the 1940s. Furthermore, in a scene in which Marc visits the bar to ask about Carlo's whereabouts, a woman can be glimpsed in the foreground applying such an excessive degree of eyeliner as to look absurdly theatrical. The effect of mentioning Carlo while foregrounding the character (she is the dominant feature in this composition despite his irrelevance to the plot) subtly connects Carlo to the previously glimpsed close-ups of the killer's eyeliner-caked eye and casts suspicion on him. (See Figure 5.12.)

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<sup>37</sup> The killer's potential masculinity is further inferred by an early scene in which she is shown using a men's public bathroom, and the fact that the transvestite Massimo also wears eyeliner.



**Figure 5.12 – Femininity as performance: the killer (top) and an unnamed extra.**

The presence of this extended cast of characters whose behaviour or appearance marks them as queer is only intensified by a number of elements which, while not directly related to gender or sexuality, help convey the film's overwhelming sense of strangeness and hyperreality. This otherness fits hand in gloves with the film's challenging of traditional gender boundaries, which, while not grotesque in the manner of a character like Dorsey in *The Pyjama Girl Case*, does provoke a sense of pronounced unease. Just as *film noir* conveys a sense of "strangeness" with its "unbalanced composition" and "skewed camera angles" (Dyer 1977), *Deep Red* itself effectively becomes queer by virtue of the variety of ways in which it usurps many of the *giallo*'s conventions, disorienting the spectator. This is signalled as early as the film's opening credits, where the stark white-on-black titles and jazz-rock score are interrupted midway through by the sound of a children's lullaby and violent screaming as the image of a living room adorned with Christmas decorations fades in. Two silhouettes are projected against the far wall, one repeatedly stabbing the other. The victim's silhouettes falls to the ground, while their attacker moves out of shot. A

bloody knife lands on the floor in the foreground, and a child approaches it, only their feet and lower legs visible. The image then fades to black, the jazz-rock score returns, and the credits continue as if nothing had happened. In addition to the profoundly disorienting effect of this interruption of the opening titles' flow, the scene also provides the first indicator of the sense of gender indeterminacy that pervades throughout the film via the socks and strap shoes of the child, which could belong to either a boy or a girl.

Unusual and abrupt editing of this sort occurs throughout the remainder of the film. These range from seemingly unmotivated cutaways to different angles during dialogue exchanges (which often serve to frustrate the spectator by obscuring the character who is speaking) to a number of highly unusual scene transitions, during which frames from the next scene are spliced into the current one, each appearing for only a fraction of a second. Similarly, the manner in which scenes are staged and photographed often takes on a theatrical quality. Many take place in empty or near-empty buildings and city streets which dwarf the characters, giving the sense that they are actors on an expansive stage. (See, for instance, the scene between Marc and Carlo shown above in Figure 5.11.) On two occasions this is realised in a more literal fashion: the parapsychology conference at which Helga senses the murderer's presence, and her colleague Professor Giordani (Gluco Mauri)'s later re-enactment of the moment, whereby he stands on the stage and delivers the same lines Helga previously spoke, projecting them towards the now-empty theatre in a highly theatrical manner. Background extras are often posed like mannequins, most notably in the Blue Bar where Marc and Carlo perform music, the effect of which is unsettling and recalls the 'dead-alive' citizens of Prague noted in *Short Night of Glass Dolls* (Lado 1971) in Chapter 3. The inclusion of suggestions of supernatural phenomena, most notably Helga's apparently genuine psychic powers, further add to the sense that the film transgresses the *giallo* framework, blurring the line between fantasy and reality. Even the fact that the film, despite taking place in Rome, incorporates numerous identifiable locations from Turin conveys a sense of otherness, as if the very fabric of its reality is, like its gender identities, malleable.

## 5.6 Conclusion

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw a newfound visibility for those identified as queer, both in the 'real world' and in the cinema. This newfound visibility and the resultant anxieties stemming from it are echoed in the *giallo* in the form of both the ubiquitous yet

marginal presence of queer characters and the ways in which they are portrayed, which exude ambivalence and are used to provoke unease.

Lacking the strict censorial control to which earlier filmic movements both in Italy and around the world were subjected, the *gialli* are typically far more upfront in their depiction of queer characters than the *films noirs* whose interpretation as articulations of contemporary sociocultural anxieties inspired the critical approach of this thesis. Queer characters are ever-present in the *giallo*, but rarely take centre stage. Most *gialli* conspire to keep them in the shadows and at the periphery of society and tend to present them as either implicitly dangerous and part of a broader spectrum of aberrant behaviour, or absurd and deserving of ridicule. Despite not being constrained by the straitjacket of *noir*'s heterosexist genre limitations, therefore, the language of repression remains to the fore in the *giallo*. At the same time, however, the very fact that queer characters are so visible and so numerous in these films remains striking. At any rate, by the time of the *giallo* boom, the diverse array of sexual and gender-variant minorities grouped together under the umbrella term 'queer' were well and truly 'out of the closet', meaning that it was no longer possible to simply pretend that they did not exist.

With this chapter, I have sought to demonstrate that the *giallo*'s portrayal of queer sexuality goes beyond either an enlightened attitude to these minorities or a regressive exercise in queer-bashing. As noted in the two previous chapters and their explorations of the portrayal of male protagonists and central women, these films are too ideologically ambivalent to facilitate such reductive interpretations. In examining the *giallo*'s portrayal of its queer characters, it is all too easy to look at the broader picture and dismiss them as mean-spirited, reactionary and clichéd. While not wishing to suggest that any of these labels are inaccurate, I have aimed, particularly with this chapter's three case studies, to at least *challenge* them, suggesting that the *gialli* can also be subversive and mischievous, offering the potential for more progressive readings. These readings do not necessarily mean that the films are not *also* reactionary and clichéd, but it does suggest that they are more multifaceted than mere tracts against what Cristiano Berti would call "human perversion". Just as *film noir* "liberates alternative types of men and masculinity at the same time that it constructs these alternatives as dangerous or threatening" (Oliver and Trigo 2003: 34), the very presence and visibility of queer characters in the *gialli* is a double-edged sword, on the one hand increasing the visibility of marginalised groups such as homosexual, transvestite and other non-heteronormative men and women while at the same time continuing to subjugate them.

These are not films, therefore, that provide practical answers, explanations or solutions, and that is what makes them so fascinating (and frustrating). Instead, they problematize masculinity and femininity as fixed identities in a variety of interesting ways, challenging established boundaries of gender and sexuality in ways that their makers did not necessarily intend. Some even go so far as to challenge notions of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ to the extent that virtually every character deviates in some way from notions of heteronormativity, fostering a breakdown of gender as a binary construct. It may be that *Tenebrae*, which confronts the critical reaction to the *giallo* from both sides of the political spectrum and indicts both a conservative film critic and an author of *gialli* as architects of the destruction of those identified as queer, most accurately sums up these films’ relationship with queer sexuality and in so doing has the last laugh.

In the next chapter, I turn to the subject of children and teenagers, examining the ways in which – much like the characters and situations explored in this chapter – their presence serves to disrupt the heteronormative order.



## 6 “The stirrings of the flesh”: Children and teenagers in the *giallo*

### 6.1 Introduction

As an Alitalia flight touches down at an airport in Venice, Franco Serpieri (George Lazenby) waits in the terminal, clutching a bouquet of flowers. The camera cuts outside, showing a motley array of disembarked passengers approaching the terminal, but focusing on one in particular: a young, attractive brunette woman in the mould of any number of F-*giallo* central women or M-*giallo* sidekicks. A close-up of Franco follows, grinning in apparent recognition and stepping out of frame as he advances to meet someone. Common sense and a familiarity with conventional filmic editing patterns would suggest that the person he has been waiting for and has just spotted is the brunette woman we have just seen – an assumption that appears to be confirmed as the camera cuts again to the woman as she enters the terminal, also smiling in what appears to be recognition. The camera continues to track her in profile as she moves towards Franco. At this point, however, the illusion of what has until now appeared to be a reunion between two lovers is shattered by a disembodied voice exclaiming “Hi, daddy!”, followed by the woman walking straight past Franco to embrace and kiss another man in the background, while Franco bends down to pick up a hitherto unseen young girl: his daughter Roberta (Nicoletti Elmi). From this point, the brunette woman is never seen again.

The scene described above, and reproduced in part in Figure 6.1 below, immediately follows the opening credits to *Who Saw Her Die?* (Lado 1972). Superficially, it resembles the beginning of any number of *gialli*, with a foreign tourist arriving in a major European city. The scene plays with the audience’s familiarity with *giallo* conventions, only to usurp them at the last moment by abandoning what appears to be a typical adult heterosexual union in favour of introducing an element that is highly *atypical* in the *giallo*: a child. When I first watched the film, knowing little to nothing about the plot, I not unreasonably assumed that the woman on whom the camera lavished so much attention was romantically involved with the protagonist played by Lazenby and was surprised, not to mention baffled, by this apparent act of deception by the filmmakers.



**Figure 6.1 – Misdirection: the intrusion of a child disrupts a conventional adult heterosexual pairing.**

I am not alone in my confusion. Various theories have been proposed as to why the scene is shot this way: for instance, Bengt Wallman suggests that it “tells us it is a mistake to trust anything at face value, especially vision” (2007: 46-47), while Mikel Koven argues that the scene is “playing with the audience’s expectations and assumptions, demonstrating the empathic and participatory nature of vernacular films like the *giallo*” (2006: 59). While I do not disagree with the assertions of either author, I do not feel that they adequately explain what is happening in this scene. What makes the deception so strange is how seemingly unmotivated it is, lasting for all of thirty seconds and having no impact on the plot. There is literally nothing to be gained by implying a romantic union between Franco and the unidentified woman, or in initially concealing Roberta from the spectator. Surely if, as Wallman suggests, the intention is simply to emphasise that all is not as it initially seems in the *giallo*, the point is made far more effectively by the multiple red herrings and shocking revelations that occur in the murder investigation which follows.

What the scene *does* do, wittingly or otherwise, is highlight the *giallo*’s emphasis on an adult male/female binary and the liminal status of the figure of the child within this framework. The scene is confusing and misleading not just in terms of its editing but also its staging, with the direction of Franco’s gaze failing to account for the height difference

between him and Roberta, as if the visual language of the *giallo* is not equipped to accommodate the presence of a child. As such, Roberta's sudden intrusion, first into the soundtrack via her disembodied voice, and then finally into the visual domain as she is lifted into frame by Franco, disrupts 'business as usual' and forces a reconfiguring of the traditional 'vocabulary' of the *giallo*. All of this suggests that the place of the child within the *giallo* is problematic: a third party intruding on and disrupting the adult male/female binary. This in turn raises several questions. What is the position of the child within the *giallo*'s structure of male agency and female passivity, as established in the previous chapters? Do the films adjust their usual lexicon to accommodate the child being placed within this framework? Do a child's age and/or gender have any bearing on how they are depicted? The scene described may be an isolated moment in a single film, but it has ramifications for the *giallo* as a whole.

This chapter was born out of a desire to answer the above questions, inspired by this curious scene, and to acknowledge and account for the absence of children and teenagers in the *giallo* in general, relating this phenomenon back to anxieties regarding the evolving role and makeup of the family in light of changes to gender roles at the time of the *giallo* boom. The figure of the child has been overlooked and deserves greater attention, not least because of the unique and intriguing qualities of the handful of *gialli* in which they are a key presence. For the most part, children rarely feature in these films, and the few that do seldom have any great narrative significance. The very fact that children are so conspicuous by their absence makes the films in which they *do* appear in a significant capacity all the more interesting, and it is on these examples that this chapter focuses. In the first portion of the chapter, I provide a broad overview of the figure of the child in the *giallo* and in film as a whole, exploring the ways in which children are used in the typical *giallo* (when they appear at all). In the second portion, I examine three films from the corpus of study in which children and teenagers play a significant role: *Who Saw Her Die?* and the pre-pubescent Roberta, *Don't Torture a Duckling* (Fulci 1972) and its pubescent boys, and finally *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Dallamano 1972) and its clique of sixth form girls.

## 6.2 Conceptualising the child in film

Before discussing the ways in which children appear and are used in the *giallo*, it behoves me to first address the figure of the child in film more generally. In writing on *film noir*,

which has provided my primary framework for interrogating the *giallo* throughout this thesis, children rarely feature, with what little discussion does exist tending to concentrate on pointing out their absence. These discussions are usually framed around representations of the family, which tend to be either overtly critical or artificially idealised (and thus, according to *noir*'s generally cynical worldview, doomed).

The most comprehensive of these discussions is arguably Sylvia Harvey's "Woman's Place: The Absent Family of Film Noir". As its title suggests, Harvey's essay is primarily concerned not with children but rather the role of women within the *noir* family, arguing that its role as a site of women's oppression is usurped in these films by "the absence of normal family relations", in doing so encouraging "the consideration of alternative institutions for the reproduction of social life" (1998: 45). Janey Place, too, notes the scarcity of depictions of family life in *noir*, arguing that, when the world of families, children and the home *is* shown, "it is either so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction" or "so dull and constricting that it offers no compelling alternative to the dangerous but exciting life on the fringe" (1998: 60). Similarly, Andrew Dickos notes that in *noir*, the family tends to be either missing entirely or characterised as "the root of malcontent and evil": the hidden alter-ego of "the wholesome image of American family life promulgated in American entertainment" in the 1950s (2002: 146-147; see also Krutnik 1991: 61). Harvey and Dickos' observations are echoed by Sheri Chinen Biesen, who notes the "male-centered, urban" character of these films and the lack of scope this provides for explorations of the domestic realm, in contrast to the interrelated but female-centric gothic melodrama movement (2005: 41; see also Chapter 4).

While the lack of discussion of children in literature on *film noir* limits its scope as a means of framing my examination of children in the *giallo*, the observations of these authors are nonetheless useful for the purposes of this chapter. This is chiefly because, despite my emphasis on children and teenagers rather than the family as a whole, the spectre of the family remains a constant presence in the films under discussion. As the analyses which follow will show, the child and the family are inextricably linked, with the portrayal of children in the *giallo* invariably also shedding light on the way in which the family is viewed in these films, and vice versa. To that end, many of the anxieties depicted in the *gialli* regarding children can be read in relation to broader concerns regarding changing conceptions of the family and its role in society at the time of the *giallo* boom, just as Harvey interprets *noir*'s displacement of traditional 'family values' as at least in

part a response to the disruption of normal family life by the Second World War and the various societal transformations which followed (1998: 38; see also Dickos 2002: 151).

In contrast to writing on *film noir*, much commentary exists on children in Italian cinema, an “important staple [...] since the silent era” (Sutton 2005: 354), and their function as a means of critiquing Italian society and culture. Mary Wood observes that children are often used to emphasise the power of family solidarity in films such as *Bicycle Thieves* (de Sica 1948) by depicting their loyalty to parental figures and each other. Additionally, she argues that they possess a “sexual neutrality” which allows them to “comment ... on the state of their world” (2005: 177-178). Similarly, Peter Bondanella interprets children in neorealist cinema as “the symbol of a future hope, of the possibility for social change” (2001: 452), while Marcia Landy describes children as functioning in turn as

signifiers of innocence in a corrupt world, melodramatic images of martyrdom tied to the disintegration or regeneration of society, figures of nostalgia for a lost past, signs of generational warfare in society, and as means of providing a different and distanced perspective on familiar social situations. (2000: 234)

The language used by these authors is significant. With words like “signifiers”, “images” and “figures”, Landy makes it clear that the main significance of the child in these films is not as an individual but rather a *symbol* of broader concerns. This tendency has been observed by numerous authors in relation to screen representations of the child. Karen Lury, for instance, notes the use of children to renegotiate historical events, exploring ideas that cannot otherwise be articulated and serving as “ciphers for adult anxieties, fantasies and fears” (2010: 106). Similarly, Vicky LeBeau conceives of the child on screen primarily as “an object to *think* with, an idea through which to encounter the *institution* of cinema – its historical and social placement, certainly, but also [...] its forms of address to the spectators ranged before its screens” (2008: 12-13). LeBeau repeatedly refers to the figure of the child as symbolic, with, for instance, the murder of children by the Nazis in the Soviet war film *Come and See* (Klimov 1985) serving as “the very symbol of the human right, at once individual and collective, to exist, to *be*” (2008: 146). In terms of narrative function, children often serve as ‘MacGuffins’ (to borrow the Hitchcockian term): plot devices used to spur the films’ adult protagonists to action. Emma Wilson notes the recurring function of the murdered or kidnapped child in popular cinema as a vehicle for exploring the desire for revenge, with the loss of a child serving as “a trigger to action but not a subject of investigation in its own right” (2003: 4). The child in film, therefore, does not necessarily articulate a child’s concerns or point of view: it is not so much their identity

as children that is significant but rather what their presence *symbolises*. In this respect, the child performs a similar function to, for example, the *femme fatale* in *film noir* or the modern cosmopolitan city in the *giallo*: an abstract articulation of either broad sociocultural anxieties, often tied to a specific period in history, or more primal urges, such as vengeance or the desire to protect.

### 6.3 Children and the family in the *giallo*: An overview

Whereas the child is widely recognised as a significant figure in Italian cinema, writing focused specifically on the *giallo* tends to mirror literature on *film noir* in its lack of direct reference to children, let alone any extended analysis of their function. One of the few exceptions, a short discussion by Koven, explores the subject of children exclusively from the point of view of pederasty, an offshoot of a broader discussion of criminal activity in the *giallo* (2006: 70-71). Even this brief examination, however, does not specifically discuss the portrayal of children but rather those who prey on them, the author's own implicit diminishing of the figure of the child paralleling their liminal status in the films themselves. Prior to examining this chapter's three core texts and the more prominent roles occupied by children and teenagers in these films, I aim to correct this oversight by discussing the portrayal and function of children in the typical *giallo*, in effect providing a yardstick against which the more atypical core texts can be measured.

The most common appearance of children in the *giallo* is as participants in the various flashbacks that reveal the killer's psychosis and provide the motivation for his/her murderous spree. Sometimes the child is the killer him/herself, as in *Torso* (Martino 1973), in which Franz witnesses his brother plunging from the hillside to his death after trying to retrieve a doll dropped by a friend and is subsequently driven to commit murders in the present day as a result of this trauma. On other occasions, the child is a peripheral figure whose role as an observer is key to solving the mystery, as in *Deep Red* (Argento 1975), in which the young Carlo witnesses his mother Marta (Clara Calamai) stabbing his father to death. In each case, there is a recurrent theme of the child being damaged by the encroachment of violence from the world of adults. Childhood, it is inferred, is a time of innocence that ends when disrupted by a moment of brutal violence, after which come the hardships and moral uncertainties of adulthood. The child Franz and the child Carlo are both wide-eyed naïfs. The adult Franz (John Richardson) is a vicious killer compelled to murder women, whom he sees as "only dolls – stupid dolls made out of flesh and blood".

Similarly, the adult Carlo (Gabriele Lavia) is a dysfunctional drunk whose homosexuality, in Peter Bondanella's reading of the film, is depicted as symptomatic of his strong identification during his childhood with his murderous mother rather than his father (2009: 386). In this way, the child serves "as both evidence and ground for the interpretation of everybody's individual self, in that what happened to you 'as a child' determined how you would act and think as an adult" (Lury 2010: 25).

In the *giallo*, therefore, children are largely excluded from the present day, distanced from the adult world and tied to the uncertainty and confusion of subjective flashbacks. It is left to their adult selves (or other adults) to give meaning and contextualisation to their past trauma, evoking Lury's assertion that children are often used in cinema to renegotiate historical events, "reflect[ing] on what cannot be said" (2010: 6). Indeed, in this respect *Deep Red* exemplifies the manner in which children are used in the *giallo*. Apart from the young Carlo, the only other child character in the film is Olga (Nicoletta Elmi), a disturbed young girl who tortures lizards, grins sadistically when her father slaps her, and whose recreation of the child Carlo's gruesome painting of his father's death provides the crucial link which allows protagonist Marc Daly (David Hemmings) to connect Carlo (and through him Marta) to the current spate of murders. Although Olga exists in the present rather than in flashback, she is inherently associated with the past, living in a rural area that appears largely unaffected by the technological advancements of the post-war years. She is also the character who guides Marc to the old, dilapidated mansion in which the murder of Carlo's father took place and in which he will ultimately find Carlo's original painting, effectively bringing the past into the present. All three core texts in this chapter embrace the past as much as (or indeed more than) the modern cosmopolitanism that characterises other *gialli*, from the crumbling architecture of old Venice in *Who Saw Her Die?*, to the ancient traditions and superstitions of *Don't Torture a Duckling's* bucolic community, to the country lanes and rural idyll of Middle England in *What Have You Done to Solange?*

If the child is treated as a site of anxiety and a signifier of past trauma, then the *giallo's* conception of the family is even more ambivalent. This is despite the huge cultural significance placed on the family in relation to Italian national identity (Wood 2005: 76-77) and the country's long-running tradition of films in which the family is the central focus. Only when one considers the changing nature of the role of the family in the early 1970s, with new legislation for divorce, abortion and the contesting of the husband's role as head of the family (Landy 2000: 206-207), does the *giallo's* clear ambivalence towards the family begin to make sense. Domestic bliss is a concept wholly alien to these films, and

throughout the *giallo* canon examples exist of families that are depicted as corrupt and dysfunctional. These include, among others, a scheming Satanist who attempts to murder her sister to collect her insurance policy in *All the Colours of the Dark* (Martino 1972), a husband indulging in an affair with a family friend while his wife fantasises about (and murders) their lesbian next door neighbour in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971) and an obsessive ex-husband who stalks his former wife, trying to force her to return to the bosom of his free love cult in *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (Carnimeo 1972). This familial dysfunction is most vividly depicted in the F-*giallo*, in which one of the most common narrative conventions is that of the seemingly innocuous husband who is secretly plotting to murder his wife, usually for financial gain. Even when the husband is in fact genuinely harmless, he is invariably presented as boring and a poor substitute for the life of passion and sexual freedom that entices the central woman to forsake her marriage, mirroring Place's observations about the mundanity of the *noir* family. While the M-*giallo*'s male protagonists are almost invariably shown to be in relationships, they are usually unmarried, implying a degree of impermanence and greater freedom than is afforded to their female counterparts in the F-*gialli*. Several male protagonists are either divorcés or have had long-running relationships with women that have ended prior to the start of the film, with either the relationship itself or its dissolution portrayed as a source of considerable pain.<sup>38</sup> The *giallo*'s ambivalence towards the family is accentuated by the representations of married life into contact with which the films' protagonists come in the course of their investigations. See, for instance, the loveless relationship between Sophia Bini (Rossella Falk) and her adulterous husband Richard (Renato Romano) in *The Fifth Cord*, or the ineffectual Alberto Ranieri (Umberto Raho) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (Argento 1970), compelled to cover up his wife's murder spree even after she attempts to kill him.

It is worth stressing that children rarely feature in these portrayals of the family. The Ranieris and the Binis are both childless, and while Helene has a young son, Tony, he is the product of a relationship she had after breaking up with Andrea, who conveys no strong feelings regarding the boy, either positive or negative. When relationships between parents and children *are* shown, the children tend to be adults themselves. These relationships are usually as fraught as those between husbands and wives. For instance, in *Autopsy* (Crispino 1975), Simona Sana (Mimsy Farmer)'s relationship with her father (Carlo Cattaneo) is tinged with suggestions of incest, while in *The Case of the Bloody Iris*, the elderly

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<sup>38</sup> See my discussion of Andrea (Franco Nero)'s relationship with Helene (Silvia Monti) in *The Fifth Cord* (Bazzoni 1971) in Chapter 3.



Professor Isaacs (George Rigaud) is overly controlling of his daughter Sheila (Annabella Incontrera) and revealed to be responsible for murdering the various women whom he holds responsible for her lesbianism. These scenarios reveal a high level of intergenerational strife that, like so many other facets of the *giallo*, evokes the changing social mores of the post-war period. This is particularly true of *Iris*, in which Isaacs' response to his daughter's sexuality reflects the inability of the older generation to reconcile with the culture of permissiveness that their children were seen to embrace.

These examples show that the family is far from absent from the *giallo*, although it is invariably portrayed in a less than positive light. However, while fraught relationships between older parents and their adult offspring are rife, children in the most literal sense – that is to say those who are not yet adults – are seldom featured, except in minor roles. Having established the nature of these minor roles, I now wish to examine the opposite end of the spectrum: the rare *gialli* in which children take centre stage and serve as the primary focus of the narrative.

#### **6.4 Masculinity in crisis revisited: The father in *Who Saw Her Die?***

Aldo Lado's *Who Saw Her Die?* is arguably the most conventional of this chapter's three core texts, ostensibly an archetypal M-*giallo* involving an obsessive male protagonist, Venetian sculptor Franco Serpieri, who sets out to solve a murder. The major point of distinction is the fact that the victim is his daughter Roberta, murdered after he leaves her playing outdoors while he indulges in a bout of casual sex with Gabriella (Rosemarie Lindt). Most M-*giallo* protagonists are connected only tangentially to the case by having been in the wrong place at the wrong time, but in this instance the investigation takes on an intensely personal dimension, and indeed comes about not because Franco happens to be present when the murder is committed but because he is *absent*, his failure to protect his daughter fuelling his drive to bring her killer to justice. Over the course of his investigation, Franco uncovers a sadomasochistic, paedophilic sex cult whose members include several of the city's most distinguished residents. Among these is the killer, local priest Father James (Alessandro Haber), driven to murder young red-haired girls because of a desire to prevent them from growing up to become "whores" and "sinners" like his mother, herself a redhead.

The film is divided into two distinct ‘acts’, of which the first, constituting the initial half-hour, concentrates on the lead-up to Roberta’s disappearance and the discovery of her body. This longer than usual build-up to the film’s ‘inciting incident’ (in most *M-gialli*, the murder that sets the protagonist on his quest occurs within the first five to ten minutes) provides an opportunity to develop tension in the form of the multiple characters whose intentions towards Roberta can be interpreted as predatory. Despite the deceptively carefree nature of the footage of Roberta and Franco enjoying the sights and sounds of Venice, nearly every scene features an adult male showing a potentially unhealthy interest in the child. Franco’s unnamed journalist friend (Piero Vida) calls Roberta “beautiful”, stroking her hair and cheek – an action repeated by another character, Serafian (Adolfo Celi), who gives her a necklace as a present. Incidental characters also show an interest in Roberta; for example, a twitchy, bespectacled man in a restaurant who is shown surreptitiously sketching her in his notebook. All of these incidents can be read as completely innocuous, but the very nature of their ambiguity, and the fact that the film’s subject matter includes child murders and paedophilia, imbues them with an air of profound unease. At the very least, they convey the idea of an uncertain world filled with menace, and just as in the average *giallo* the killer can potentially be anyone, here anyone can potentially be a child predator.

This tendency to emphasise understated menace rather than immediately launching into scenes of visceral gore extends to the manner in which the film’s child murders are depicted. Two children are killed, and in both instances, the film is unusually coy about depicting their deaths in comparison to the murders of adults in both this and other *gialli*. In typical *giallo* fashion, there is significant build-up to the deaths of both children, consisting of subjective point of view shots of the killer watching or advancing on his prey. The first of the two child victims, Nicole, is killed in a brief pre-credits prologue set in the French Alps four years prior to the events of the rest of the film. After building tension by showing the killer moving towards Nicole as she rides her sledge into a wooded area, the scene cuts to a close-up of Nicole running towards the camera. Suddenly, the killer’s gloved hand reaches into frame and covers her mouth, before hauling her out of frame. The scene then cuts to a shot of the killer bludgeoning Nicole’s head with a rock. The horror of the situation is, however, mitigated by the fact that Nicole is completely still, suggesting that she is already dead, and that the object being struck is clearly a mannequin, robbing the scene of any sense of verisimilitude. The next time Nicole is seen, she is already partially buried face down in the snow as the killer frantically tries to conceal the body.

The music, too, contrasts with that of other *gialli*. Whereas many of the numerous other scores provided by Ennio Morricone prominently feature the voice of adult female soloist Edda Dell'Orso, *Die*'s vocal accompaniment is provided by a children's choir. The music has an ambiguous quality: bombastic and enthusiastic but also rendered sinister by virtue of the fevered nature of the chanting and its frequent juxtaposition with scenes of violence or menace towards children. This is particularly apparent in the opening credits following Nicole's death, where the choir sings over footage of pages from the police report on the murder. As images of Nicole's half-buried body and the rock used to bludgeon her skull are shown, the feverish music continues. The credits conclude with a portrait of Nicole seeming to stare imploringly at the camera as if condemning the spectator who has, in the previous scene depicting her murder, shared the killer's point of view. The music, which continues in this vein for the film's duration, provides the figure of the child with a constant presence in the film even when not on screen, while the religious connotations of the music emphasise the Church, which plays a significant and sinister role in all three of this chapter's core texts.<sup>39</sup>

The death of Roberta is even less explicit than that of Nicole. Again, there is considerable build-up, with numerous scenes showing the point of view of the killer (identified by the combination of the distinctive black veil placed in front of the camera lens and the use of the same piece of choral music that accompanied Nicole's murder) as he watches Roberta from a distance. In the final such scene, Roberta lifts her head, staring straight at the camera in a manner not unlike the portrait of Nicole that accompanied the crime dossier seen earlier. This is followed by a jump cut to carcasses hanging in a butcher's shop as the doors slam shut, bringing the music to an abrupt end and inviting the spectator to make an assumption about Roberta's fate without explicitly showing it. While unsubtle, this approach is unusually restrained given the *giallo*'s tendency to place great importance on the 'thrill of the kill', particularly in the marketing, which invariably emphasises the films' gruesome death scenes. Even in the rare instances where a death takes place off-screen, such as that of the yellow-jacketed assassin (Reggie Nalder) in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, considerable emphasis is placed on the reveal of the body and its invariably mutilated condition. By contrast, with the murder of Roberta, not only is the actual moment of death denied to the spectator, the discovery of her body is similarly understated and unusually sombre, as Roberta – immediately identifiable by her red hair, but like Nicole represented by an unconvincing mannequin – is shown floating face down in the

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<sup>39</sup> For a more extended discussion of the Church in these films, see section 6.4.

canal, accompanied by a lower key, more mournful chant from the children's choir. A close-up of Roberta's body is followed by a tracking shot of the faces of various onlookers watching in contemplative silence (see Figure 6.2), before abruptly cutting to Roberta's funeral.



**Figure 6.2 – The unusually low-key reveal of Roberta's body.**

With Roberta's death, the emphasis is not on the body itself but on the reactions of those who discover it, evinced by the tracking shot of the onlookers. This shot is particularly striking as it depicts a more emotional, contemplative form of horror than the visceral body horror normally associated with the *giallo* and its fetishistic close-ups of punctured flesh. It also foreshadows the second of the film's two acts, in which the child victim is sidelined, instead emphasising the adults left to negotiate the aftermath, particularly Franco.

In contrast with the deaths of Roberta and Nicole, the various murders involving the film's adult characters are far more conventional in their explicitness and the thrills derived from

the actual moment of death. The strangulation of Ginevra (Dominique Boschero) in a darkened cinema is typical *giallo* fare, accompanied by shots of the victim's agonised face and extreme close-ups of her eyes, her hands clawing at the noose around her neck and blood flowing from her open mouth as she gasps her last agonised breath, followed by the screams of her fellow cinemagoers as the body is discovered and chaos ensues. The death of the paedophilic lawyer Bonaiuti (José Quaglio), stabbed to death by the killer, and that of the killer himself, who catches fire and plunges screaming from a balcony, are similarly explicit. Clearly, the filmmakers have no aversion to showing graphic violence when the victims are adults. This indicates that the restrained manner in which Roberta and Nicole's deaths are depicted is not indicative of a broader rejection of the *giallo*'s violent iconography but rather a sense that children are in some way 'off limits' for depictions of brutal violence. The effect of this is to suggest that there is something sacred about children – something that makes them inappropriate targets for the salacious and titillating tendencies generally associated with the *giallo*. Father James' reference to his desire to prevent his victims from becoming "whores" like his mother is also potentially significant. Whereas Roberta and Nicole's youth affords them a degree of innocence, the films' adult victims are invariably tainted by virtue of their involvement with the sex cult or other related proclivities, such as Bonaiuti's paedophilia. As such, characters like Bonaiuti and Father James can be regarded as more 'deserving' of their violent fates, allowing the filmmakers and spectators to feel less morally compromised in relishing their visceral death scenes.

This decision to figuratively protect Roberta from the worst excesses of violence also has the effect of diminishing her presence in the film. Because she spends so much time off-screen, including at the moment of her death, we are far more "spatially attached" – to use Murray Smith's term (1995) – to the adult characters. With Roberta dead, the remainder of the film focuses on Franco's investigation, the conventional M-*giallo* narrative quickly surfacing as his personal grief is repressed and a drive to explain and restore order takes over. As early as the funeral itself, Franco is distanced from the emotional aspect of Roberta's death: while numerous close-ups of his wife Elizabeth (Anita Strindberg)'s distraught face are shown, Franco's emotionally blank face is seen clearly only once, in the foreground of a tracking shot of various mourners climbing aboard the funeral barge. The rest of the time, he is shown either in the background of group shots or, as the barge sets off down the canal, with his back to the camera, standing stolidly with his hands in his pockets while Elizabeth weeps and is comforted by the priest. Franco stands apart from his wife, on the opposite side of the coffin, a composition that both emphasises their

estrangement and establishes the very different roles the two parents will play in the aftermath of Roberta's murder. Throughout the rest of the film, Elizabeth is continually associated with the domestic sphere and with passivity, frequently pictured at home or pleading with Franco to give up his quest and remain at home with her so they can "help each other to be strong". Franco, on the other hand, responds not with displays of grief but with rage that he first directs at himself, pounding one of his sculptures to pieces as he rants about the responsibility he feels for Roberta's death, before focusing his anger on the killer and channelling it into catching and punishing him.

Franco's reactions represent a prototypically masculine response and in so doing illustrate the same preoccupation that informs the *M-giallo* as a whole: the fear of male powerlessness. *Die* illustrates that those who threaten the heteronormative order are capable of robbing man of not only his power and freedom but also his role as protector of his family – perhaps the most potent symbol of conventional masculinity. Through his inability to protect his daughter, Franco's failure is that of both a father and a man, his inaction having contributed to Roberta's death. He proceeds to rectify this by forsaking domesticity – represented by Elizabeth, whose pleas to return home to her he repeatedly ignores – and instead adopting the more traditional male role of the hunter as he seeks to apprehend the killer, thus not only avenging his daughter and restoring social order but also reaffirming his own power. He does this both by identifying the killer (thereby reinstating logic and order) and by asserting his position as the 'alpha male' by intimidating and on occasions assaulting the physically weaker and often fey suspects he encounters. The casting is significant here, with George Lazenby, fresh from a stint as male fantasy figure James Bond in *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Hunt 1969), sharing the frame with the likes of the overweight Piero Vida as his journalist friend, the boyish Peter Chatel (dubbed with a decidedly effete voice) as the masochistic Philip Vernon, and the elderly, effeminate José Quaglio as Bonaiuti.

An undercurrent, therefore, develops by which the film functions as a reaction to the destruction of the family and an attempt to reassert it. Franco's estrangement from his wife and his infidelity result in the death of their daughter, revealed to have been perpetrated by a cross-dressing priest who belongs to a secret cult whose members indulge in every vice imaginable, from drug-taking to spanking to child molestation. The alternative, perverted 'family' to which Father James belongs is contrasted with the conventional nuclear family represented by Franco, Elizabeth and Roberta – father, mother and child. While the *giallo's* proclivity for ambivalence prevents the Serpieri family from being overly idealised

(Franco and Elizabeth are separated and living in different countries at the start of the film, and their interaction remains somewhat cold throughout), it requires little extrapolation to read the unmasking and destruction of the killer and his cult and the corresponding reunion of Franco and Elizabeth (last seen departing in a boat, entwined in each other's arms) as a reaffirmation of the superiority of heteronormative order.

As is typical of *M-gialli*, *Die*'s final scene is tinged with ambivalence as Franco and Elizabeth quietly depart the scene of Father James' demise, leaving the police to take full credit for solving the crime. As the childless couple sail away down the river, Franco's journalist friend hurries down the jetty after them, announcing a final twist in the puzzle: Father James was "an imposter – he wasn't a priest at all!"<sup>40</sup> His words fall on deaf ears, however, as Franco and Elizabeth continue to sail away, while the familiar sound of the children's choir abruptly rises on the soundtrack, as if to drown out his words. This ending is awkward and unsatisfying for several reasons, ranging from the lack of a traditional 'summing up' process in which the killer's motive is explained<sup>41</sup> to the sudden intrusion of such a bombastic piece of music in an otherwise melancholic scene. Most notable, however, is the lack of any mention of Roberta, the role of her death as the impetus for Franco's investigation seemingly forgotten. As Franco's investigation progresses over the course of the film, Roberta is increasingly deemphasised, to the extent that she eventually ceases to figure in the narrative at all. In the earliest stages, she is kept at the forefront of Franco and the spectator's minds via brief flashback interludes showing her prior to her death (again marginalising the figure of the child by tying her to the past), but these are infrequent and eventually cease altogether shortly after halfway through the film. From this point on, Roberta is barely mentioned, with the emphasis placed solely on the hunt for the killer. As if to underscore the lack of importance afforded to the murdered children in their own right, the tension is kept alive in the present via various murders of adult characters committed by the killer as he attempts to cover his tracks, further obfuscating the *raison d'être* for Franco's investigation.

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<sup>40</sup> I have noticed a widespread tendency, in online discussions and reviews of the film, to claim that this final line was inserted at the behest of the Italian censors to absolve the Church of blame for the murders. Many cite an interview with Aldo Lado on the US Anchor Bay DVD release (Hertz 2002b) as the source for this theory. In actual fact, Lado makes no reference to the 'imposter' line. Instead, he laments more generally his battles with the censors, claiming that "they didn't even want this movie to be released". This is followed by a clip of the aforementioned line, implying but not explicitly stating a correlation between it and censorial interference.

<sup>41</sup> Father James' psychosis is revealed in an earlier scene in which, prior to his unmasking, he is overheard ranting to another character about his "whore" mother and her red hair. However, it is left to the spectator to draw a connection between this and the murder of the red-haired Roberta and Nicole.

Roberta is ultimately a ‘MacGuffin’ in the classical sense: a device to facilitate the assertion of the superiority of heteronormative masculinity in the face of a sinister array of deviants, recalling Emma Wilson’s observation that children in film frequently function as mere catalysts for the exploration of adult actions and desires (see Section 6.2). This is reinforced by the fact that, as individuals, Roberta and Nicole are of little importance to the killer: by his own admission, Father James murders his victims not because of who they are or what they have done but because they share the same hair colour as his mother. Therefore, for both the killer and Franco, and indeed the film itself, these dead children are merely symbols of adult anxieties. As such, the presence of a child in a central position proves less significant than would initially appear to be the case, as the film becomes yet another exploration of the fear of a loss of male power and desire to reassert it that, to one degree or another, serve as an undercurrent to every *giallo*.

## 6.5 Young boys and their priests: Children in *Don’t Torture a Duckling*

Whereas *Who Saw Her Die?* adheres closely to the M-*giallo* framework and in doing so privileges the point of view of its male protagonist, Lucio Fulci’s *Don’t Torture a Duckling* initially operates as more of an ensemble piece, albeit one in which a male protagonist eventually emerges to solve the mystery.<sup>42</sup> The plot revolves around a series of murders of young boys in the rural southern village of Accendura. With the local police failing to make any headway, the inhabitants turn on various scapegoats, including Giuseppe (Vito Passeri), a local simpleton, and Maciara (Florinda Bolkan), a “witch” whom several of the village men corner and beat to death. It falls to a pair of amateur sleuths – big city journalist Andrea Martelli (Tomás Milina) and recovering drug addict Patrizia (Barbara Bouchet) – to identify the killer: the boys’ priest, Don Alberto (Marc Porel), motivated, like Father James in *Die*, by a desire to preserve his victims’ purity, killing them before they can “grow up and feel the stirrings of the flesh”.

As a result of its ensemble approach, *Duckling* focuses not on an individual protagonist’s desire for revenge but rather the response of a community to the murder of its children, engaging with a variety of broad cultural anxieties relating to children, their development and the conflicting roles of the family and the Catholic Church in their lives. Despite

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<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that I class *Duckling* as an M-*giallo* rather than a purely ensemble piece like *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (Bava 1970) or *Eyeball* (Lenzi 1975), in both of which there is little sense of an amateur detective actively pursuing the goal of unmasking the killer.



sharing *Die*'s subject matter and its killer's agenda, therefore, *Duckling* is very different in its more overt concern with children themselves, or at least their position in the social order. Whereas *Die* tempered its portrayal of a murderous clergyman with the last-minute assertion that he was not a "real priest", *Duckling* makes no such concession, and is surprisingly explicit in its condemnation of religion. Indeed, there can hardly be a more potent denunciation of the Church's role as a moral arbitrator than the image of a priest murdering the children under his care to prevent them from becoming sexually aware. Religion is infused with a sense of menace from as early as opening credits, during which a scene inside the village church features a shot of several boys kneeling and praying, watched over by a carved statue of a cloaked figure, its face a grinning skull and its skeletal hands clasping the hilt of a sword. The low, ominous music, the muted lighting and the presence of this grotesque figure of death, along with the fact that the boy in the foreground, Bruno, is covering his eyes as if in fear, give the setting a distinct air of horror, while the skeletal figure's priest-like robes foreshadow the killer's identity (see Figure 6.3). This, along with a later scene in which another of the boys, Michele, is attacked and choked to death beneath a crucifix statue, shows that the film's conception of the Church is far from that of a benevolent force for good, corresponding with the growing questioning of religious doctrine and of the Church's role in society in post-war Italy.



**Figure 6.3 – Religious imagery as a harbinger of death.**

It is worth acknowledging that killer priests are far from unusual in *gialli*. From a purely practical perspective, their black robes provide a convenient means of both outfitting the villain in the iconography of the traditional *giallo* killer and, with their close resemblance of women's dresses, disrupting the gender order. They are not so ubiquitous, however, that the fact that all three of this chapter's core texts feature a killer priest (either real or, in the

case of both *Die* and *What Have You Done to Solange?*, an “imposter”) can simply be dismissed as happenstance. In Italy, the Church was and is regarded as crucial to the conception of the family as “child-oriented, patriarchal and Catholic” (Ginsborg 2003: 69), and as such was intimately involved in children’s development. It is a source of some irony that, even as regular churchgoing declined in Italy, its influence in shaping the development of children actually increased as a result of the diminishing role of the extended family in childrearing, with institutions such as schools and churches picking up the slack (see Chapter 2). As an educator, guardian and arbiter of moral standards, the Church was instrumental in children’s upbringing and an institution into which parents readily entrusted their offspring. As such, the real horror of the film is derived from the revelation that the malevolent force preying on the boys is not a “witch” or local “imbecile”, both vulnerable outcasts who can easily be scapegoated by the townspeople, but rather a figure at the heart of the community and the very person into whom they entrusted their children’s wellbeing.

From a twenty-first century perspective, in which the Catholic Church has been constantly dogged by child abuse scandals, it is perhaps surprising that *Duckling* makes no attempt to infer a paedophilic dimension in Don Alberto’s close relationship with the boys in his care. Certainly, his interaction with them tends to be overtly physical, replete with hugging and hand-holding, but there is little evidence to support Stephen Thrower’s assertion that the priest is “a repressed queer who wants little boys” (2002: 98), an interpretation that seems overly coloured by present day revelations. Indeed, it is explicitly stated that there is no evidence of molestation on the bodies of the murdered children. Furthermore, in a voice-over at the end of the film, after his guilt and motivation have been revealed, Don Alberto describes the boys as his “brothers”, inferring a degree of innocence in the bond between them that supports his desire to protect their innocence. The film presents the purity of Don Alberto’s relationship with the boys as the greatest tragedy of all, and as he plunges to his death from a cliff – both a literal and figurative fall from grace – the emotional music and nostalgic flashbacks to him playing football with his wards appear to be entirely unironic in their poignancy.

Don Alberto’s role as a dark inversion of the figure of the priest as a nurturing force in children’s development is particularly relevant given the extent to which *Duckling* emphasises the transitional nature of the boys’ identities as they move from childhood to adolescence. This is underscored by the costume design, which frequently presents the boys in mismatched outfits: shorts and sandals combined with suit jackets, the former more

commonly associated with children and the latter with adults. In the first sequence after the opening credits, Bruno and Michele are shown walking outside the village, sharing a cigarette that they have split in half. Their clothes and their smoking – an adult activity – give the impression of them being ‘little adults’, but there is something clearly forced about this routine. The way in which they deliberately act out puffing on their cigarettes and then clenching the stubs between their thumbs and forefingers as they savour the taste emphasises that they are indeed children playing grown-up games (see Figure 6.4).



**Figure 6.4 – Adulthood as pantomime.**

The boys’ discussion of the prostitutes that another member of the group, Tonino, has seen arriving – “They’re real whoppers,” he declares; “they’ve got huge tits like watermelons and huge rears” – is similarly ambiguous, combining adult desires with a decidedly juvenile perspective. This clash between childhood and adulthood is further emphasised by the English-language version of the film, in which the boys are dubbed with distinctly adult-sounding voices, which conflicts with the fact that the on-screen actors are clearly much younger (particularly the actor playing Michele).<sup>43</sup> A similar issue is apparent in *Die*, where Nicoletta Elmi’s on-screen performance is paired with what sounds suspiciously like an adult woman’s voice, showing that this confusion is not necessarily gendered or specific to a single film. However, taken in conjunction with their clothing and behaviour, the effect is far more pronounced with regard to the boys in *Duckling* than *Roberta*, who in every other respect embodies the broad archetype of the youthful innocent. From listening to the English versions of these films, it is clear that most *gialli* were dubbed into English by the same group of actors, all adults, and as such the lack of authentic children’s voices

<sup>43</sup> This assumption is based purely on appearances: none of the child actors receives an on-screen credit, precluding the possibility of identifying their actual ages at the time of filming. This in itself reinforces the liminal position children occupy in these films.

in these films was probably purely logistical rather than a deliberate attempt to emphasise the characters' precarious positioning between childhood and adulthood. It does, however, illustrate the lack of attention generally afforded to children in the *giallo* as a whole (they were so low on the agenda of the English dub's casting director that he/she deemed it unnecessary to obtain child voice actors) while simultaneously reinforcing the transitory nature of their identity.

The boys' uncertain positioning between the worlds of children and adults is also reflected in the film's setting, whereby the rural way of life of Accendura is interrupted by intrusions from the modern world. This is emphasised in the film's first shot, a slow pan over the arid countryside in which the natural landscape is suddenly dissected in two by the decidedly *unnatural* sight of a modern motorway bridge. It is a meeting of two worlds, the old and the new, in which tourists from the richer, more industrially developed north of Italy cut a great swathe through the 'backwards' south, bringing with them various symbols of modernity and prosperity: cars, transistor radios, the latest fashions, the relatively new concept of families embarking on *ad hoc* holidays thanks to the increased ease of travel afforded by private car ownership. The two amateur detectives, Andrea and Patrizia, also represent this new world, their modern logic being required to impose order on a world governed by superstition and knee-jerk reactionism by solving the mystery. The boys, as the effective 'gatekeepers' between the old world and the new (in the opening scene, Tonino is seen standing on a bridge above the motorway, watching the cars going by), enjoy a privileged position of being able to observe and move between both worlds that is not shared by any of the adult characters. Patrizia, for example, is shunned by the locals because of her promiscuity, modern clothes and past drug addiction, while Andrea finds the local police uncooperative in his attempts to liaise with them while reporting on the murders.

The boys' active gaze stands in stark contrast to that of the young girls in *Die*, both of whom were denied any agency whatsoever. While it would be incorrect to suggest that the boys are *Duckling*'s protagonists – they are interchangeable and usually killed shortly after being introduced, with the narrative instead being largely driven by the film's adult characters – the fact that they are both male and experiencing their sexual awakening proves to be a far more natural fit for the *giallo* with its penchant for objectification of the female form. This is illustrated by a scene in which Michele has a steamy encounter with Patrizia, throughout which his point of view is repeatedly emphasised.

The scene begins when Michele is ordered by his mother, Patrizia's housekeeper, to take a tray of orange juice upstairs to "Miss Patrizia", who is in her bedroom. The fact that the scene begins with Michele means that we are spatially attached to him rather than Patrizia, with a feeling of mystery being created around the enigmatic woman by virtue of her being mentioned through dialogue before we actually see her. The sense of anticipation leading up to Patrizia's reveal is only compounded by Riz Ortolani's seductive, jazzy score as Michele ascends the spiral staircase to her bedroom. As he enters the room, he is initially seen staring through a Perspex wave machine that blocks his view of Patrizia, the waves rolling seductively and accentuating the sense of intrigue. The camera cuts from a close-up of Michele's wide-eyed face to a shot of Patrizia's bare breasts, visible in a haze through the rolling water like a mirage in the desert. The camera then cuts back to Michele as he averts his eyes from temptation, before his impulses overcome him and he looks again.

In the next shot, the camera rises up over the water tank, revealing Patrizia reclining on a lounge, wearing only a pair of sunglasses, which, in conjunction with the lounge and the rolling waves that frame her, evoke a beach setting. The camera cuts back to Michele as he again turns away from the temptation before him, then back to Patrizia, providing the clearest view of her yet, her left leg bent to hide her genitals, teasing the prospect of what is *not* seen as much as what *is*. Patrizia appears deliberately posed, like a pin-up model, her position and the composition of the scene replete with allusions to adolescent fantasy (see Figure 6.5).



**Figure 6.5 – Patrizia as an adolescent fantasy.**

Hearing Michele setting down the orange juice, Patrizia lifts her head, removing her sunglasses and revealing her eyes for the first time. The camera cuts to Michele hastily

retreating, and then back to Patrizia, who has again adopted a very deliberate pose, arms folded behind her head, accentuating her breasts, smiling coquettishly at the camera and laughing, evoking the image of a pin-up more than ever.

What follows is an encounter laced with sexual tension as Patrizia orders the nervous Michele to bring the tray to her, demands that he look at her (followed by a corresponding shot of her from his point of view) and deliberately spills orange juice over her body, before quizzing Michele about how many girls he has “had”.<sup>44</sup> As the scene progresses, Patrizia is repeatedly seen from the point of view of Michele within the broader context of a conventional shot/reverse shot structure. The scene plays out from an adolescent perspective, replete with sudden cutaways corresponding to Michele looking away from Patrizia’s exposed body in shame, with the handheld camerawork, claustrophobic close-ups and discordant background music evoking his nervous but excited state of mind. The shots of Patrizia, deliberately composed to accentuate her sexuality, evoke images of pin-ups and pornography – in essence, a young boy’s masturbatory fantasy made flesh. As a whole, however, the scene is somewhat incoherent, revealing the same sort of spatial confusion as the airport scene in *Die* (see Section 6.1). While many shots of Patrizia, including the initial frames of her lying on her lounge and those of her towering over Michele as she stands facing him, are convincing as representations of the point of view of a relatively short child, others are more suggestive of that of a person of adult height. Although the resulting confusion reinforces Michele’s own disorientation, it also suggests a degree of indecision on the part of the camera operator, as if the adjustment of the *giallo*’s traditional adult male objectifying look to one in which the subject is a younger boy is not entirely successful. Again, therefore, the child’s presence in the *giallo* is a source of uncertainty and confusion.

The scene concludes humiliatingly for Michele as what seems set to be his first sexual encounter is interrupted by his mother calling for him and Patrizia mockingly telling him to “obey your mama”, once more underscoring Michele’s dual nature as someone who has adult desires but is also still a child in the thrall of his mother. It is this lack of stability that

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<sup>44</sup> The clear inference in this and other scenes that Patrizia is a paedophile is intriguing, particularly given the disavowal of any such desire on the part of Don Alberto. The film’s lack of any condemnation of Patrizia’s behaviour or desires, in comparison with those of male paedophiles in other *gialli*, reveals a double standard that Thrower argues is indicative of Italian society’s greater tolerance for “sexual adventurism” in pubescent boys than in Anglo-American culture. Indeed, many of the country’s most prolific filmmakers have presented young teenage boys’ sexual encounters with adult women as “occasions for celebration, humour, nostalgia and farce” (2002: 98). It is difficult, as Thrower alludes, to imagine a situation in which an adult male exposing himself to and ‘flirting’ with a child of either sex could pass without comment, even in the morally ambiguous world of the *giallo*.

defines *Duckling*'s portrayal of children as a whole, with the film betraying considerable anxieties regarding the encroachment of children into the adult world. By associating the boys' sexual awakening with the modern urbanised world through their erotically charged encounters with Patrizia and the two prostitutes on whom they spy in the opening scenes, the film reinforces the anxieties regarding sociocultural change that permeate through every facet of the *giallo*. On the other hand, the fact that the Church, represented by the murderous Don Alberto, is affiliated with the rural 'old world' and its various superstitions and prejudices, shows that this does not simply constitute a clear-cut yearning for an idealised past. Both the past and the future are sources of anxiety, with the boys caught in the liminal space between the two.

## 6.6 Innocence lost: Teenagers in *What Have You Done to Solange?*

If the boys of *Don't Torture a Duckling* are situated in a nebulous phase between childhood and adulthood, the teenage girls of this chapter's final core text occupy an even more precarious position. *What Have You Done to Solange?* is the first entry in a loosely linked series of films popularly known as the 'schoolgirls in peril' trilogy, focusing on the murders and sexual exploits of teenage girls and their fraught relationships with the adults who alternately prey on and seek to protect them.<sup>45</sup> The film's protagonist is Enrico Rosseni (Fabio Testi), a teacher at a sixth form girls' school in London, whose pupils are being brutally murdered, each stabbed through the vagina. When Elizabeth Seccles (Cristina Galbó), a pupil with whom he is having an affair, is killed, Enrico is initially arrested. Following his release, he and his wife Herta (Karin Baal) team up to identify the killer, who turns out to be Professor Bascombe (Günther Stoll), killing the former schoolmates of his daughter, the eponymous Solange (Camille Keaton), who forced her to undergo a back alley abortion which left her so traumatised that she became mute and regressed to a state of perpetual childhood.

While the theme of family lurked on the sidelines of both *Duckling* and *Who Saw Her Die?*, it is at the forefront in *Solange*, which is replete with depictions of strained relations between parents and their children, as well as husbands and wives. The latter are represented by Enrico and Herta, whose marriage is effectively in name only: Herta is cold

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<sup>45</sup> The remaining entries are the more *poliziottesco*-infused *What Have They Done to Your Daughters?* (Dallamano 1974) and the *giallo/poliziottesco* hybrid *Rings of Fear* (Negrin 1978). As the only instalment that constitutes a 'true' *giallo*, I have opted to focus on *Solange*.

and distant, while Enrico is having an affair with a schoolgirl. The girls, meanwhile, lie to their parents as to their whereabouts and extracurricular activities, while the parents are in turn either unwilling or unable to acknowledge that their daughters are no longer innocent. The mother of the first victim, Hilda Erickson, insists that her daughter could not have had a boyfriend because “she would have told me”, and yet it is later revealed that Hilda, like the other girls in the clique to which she belonged, was having sex with older men on a regular basis.

The gulf between how the adults perceive their daughters and who their daughters actually are results in the impression that the girls inhabit two worlds: the one they share with the adults, in which they present themselves as model pupils who do their homework, take communion and go to confession, and another secretive one which they are determined to hide from their parents and claim as their own at all costs. As a result, numerous scenes can be read in multiple ways. For instance, the sight of the girls laughing as they ride through the tranquil countryside during the opening title sequence initially seems to be one of lighthearted innocence. However, when the same scene is returned to later, now contextualised with the knowledge that their destination is the cottage where the maid Ruth Holden (Emilia Wolkowicz) will perform her gruesome procedure on Solange, it takes on a far darker tone and the girls’ apparent mirth seems hopelessly naïve considering the horrors that await. This is augmented by the music that accompanies the opening titles which, like that of *Die*, seems at once both carefree and sinister, the tranquil piano melody punctuated at intervals by sharp, menacing strings. When the scene is revisited in the film’s final ten minutes and its true context is made clear, the musical accompaniment is laced with unease: a wind arrangement augmented by a tense drumbeat. The notion of the girls cycling towards a cottage in the woods where a witch-like woman waits to enact untold suffering (using a needle heated in a cauldron) is rife with the imagery of fairytales, which, like the world the girls of *Solange* inhabit, are filled with dangers for children.<sup>46</sup>

In the same way that *Duckling* presented the Church as filling the void left by the traditional extended family, *Solange* depicts the girls’ clique as an alternative family governed by its own rituals and jokes, as well as a specific code of honour that involves maintaining absolute silence about what was done to Solange, even as the killer picks them

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<sup>46</sup> The film includes at least one other fairytale allusion when, as Elizabeth sets off to visit Enrico, she assures her concerned uncle that it is safe for her to go out alone as she is “not Little Red Riding Hood”. While on the one hand this can be read as a rejection of childish stories and therefore childhood itself, it also serves as a reminder that the world of fairytales, despite its connotations with childhood, is hardly an innocent and safe place.



off one by one. “We promised we’d never tell,” one of the girls, Brenda (Claudia Butenuth), insists to another whose resolve is weakening; “we *swore!*” Various visual identifiers, like the matching school uniforms and the distinctive pin that identifies members of the group, serve to emphasise the solidarity of the girls and set them apart from the adult world. Even Ruth Holden, the one adult to whom the girls turned for help, is infantilised through their use of a childish nickname, “Tata”, while the fact that this character is never seen to interact with any other adults underscores that she is a part of the girls’ world rather than that of the grownups. The girls also inhabit various spaces that are shown to be off limits to the adult characters, including the church confessional booths and communal school showers. These locations are presented as mirror images of each other, constituting the only places in which they can talk freely about what happened to Solange, admitting their role in the abortion to their priest (who turns out to be Professor Bascombe posing as their confessor) and discussing their feelings of guilt and fear among themselves respectively.

This disconnection between teenagers and adults is, however, most clearly illustrated by Solange herself, whose ordeal has left her unable to speak and in a state of perpetual childlike innocence. Indeed, Solange’s arrested development serves as a twisted literal manifestation of the parents’ desire for their daughters to remain forever young and innocent. Similarly, her inability to speak mirrors the other girls’ unwillingness or inability to tell the adults the truth about their lifestyle and about what happened to Solange. Intriguingly, there is an equivalent character to Solange in *Duckling*: Don Alberto’s young sister Malvina, a six-year-old who is both deaf and mute and referred to as “retarded” and “subnormal”. Malvina, like Solange, is a silent observer who bears witness to the killer’s crimes but lacks the means to tell anyone – or, it would seem, the capacity to even *understand* – what she has seen. The black and white photograph of the deceased Nicole gazing imploringly at the camera in *Die* can be understood in similar terms: Nicole, like Roberta and Solange, knows who is responsible for what happened to her, and both Malvina and Solange know who is committing the crimes in the present day, but none are able to communicate this knowledge. This recurring image of the child as a silent witness to tragic events persists across a wide range of cinematic genres and is particularly common in war films (Lury 2010: 105-144). In the *giallo*, it serves as a particularly potent symbol of these films’ denial of a voice to its female children. Although they can look, their inability to speak about what they see means that their gaze is even more devoid of agency than that of Sam Dalmas (Tony Musante), trapped between two sliding glass doors in the iconic scene from *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (see Chapter 3).

The lack of agency of children and teenagers in the *giallo* is reinforced by the fact that in *Solange* the spectator is repeatedly denied knowledge that is available to the girls. We are not a part of their ‘family’, only discovering their secrets as the film’s adult characters do. Therefore, as with *Die*, although a child (or in this case a teenager) is the focus of the narrative, the film does not represent a child’s (or teenager’s) view of the world. This also extends to the manner in which the girls are photographed, whereby they are repeatedly positioned as objects of a controlling and lecherous camera. This is most vividly illustrated in the two shower scenes, in which the camera takes in, with apparent glee, the sight of numerous girls, many of whom look like teenagers even if they are in fact played by older actors,<sup>47</sup> parading around in a state of undress.

The first of these scenes is particularly interesting because it affords us a deeply intimate view of the girls’ ‘secret world’, but the fact that none of their dialogue (barring the odd word here and there) is intelligible means that none of the dark secrets they harbour are at this stage revealed. We in effect remain outsiders looking in on an alien world, despite sharing the same space as the girls. As they smoke (the scene, consisting of a single continuous take, begins on a close-up of a packet of cigarettes) and walk around naked, the scene provides the first real indication that the girls are not the innocent children their parents believe them to be. In spite of this, there is a light-hearted, playful quality to the scene. The girls, unaware that they are being watched (either by the spectator or a presently unrevealed peeping tom), are sharing their own private space in which they can smoke, laugh and joke together without the need to put on a front for the adult world. They are, in essence, putting on a spectacle without realising it. Indeed, it is only as the camera cranes up to a frosted glass window to reveal a voyeur’s disembodied eye that any sense of threat enters the situation.

While exploitative, this first scene therefore lacks the more overt sense of menace with which the second is infused. This time, the camera remains outside the shower looking in on the girls, with the high angle from which they are photographed serving to both distance us from them and mimic an adult/child height difference, in stark contrast to the first scene, in which the position of the camera suggested a similarity between the girls’ height and that of the spectator (see Figure 6.6). Additionally, the small hole through which the voyeur looks fragments the girls’ bodies into individual parts – breasts, buttocks, crotches – explicitly eroticising them in a way that the earlier scene does not.

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<sup>47</sup> According to the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>), the three actors playing the most significant girls – Galbó as Elizabeth, Keaton as Solange and Butenuth as Brenda were 22, 22 and 26 in 1972 respectively.



**Figure 6.6 – The same girls shown in the first and second shower scenes.**

It is in these scenes, and others in which the girls are placed in sexual situations, that *Solange* differs most noticeably from the other films discussed in this chapter. *Solange* has acquired a reputation for being sleazy, even within the context of the *giallo*'s already salacious nature, with even the girls' deaths having a leering quality absent from those of the children in *Die* and *Duckling*. This reveals an inherent contradiction between the film's readiness to exploit the girls' sexuality and its underlying morality. A desire to protect the girls from the outside world informs the actions of the film's parents and teachers – a form of alarmist 'think of the children' paranoia that is utterly at odds with the salacious manner in which the girls are characterised and photographed. In *Duckling*, this paranoia was also evident in the mass hysteria of the bloodthirsty mob that gathered outside the village police station, eager to avenge their murdered children by attacking the most convenient scapegoat. In *Solange*, crowds do not gather outside the police station to bay for Enrico's blood when he is taken into custody, but the father of one of the murdered girls is only too quick to berate the schoolteachers for their failure to "accept the fact that they have a sex

maniac on the faculty”. The outraged father departs in a huff, telling them to “just wait until you read the papers tomorrow”. The use of the decidedly tabloid phrase “sex maniac”, compounded with the ultimate threat – to take the scandal to the press – suggests that the hysteria surrounding children’s safety and wellbeing found in *Duckling* is present in *Solange* too, albeit in a more reserved, ‘Middle England’ form.

What is most curious is the extent to which the film appears to endorse the ideology that underlies this panic, functioning as a morality play on the dangers that await young people as they enter the world of adults. This is not simply a matter of children being shown to have sexual desires, as was the case in *Duckling*: here, the film actively positions its teenage girls as legitimate objects of sexual desire, while at the same time lamenting their loss of innocence. Fuelling this hypocrisy is the uncertain positioning of the girls on the child-adult spectrum. While they are clearly a number of years older than the children in *Die* and *Duckling*, for all intents and purposes both the film and its adult characters view them as children. Elizabeth, on whom many of the early scenes focus and who initially appears to be a potential central woman until she is killed off midway through the film, is described as a “minor”, and reference is made to her lover Enrico’s supposed tendencies towards “very young girls”. Despite this, Elizabeth is later stated to be eighteen years old and thus an adult in the eyes of the law. It is this uncertainty that allows the film to simultaneously position the girls as children whose innocence has been stolen and adult women who are considered ‘fair game’ as sex objects. Therefore, while *Solange*’s screenplay still pays lip service to the same moral anxieties that characterised the depiction of children in the other two films, in terms of its fetishistic camerawork the film has far more in common with the *F-giallo*, whose female central characters are in all likelihood only a few years older than the likes of Elizabeth and Solange. Like the girls, therefore, *Solange* teeters between two worlds: that of the ‘child-*giallo*’ with its moral angst, and that of the *F-giallo* with its unbridled titillation and exploitation.

*Solange* concludes with a reassertion of the traditional nuclear family. Enrico and Herta’s troubled marriage has survived, and the final shot shows Solange sharing the frame with them, conveying the impression of them forming a makeshift family of sorts: father, mother and daughter. This final image, however, is fraught with uncertainty, as the camera zooms in and freezes on Solange’s face, her eyes staring vacantly and uncomprehendingly at Enrico and Herta – a decidedly un-fairytale-like ending which emphasises that, although the mystery has been solved and the killer is dead, the damage resulting from Solange’s abortion cannot be undone. Furthermore, in spite of its apparent endorsement of the

nuclear family, the family portrait with which we are presented is nothing if not troubled: a father guilty of abusing his position as a schoolteacher to seduce a teenage girl, an emotionally distant mother and a daughter who is psychologically devastated by the trauma she has endured. *Solange* is thus, like *Die* and *Duckling* before it, an oddly reflective *giallo* that dwells less on the visceral thrills of gory murders but rather on the pain faced by those left to negotiate the aftermath. As with the previous films, however, the visual language of the *giallo* is ill-equipped to deal with the presence of children and teenagers, and *Solange*'s failure to moderate its more exploitative tendencies results in a sense of moral hypocrisy and contradiction.

## 6.7 Conclusion

The centrepiece of Dario Argento's *Deep Red* is the gruesome painting by Carlo of his father's murder, depicting the child Carlo holding up a bloody meat cleaver while his father bleeds profusely before him. Taken at face value, the painting appears to implicate Carlo as the murderer. What protagonist Marc Daly does not at this stage realise is that there is in fact an additional component to the painting, still hidden behind a coating of plaster: the true killer, Carlo's mother Marta. The painting is fascinating because it encapsulates so many of the themes and conventions relating to the roles of children and teenagers in the *giallo*, in particular the loss of innocence: Carlo is forever scarred by having witnessed his father's murder. Perhaps even more significant, however, is how misleading the painting is. Despite seeming to imply that the child is the killer, the guilty party is in fact an adult, with the child merely a witness who happened to pick up the bloodied weapon after the murder was committed. As such, the child in the painting fulfils a similar role to the child in the three *gialli* discussed in this chapter: an incidental presence who, far from being the main focus, merely serves to articulate adult anxieties about the world.

Children and teenagers therefore occupy an unusual and precarious role in the *giallo*, with the various uncertainties and contradictions in their positioning within these films symptomatic of the confused nature of society at the time of the *giallo* boom. Central to these anxieties is the family and the ways in which both its configuration and its role in society were changing. Whereas Sylvia Harvey characterised the family in *film noir* as absent, families are very much present in the three films discussed in this chapter, albeit in compromised, distorted or displaced forms. With their depiction of cults in *Who Saw Her*

*Die?*, cliques in *What Have You Done to Solange?* and the influence of religion as a guiding force in children's development in *Don't Torture a Duckling*, these films offer alternatives to the nuclear family that are depicted in a far from positive light. Firmly associated with the past, children thus come to symbolise the 'old world' prior to the sociocultural upheavals on which the *gialli* fixate, and their death and/or loss of innocence the disappearance of a previous way of life.

At the heart of all three films is a drive to protect children and maintain their purity. In each case, however, this is presented as misguided or futile. In both *Die* and *Duckling*, preventing children from discovering "the stirrings of the flesh" requires killing them, while in *Solange* the teenage girls, whose familiarity with sex, drugs and adult relationships goes beyond anything their parents could ever contemplate, are already 'impure'. Nonetheless, there is something that is deemed sacred about children and their lack of exposure to what Father James and Don Alberto would consider the 'sins' of adulthood, which manifests itself in a striking reticence to expose them to the brutal violence and explicit sexualisation generally associated with the *giallo*. As such, the first two of these films, dealing with young girls and young boys respectively, appear to rein themselves in in a manner that is uncharacteristic of the *giallo* as a whole. All three films are sombre, contemplative and lacking the jet set glamour with which most *gialli* are infused; traditional displays of gleeful mayhem and outrageous gore are replaced by close-ups of grieving parents' tear-stained faces.

In spite of this, much of the *giallo*'s traditionally exploitative iconography remains intact and this, coupled with the focus on children, means that the films at times make for deeply uncomfortable viewing. In particular, children and sexuality seem to be inextricably linked in the *giallo*, whether in the context of adults preying on children, or, in the case of *Duckling*, children's own sexual desires. That said, the differences in the age and gender of the children and teenagers in the three films results in clear discrepancies in terms of their treatment. In particular, the boys in *Duckling* are imbued with a sense of agency that their female counterparts in *Die* and *Solange* lack, as well as an active sexual desire that allows them to view women within the *giallo*'s traditionally objectifying framework which, as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4, typically imbues male characters with a degree of agency denied to their female counterparts. Indeed, the teenage girls in *Solange* lack the agency afforded to the boys in *Duckling* and are instead presented as legitimate sites of objectification themselves. Only the pre-pubescent Roberta and Nicole in *Die* are

completely excluded from this framework, and are therefore imbued with the most pronounced sense of not ‘belonging’ to the world of the *giallo*.

For a long time, I have been fascinated by the positioning of children and teenagers in the *giallo* and knew from an early stage that I wanted to devote a chapter of this thesis to exploring the various anxieties and contradictions revealed by their presence in these films. I was, however, left with two hurdles to overcome: first, justifying dedicating so much space to exploring characters who appear in only a tiny minority of *gialli*; second, relating a discussion of children to the thesis’ broader theme of gender. I now feel that the same answer can be given to both of these problems. What the presence of children and teenagers does, more than anything else, is reveal the inherent hypocrisy of the *giallo*’s dual approach of condemning the very same people and practices that it uses to titillate its viewers, recalling the observation in Chapter 1 that maligned ‘genre films’ like the *gialli* and the reactionary individuals who condemn them share a considerable amount of ideological ground. As Ellis Hanson states in his discussion of the figure of the child in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin 1973), “we find ourselves called upon to participate in the voyeuristic popular obsession with decrying an evil and enjoying it at the same time” (2004: 135). “Our narratives of protection and redemption,” he observes, “are endlessly serviceable as pornography for puritans” (2004: 134). Quite apart from highlighting the significant tensions in the ‘real world’ regarding the changing role of the family, therefore, the value of these three films lies in their foregrounding of the frictions and double standards that lurk beneath the surface of all *gialli*.

## 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

This thesis has explored the fascinating and frequently paradoxical ways in which the *giallo* engages with the seismic sociocultural changes that occurred in Italy and Western Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s, placing a particular emphasis on issues relating to gender and sexuality. As I have suggested on a number of occasions along the way, the *gialli*'s penchant for self-contradiction and steadfast refusal to fully commit to a single ideological stance often poses challenges in drawing concrete conclusions from the depiction of its male protagonists, central women, non-heteronormative characters, children and teenagers. Nonetheless, certain prevailing concerns recur throughout this body of films. This final chapter reviews the themes and conventions identified in my research and the thesis' four analysis chapters, seeking to distil them into broad conclusions about representations of gender in the *giallo* as a whole, in addition to considering the impact of these conclusions and potential scope for future research on the *giallo*.

### 7.2 Findings

As established in Chapter 1, the bulk of previous literature on *gialli* has consisted of either detailed analyses of the work of individual directors or more broad-based overviews of the *giallo* as a *filone* (or cycle) united by its generic conventions and iconography. With this thesis, I have sought to combine the depth of the former with the breadth of the latter, eschewing auteurism in favour of an approach that acknowledges both the Italian popular film industry's tendency to regurgitate rather than innovate and the state of the world at the time when they were made. As demonstrated by the plethora of analyses of *film noir* that informed the methodology of this thesis, reading a body of films as a manifestation of the sociocultural concerns of a specific period is not a new approach. However, with the exception of a negligible number of essays that are either unavoidably impressionistic given their brevity (Needham 2002) or specific to a single film (Burke 2006), such an approach has not, until now, been applied to the *giallo*. In resituating the *gialli* within the historical context of their original production and release, therefore, this thesis has promoted an approach to understanding these films that is defined not by "labelling and listing" (Wallman 2007: 2) or ahistorical psychoanalytical theory but by the sociocultural milieu out of which they originally arose and with which they engaged. As established in



Chapter 2, specific anxieties relating to real world events are typically not represented in the *gialli* in a direct manner. Rather than placing them in plain view, the concerns of these films tend to be hidden behind the *giallo*'s distinctive visual iconography and 'whodunit' murder-mystery narrative. As such, I have taken pains to stress the lack of simple linear relations between the films and the real world context. Nonetheless, by harnessing an awareness both of historical events before and during the *giallo* boom and of the strategies employed by critics of *film noir*, it has been possible for me to 'decode' the *gialli*, uncovering the hidden anxieties that lie beneath the cloak of generic convention.

I have focused on gender and sexuality, using these themes as something of a framing device to explore the ways in which a broad spectrum of anxieties is manifested in the *giallo*. It goes without saying that gender and sexuality were not the only subjects of social change and tension in Italy and Europe in the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, it is striking to note just how much of the social unrest during this period, described in Chapter 2, became organised along gendered lines. The agitation of the late 1960s, for instance, revealed deep-rooted divisions between the largely class-based concerns of male protesters and their female counterparts' desire for gender equality. The *gialli*, produced primarily by and for the consumption of men, invariably view the various sociocultural anxieties with which they engage exclusively in terms of their effect on men. As a result, themes that are in theory not gender specific, such as alienation within an increasingly homogenised urban metropolis, become specifically masculine concerns and are viewed through the prism of how they affect the films' male protagonists. While the main focus of any *giallo* tends to be the central mystery surrounding the identity of the killer, these films also explore, albeit in a refracted form, a plethora of less initially obvious problems which play out in parallel to and often overlap with the 'whodunit' element. Questions surrounding women's autonomy, men's disempowerment, increased urbanisation and globalisation, the homogenisation of society, the breakdown of stable gender identities and growing discontentment with the establishment all help to form the colourful and unpredictable backdrop against which these murder-mystery scenarios play out.

I have argued that the manner in which a *giallo* approaches and resolves (or fails to resolve) these anxieties is determined to a considerable extent by whether the film in question focuses on a male or female central character. As an original contribution to the study of the *giallo*, I divided my corpus of study along gendered lines, identifying the male-centric *giallo* (M-*giallo*) and the female-centric *giallo* (F-*giallo*) as distinct 'sub-*filoni*', each adhering to their own unique narrative formulae and exhibiting vastly

differing responses to the sociocultural upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. In the *M-giallo*, explored in Chapter 3, much of the uncertainty of this period is conveyed through the construction of its male protagonists as rootless, ineffectual and struggling to establish an identity for themselves in a world that has changed dramatically in a short space of time. These films reveal a tension between the protagonists' desire to assert themselves as individuals who refuse to play by the rules imposed by an oppressive Establishment in an increasingly homogenised society, and their often fractious encounters with the villainous and/or liberated women who represent the changing fortunes of women more generally. The *M-gialli* are defined by an air of helplessness: a sense that their protagonists are powerless to effect their fates or halt the changing nature of society. To that end, the majority of *M-gialli* do not offer a conclusion that is entirely satisfying. In most films, the killer is defeated and a semblance of order is restored, but in almost every case the protagonist is left unfulfilled and rootless, as if solving the mystery has failed to quell the anxieties that consume him.

In contrast, the focus of Chapter 4, the *F-gialli*, tend to offer a far more conclusive return to order than their *M-giallo* counterparts, with equilibrium restored and the central woman upon whom the narrative focused rescued from the nefarious forces that sought to do her harm. Whereas the *M-gialli* are about male protagonists who actively investigate the murder-mysteries in which they become embroiled, *F-giallo* central women lack sufficient agency to be thought of as active protagonists and are more typically constructed as passive victims who are subjected to increasingly intense campaigns of terror and must ultimately be rescued by men. As such, despite the shift in focus from a male to a female main character, the *F-gialli*, like the *M-gialli*, are films in which men are the primary active agents, driving the narrative, investigating the mystery, and eventually rescuing the central woman. By depicting the central woman as being at least partly responsible for her own misfortunes as a result of having sought to escape the constrictiveness of domesticity through her embracing of a more alluring and dangerous way of life, these films construct her as a problem to be first investigated and then solved alongside the whodunit.

The *M-gialli* and *F-gialli*, therefore, offer different approaches to the same overriding concerns. While the *M-gialli* engage with anxieties about alienation, the loss of individuality and the growth of women's autonomy but fail to offer solutions to them, the *F-gialli* are more successful in 'closing down' the threats to social order raised by their narratives of women who forsake their traditional roles as housewives in search of their own self-gratification. In the process, these films reveal the double standards that operate

for their male and female central characters. Whereas male individuality and autonomy are celebrated, female self-determination is demonised as both a threat to social order and potentially self-destructive, requiring male intervention to reassert the patriarchal *status quo* and save the central woman from her own vices. The F-*giallo*'s process of pathologising and subsequently 'passifying' the central woman is most vividly depicted in *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* (Fulci 1971), which takes the unusual step of combining the roles of central woman and central antagonist, thereby making explicit the fact that, while most F-*gialli* position the killer's identity as their central puzzle, an equally or potentially even more significant goal of the F-*giallo* is to 'solve' the central woman herself. This process of pathologisation is not applied to the M-*giallo*'s male protagonists, whose problems are portrayed as purely external and not of their own making. (It is worth noting that, whereas the F-*giallo* central woman is typically the target of a highly personal campaign of intimidation orchestrated by someone who knows her intimately, the M-*giallo* protagonist typically becomes involved in the central mystery by virtue of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, thereby absolving him of responsibility for the mishaps that befall him.) As such, the *giallo* as a whole, whether in its M-*giallo* or F-*giallo* incarnations, emphasises a male response to the changing face of society and privileges a masculine point of view, positioning forces that threaten the male-dominated hegemony as problems that may or may not be successfully resolved over the course of each film.

It must be stressed, however, that it is not simply masculinity in general that is privileged but rather a specific type of masculinity. The men to whom the spectator is spatially attached for the bulk of the films' running time, whether the M-*giallo*'s protagonists or the secondary male characters of the F-*giallo*, are invariably white, middle-class westerners, in their thirties, and nominally heterosexual. Indeed, there is an irony to be found in the fact that, despite the *giallo*'s celebration of individuality in its male heroes, in each M-*giallo* the exact same traits can be observed in nearly every protagonist. There is therefore a tension between presenting the protagonist as a sort of 'everyman' – a representation of contemporary masculinity to whom the spectator can relate and with whose problems he can engage – and differentiating them from the plethora of other men that surround them.

Among the characters that are coded as different from the male protagonist are the ones explored in Chapter 5: homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites and all others whose gender identity or sexuality runs contrary to what these films and society as a whole construct as 'normal'. I have argued that, like the F-*giallo*'s central women, the portrayal of these characters serves as a way to 'close down' potential threats to the *status quo*. By restricting

them to insignificant roles, presenting them as figures to be either mocked, pitied or distrusted and clearly distinguishing them from their heterosexual counterparts, these non-heteronormative men are marginalised even as they are placed in plain view in a way that was impossible in earlier, more censorious times. The fact that these characters are both so numerous and so obviously identified as non-heteronormative, in stark contrast to the more subtextual depictions of gay men found in *film noir*, corresponds with the increasing visibility of homosexuals in the real world, if not their acceptance.

Non-heteronormativity, too, is divided along gendered lines, with the *giallo*'s portrayal of its male and female non-heteronormative characters differing substantially. Whereas non-heteronormative men are defined primarily by their difference from heteronormative men, non-heteronormative women are striking by virtue of how similar they are to heteronormative women, exhibiting a 'hyperfemininity' that is at odds with (stereo)typical representations of homosexual women in popular culture. The sexuality of these characters tends to be malleable to the demands of the plot, resulting in a lack of sufficient verisimilitude for them to 'pass' as lesbians. While considerable emphasis is placed on the spectacle of non-heteronormative women a state of undress and engaging in sexual activity with both men and women, the underlying moral disapproval of non-heteronormative sexuality results in a striking contradiction whereby the films present female non-heteronormative sexuality for the spectator's enjoyment and simultaneously disparage it.

Films that feature characters who are not adult male or female heterosexuals, including the non-heteronormative characters discussed in Chapter 5 and the children and teenagers discussed in Chapter 6, tend to reveal this 'titillation/condemnation' dichotomy in a particularly pronounced manner. However, the tendency of these films to exploit what they purport to be against permeates throughout the *giallo* as a whole and can be observed in many of its enduring conventions. For instance, the extramarital affairs of numerous *F-giallo* central women are both offered up as a spectacle and portrayed as self-destructive, while the dual exploitation of and moral condemnation of the sexually active teenage girls of *What Have You Done to Solange?* (Dallamano 1972) verges on hypocrisy. Even the brutal murders, which are exploited as a spectacle but which the demands of narrative dictate must ultimately be brought to a halt by the reinforcement of law and order, reveal the extent to which these films function as "pornography for puritans" (Hanson 2004: 134), inviting spectators to derive voyeuristic pleasure from lurid displays of sex and violence while simultaneously condemning the same behaviour.

It is this tendency for self-contradiction that makes it so difficult to ascertain the *giallo*'s overriding ideology, if indeed it has one. The films are messy and self-contradictory, and the demands of the narrative often lead to them undermining any potential for ideological coherence. For instance, the F-*gialli* may seem to decry women forsaking the domestic sphere in favour of sexual self-gratification, but the need for eleventh-hour twists to surprise the audience means that a large number of these characters end up discovering that their husbands, those very symbols of patriarchal stability, have in fact been orchestrating campaigns of terror against them all along. Similarly, while the *gialli* spend much of their running time appearing to lament, in one way or another, the sociocultural changes of the period in which they were produced, any attempt to suggest that the past was preferable or more straightforward seems half-hearted at best. Indeed, as glimpsed in films like *Don't Torture a Duckling* (Fulci 1972), some of the *giallo*'s most vehement criticism appears to be directed towards the 'backwards' rural south, which still clings to old superstitions, outdated technology and codes of honour. The extent to which the psychoses that consume both the films' killers and protagonists are tied to traumatic incidents in their childhoods also indicates deep-rooted anxieties about the past. These films are not by any stretch of the imagination nostalgic, but rather situate their protagonists between an imperfect past and an uncertain future, shedding light on the numerous problems (real or imagined) facing people in the early 1970s but offering few practical solutions.

What, if any, 'lessons' can we therefore take from the *giallo* and its representations of gender and sexuality? What do the anxieties it exhibits tell us about its underlying ideology? I am mindful of the pitfalls of taking the films' seemingly reactionary tendencies at face value. After all, while violent and at times mean-spirited, the *gialli* are also frequently playful, using their often formulaic plots in a knowing way and in a handful of instances, including in the films of Luciano Ercoli discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, supporting readings that are far more progressive than a cursory examination would suggest. Similarly, the potential to read numerous nominally heterosexual M-*giallo* protagonists as if not repressed homosexuals then at least divergent from idealised representations of 'macho' heterosexual masculinity points to the perils in taking these films at face value. As such, perhaps the question should not be "What do the *giallo*'s anxieties reveal about its ideological stance?" but rather "How real are those anxieties?" I am reminded of Janey Place's observation about the figure of the *femme fatale* in *film noir*, which I originally referenced in Chapter 2 and is sufficiently pertinent to this dilemma to be worth quoting in full:

It is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and above all exciting sexuality. In film noir we observe both the social action of myth which damns the sexual woman and all who become enmeshed by her, and a particularly potent stylistic presentation of the sexual strength of woman which man fears. This operation of myth is so highly stylised and conventionalised that the final 'lesson' of the myth often fades into the background and we retain the image of the erotic, strong, unrepressed (if destructive) woman. The style of these films thus overwhelms their conventional narrative content, or interacts with it to produce a remarkably potent image of woman. (1998: 48)

Regardless of how the average *film noir* ends, their defining image is not of the *femme fatale* defeated and contained in the final act. Rather, we remember her in her prime, a powerful, sexually assertive and unrestrained woman in a world full of compromised, ineffectual men. As such, one of the significant pleasures offered by *films noirs* is not how reactionary or how progressive they are but rather how, through the very presence of figures like the *femme fatale*, they disrupt the hegemony and transcend the bounds of generic convention. I am minded to take the *gialli* in a similar spirit, reading them not as tracts lamenting, among other concerns, the emancipation of women, loss of traditional masculine identity, growing visibility of homosexuals, increasing urbanisation and globalisation, but rather as articulations of the uncertainties, anxieties and aspirations that preoccupied people during a particular moment in history. Regardless of whether the underlying feelings towards these developments were positive, negative or indifferent, the *gialli* capture them on celluloid in a way that is entertaining, idiosyncratic, ostentatious and, as I hope this thesis has shown, thought-provoking.

### 7.3 Future research

Gary Needham concluded his influential essay "Playing with genre" by stating his hope that a more discursive approach to the *giallo* would "allow us to open [it] up rather than close it down" (2002). With this thesis, I have sought to do precisely that, albeit with a particular emphasis on questions relating to gender and sexuality. In the process, I have developed new ways of classifying and organising the *gialli*, situated them within their historical context, subjected them to a combined breadth and depth of analysis that has not previously been attempted, and demonstrated that these populist and often superficially farcical thrillers are more than the sum of their parts, providing the potential to act as a testimony of the preoccupations of the society out of which they emerged. As alluded to in the previous section, however, studying these films' representations of gender and sexuality is far from the only valid approach to understanding these films and their

underlying anxieties. With this section, I aim to suggest a number of ways in which future studies of the *giallo* could build on the work of this thesis, as well as its implications for the study of other genres and/or *filoni*.

One subject that has fascinated me for some time but which I was unable to include in my research, in the interests of both conciseness and maintaining a focus on gender and sexuality as represented in the films themselves, is spectatorship. The *gialli* have enjoyed several ‘lives’, including their original Italian theatrical releases, releases in the variety of countries to which they were exported, the US ‘drive-in’ circuit of the 1970s and 1980s (Thrower 2002: 67) and, most recently, the DVD boom of the early 2000s. How did the ways in which the same films were experienced at different times and in different parts of the world differ? What was the impact of the differing venues, marketing and cultural expectations? Were responses affected by the fact that a number of these films were re-edited, censored or re-scored for releases in different countries? In a similar vein, a significant amount of recent work on *film noir* has sought to explore the pleasures these films offer for spectators other than those for whom they were originally intended (e.g. Place 1998, Bell 2010). There is considerable scope for adopting a similar approach to the *giallo*. What pleasures do they offer for, for instance, a female, non-white and/or non-heterosexual spectator? Another theme that I was unable to explore in any detail is that of race. As previously noted, the *giallo*’s male protagonists and female central characters tend to be of a certain age and background, and all of them are white. Indeed, ethnic minorities are conspicuously absent throughout the *giallo*, and the few that do feature are used in a variety of interesting, not to mention potentially unsavoury, ways. A future examination of the portrayal of ethnic minorities in these films, and questions relating to race and nationality more generally, would be fascinating. An approach similar to that of this thesis, taking into account contemporary sociocultural attitudes to race and nationality, would provide the ideal template for such an investigation.

I have examined the *giallo* as a phenomenon specific to a precise moment in history, but that does not mean that it emerged fully formed and remained the same throughout its lifespan. Nor indeed did it simply disappear after 1975: as the corpus of study in Appendix A shows, a handful of directors continued to make *gialli* long after the initial boom had ended. These films, while separate from the original 1970-1975 *filone*, are no less interesting, not least because of their appropriation of the ‘classical’ *giallo*’s iconography in a manner that is divorced from its original context. There is considerable scope for exploring these ‘neo-*gialli*’ using a similar methodological approach to this thesis in order

to determine to what extent the prevailing anxieties of the 1980s, 1990s and early twenty-first century are buried beneath their more superficial typological similarities to the 1970-1975 *gialli*.<sup>48</sup> The *giallo*'s influence on other genres and directors is also interesting (not least because, in spite of its lack of attention from critics, it has influenced a host of more acclaimed filmmakers, from Martin Scorsese to Tim Burton) and worth charting in greater detail. For instance, the killer in *Se7en* (Fincher 1995) reappropriates the *giallo* killer's traditional black hat and coat, while director Brian De Palma's entire visual iconography seems to consist of a melding of *giallo* and Hitchcockian influences. Other filmmakers have adhered most closely to the *giallo*'s roots, producing knowing homages to the classic *giallo*, among them the critically acclaimed, postmodernist *Amer* (Cattet and Forzani: 2009). A visual love letter to the films of the 1970s, *Amer* adopts the *giallo*'s imagery and explores the five senses via a series of set-pieces connected by a virtually non-existent plot charting the sexual awakening of its central female character, Ana, at various stages in her life. In rejecting narrative form almost entirely, *Amer* reduces the *giallo* to pure sensory spectacle, pointing to the potential for these films to be understood and enjoyed in a manner divorced from their narrative.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps most exciting to me, however, is the potential that exists for the approach adopted by this thesis to be applied to another body of work, be it film, television, literature or indeed any other medium. In the process of researching this thesis, I have witnessed the phenomenal success of Stieg Larsson's "Millennium" trilogy of novels and their film adaptations, and the ensuing explosion in the popularity of what has become popularly known as "Nordic *noir*": dark, brooding detective thrillers originating from the Scandinavian countries. These books, films and television shows and their seemingly overnight success bear all the hallmarks of the *filone* phenomenon in action: a sudden, immense explosion in popularity resulting in the market being glutted with imitations of the original work (how many of the authors that have sprung up in the wake of the Millennium trilogy have been marketed as "the next Stieg Larsson"?), widespread popular appeal on an international level, and the distinct possibility that, at some point within the next few years, the Nordic *noir* phenomenon will exhaust itself just as abruptly as did the *giallo*.

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<sup>48</sup> For instance, much of *Opera* (Argento 1987) can be read as allegory for the emergent HIV/AIDS epidemic, including a killer who wears transparent latex gloves as 'protection' over the more traditional black leather ones.

<sup>49</sup> As of writing, *Amer*'s directors, H  l  ne Cattet and Bruno Forzani, are working on another *giallo* revival, *The Strange Colour of Your Body's Tears*, a more narrative-driven film in the M-*giallo* tradition. See <http://cinemart-online.co.uk/news/65591/image-from-the-strange-colour-of-your-bodys-tears/>, accessed 19<sup>th</sup> February 2013.



The similarities between the *giallo* and Nordic *noir* are more than just skin-deep, however. In my exposure to the work of Larsson and his various imitators, I have been struck by how many conventions associated with the *giallo* have been repurposed, consciously or otherwise, in this new and yet surprisingly familiar *filone*. Even the English titles of Larsson's novels – *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2006) and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2007) – are nothing if not *giallo*-like in their phraseology and allusions to animals. Indeed, one cannot help but compare investigative journalist Mikael Blomkvist, one of the trilogy's two protagonists, to Nora Davis (Leticia Román) in the similarly titled *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (Bava 1963), or indeed the flawed, ineffectual male protagonists of so many M-*gialli*. Blomkvist, like Nora, is an avid reader of crime novels who, while staying with an elderly family friend, accidentally stumbles upon a series of murders committed in the past. Meanwhile, like male protagonists such as Greg Moore (Jean Sorel), he is often presented as naïve, ineffectual and out of his depth, battling against an all-powerful Establishment and, like Marc Daly (David Hemmings), his macho prowess is frequently undercut by his resourceful and self-sufficient collaborator, the enigmatic Lisbeth Salander.

These striking similarities suggest that the *giallo* is in fact alive and well in the new millennium, albeit displaced from the cosmopolitan urban spaces of 1970s Western Europe to the snow-clad landscapes of twenty-first century Sweden. That the Millennium trilogy uses the framework of the 'whodunit' murder-mystery thriller to engage with the issue of institutionalised misogyny in present day Sweden shows that, like the *gialli*, these novels use popular generic conventions to create a dialogue around contemporary sociocultural concerns. Of course, Larsson's novels are far more direct in terms of the anxieties they address than the *gialli*, and their ideology more consistent, but such an approach is in keeping with the more knowing, self-aware climate of the twenty-first century in which they were written. Two recent collections of essays exploring, among other themes, the popularity of the rape/revenge paradigm in modern Scandinavian and Anglophone crime fiction – *Rape in Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy and Beyond* (Åström, Gregersdotter and Horeck 2012) and *Men Who Hate Women and Women Who Kick Their Asses* (King and Smith 2012) – show the scope that exists for engaging on a theoretical level with this modern '*filone*' and its inherent contradictions. Indeed, Donna King and Carrie Lee Smith's assertion that Larsson's work is characterised by a "combination of familiar crime fiction devices – rape, murder, mayhem, etc., often at women's expense and described in excruciating detail – served up with a distinctly feminist flavour and with some remarkable feminist characters" (2012: xiii) evokes precisely the sort of ambivalence and self-

contradiction that is evident in the *giallo*'s treatment of women, those identified as queer, children and teenagers.

## 7.4 Parting thoughts

Shortly before writing this concluding chapter, I rewatched Dario Argento's 2001 neo-*giallo* *Sleepless*, and found it to be a somewhat frustrating experience. While the film contains much of the classic *giallo* iconography, including brutal, artistically staged murders and a black-gloved killer whose psychosis stems from a past trauma, it also feels oddly flat and unsatisfying, its more awkward aspects (the unconvincing dialogue and dubbing, the at times flimsy and improbable plot, the reliance on spectacle over substance) drawing attention to themselves in a way that those of its 1970s counterparts did not.

What, then, has changed? Why are the very aspects of these films that once contributed to their appeal so unpalatable when placed into a modern-day context? Having spent the previous two hundred plus pages exploring the *giallo* as an articulation of a specific set of sociocultural concerns tied to a specific period in history, the answer should now, I hope, be clear. In self-consciously regurgitating the conventions established in a bygone era, *Sleepless* throws into harsh light the dependence of the 'classical' *gialli* on the specific sociocultural conditions of the early 1970s. More than forty years after Argento made his directorial debut with *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), the world is a very different place, and the formal characteristics that once dazzled now appear positively quaint when applied to a film made more recently. In the same way that their form has dated, the ideological qualities of the 1970s *filoni* remain tied to the milieu in which they were originally produced, meaning that recent attempts to revive the *giallo* and other 70s *filoni* have, more often than not, been unsatisfying. More than merely adding a little period flavour, the sociocultural upheavals of post-war Western Europe inform every aspect of these films, and films produced more recently that still cling to the more superficial manifestations of these anxieties seem like little more than empty vessels, devoid of the very context that originally gave them meaning. As such, the standard *giallo* conventions and narrative seem unmotivated and anachronistic, and their meaning can be seen to be diminished as a result.

This emphasises how absolutely 'of their time' the *filoni* of the 1970s were and why these films in general and the *giallo* in particular deserve to be examined not merely as quirky, low

budget “European Trash Cinema” (to evoke the name of a popular 1980s fanzine that covered the *gialli*, among others) or as bastardisations of supposedly superior Anglo-American models but as sociocultural engagements rich with allusions to the seismic changes that took place in the culture of the time. Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to do just that, considering not merely the patterns that repeat themselves across the corpus of study but also what these patterns *mean*. These films have not been met with the critical approval of the likes of *L'avventura* (Antonioni 1960) or *La Dolce Vita* (Fellini 1960), but they are in their own way profoundly significant in their articulation of the anxieties of an era.

As such, Sam Dalmas' imprisonment between two glass doors in *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, in addition to making for an eye-catching set-piece, captures the general mood of the period, embodying the plight of a generation trapped between the past and the future. Encased in glass, Sam seems to be suspended in time and space, able to move neither forward nor backward, his immediate plight echoing the sentiments felt by revolutionaries and reactionaries alike who, having experienced tremendous social change in a relatively short space of time, now found themselves in a position of pronounced instability and uncertainty. I feel that this single moment, more than any other in the entire *giallo filone*, encapsulates the spirit of a body of films that has all too often been neglected or analysed in an overly superficial manner, and I hope that the approach I have adopted in order to ‘unpick’ its hidden meanings serves to inspire subsequent examinations of this and other popular filmic movements.

## Appendix A: Corpus of study

The following pages list the sixty films that make up my corpus of study. The corpus is split into three categories: films released prior to the *giallo* boom (pre-1970), the boom itself (1970-1975), and films released post-boom (1976 onwards). Release dates are derived from the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com>), which in most cases gives an exact date for each film. It is difficult to verify these dates, so they should be considered a rough guide only.

The director, country of origin and subtype (M-*giallo*, F-*giallo* or ensemble) of each film are also listed, in addition to the primary location in which the film is set and the nationality of the main character (where known).

Films are listed by the English-language title by which they are referred to in the main body of the thesis. (Italian and alternative English titles are included in the Filmography.)

The core texts are shaded in grey.

## Pre-boom *gialli*

Release date (Italy)	Title	Director	Country of origin	Subtype	Location	Main character nationality
10/02/1963	The Girl Who Knew Too Much	Mario Bava	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	American
14/03/1964	Blood and Black Lace	Mario Bava	Italy/France/Monaco	Ensemble	Undefined	Ensemble/undefined
09/01/1968	Death Laid an Egg	Giulio Questi	Italy/France	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
20/02/1968	Naked You Die	Antonio Margheriti	Italy	Ensemble	France	Ensemble/various
20/03/1968	The Sweet Body of Deborah	Romolo Guerrieri	Italy/France	F- <i>giallo</i>	Switzerland/France	American
15/08/1969	One on Top of the Other	Lucio Fulci	Italy/France/Spain	M- <i>giallo</i>	USA	American

## The *giallo* boom

Release date (Italy)	Title	Director	Country of origin	Subtype	Location	Main character nationality
14/02/1970	Five Dolls for an August Moon	Mario Bava	Italy	Ensemble	Undefined	Ensemble/undefined
19/02/1970	The Bird with the Crystal Plumage	Dario Argento	Italy/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	American
02/05/1970	In the Folds of the Flesh	Sergio Bergonzelli	Italy/Spain	Ensemble	Switzerland	Swiss
19/11/1970	The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion	Luciano Ercoli	Italy/Spain	F- <i>giallo</i>	Undefined	Undefined
15/01/1971	The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh	Sergio Martino	Italy/Spain	F- <i>giallo</i>	Austria/Spain	Austrian
11/02/1971	The Cat O' Nine Tails	Dario Argento	Italy/France/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
17/02/1971	A Lizard in a Woman's Skin	Lucio Fulci	Italy/France/Spain	F- <i>giallo</i>	England	English
02/08/1971	Slaughter Hotel	Fernando Di Leo	Italy	Ensemble	Undefined	Ensemble/undefined
12/08/1971	The Black Belly of the Tarantula	Paolo Cavara	Italy/France	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
16/08/1971	The Case of the Scorpion's Tail	Sergio Martino	Italy/Spain	F- <i>giallo</i>	England/Greece	English/Undefined (French?)
18/08/1971	The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave	Emilio P. Miraglia	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	England	English
24/08/1971	The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire	Riccardo Freda	Italy/France/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	Ireland/Switzerland	Irish
28/08/1971	The Fifth Cord	Luigi Bazzoni	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
08/09/1971	A Bay of Blood	Mario Bava	Italy	Ensemble	Italy	Ensemble/undefined
10/09/1971	The Bloodstained Butterfly	Duccio Tessari	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
28/10/1971	Short Night of Glass Dolls	Aldo Lado	Italy/West Germany/Yugoslavia	M- <i>giallo</i>	Czechoslovakia	American
19/11/1971	Death Walks on High Heels	Luciano Ercoli	Italy/Spain	Ensemble	France/England	French/English
17/12/1971	Four Flies on Grey Velvet	Dario Argento	Italy/France	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
03/02/1972	My Dear Killer	Tonino Valerii	Italy/Spain	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
24/02/1972	Seven Blood Stained Orchids	Umberto Lenzi	Italy/West Germany	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
28/02/1972	All the Colours of the Dark	Sergio Martino	Italy/Spain	F- <i>giallo</i>	England	English
09/03/1972	What Have You Done to Solange?	Massimo Dallamano	Italy/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	England	Italian
16/06/1972	The French Sex Murders	Ferdinando Merighi	Italy/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	France	French
04/08/1972	The Case of the Bloody Iris	Giuliano Carnimeo	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Undefined	Undefined (English?)
04/08/1972	Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key	Sergio Martino	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian

11/08/1972	So Sweet, So Dead	Roberto Bianchi Montero	Italy	M-giallo	Italy	Italian
12/08/1972	The Crimes of the Black Cat	Sergio Pastore	Italy	M-giallo	Denmark	Danish
18/08/1972	The Red Queen Kills Seven Times	Emilio P. Miraglia	Italy/West Germany	F-giallo	West Germany	German
29/09/1972	Don't Torture a Duckling	Lucio Fulci	Italy	M-giallo	Italy	Italian
17/11/1972	Death Walks at Midnight	Luciano Ercoli	Italy/Spain	F-giallo	Italy	Italian
??/??/1972	Who Saw Her Die?	Aldo Lado	Italy/West Germany	M-giallo	Italy	Italian
04/01/1973	Torso	Sergio Martino	Italy	F-giallo	Italy	English
05/03/1973	Death Carries a Cane	Maurizio Pradeaux	Italy/Spain	F-giallo	Italy	Swedish
12/04/1973	Seven Deaths in the Cat's Eye	Antonio Margheriti	Italy/France/West Germany	F-giallo	Scotland	Scottish
16/02/1974	Spasmo	Umberto Lenzi	Italy	M-giallo	Undefined	Undefined
23/08/1974	Puzzle	Duccio Tessari	Italy	F-giallo	Italy/England	Italian
18/01/1975	Autopsy	Armando Crispino	Italy	F-giallo	Italy	Italian
24/01/1975	Eyeball	Umberto Lenzi	Italy/Spain	Ensemble	Spain	Ensemble/undefined
07/03/1975	Deep Red	Dario Argento	Italy	M-giallo	Italy	English
28/05/1975	The Killer Must Kill Again	Luigi Cozzi	Italy/France	M-giallo	Italy	Italian
6/08/1975	Strip Nude For Your Killer	Andrea Bianchi	Italy	Ensemble	Italy	Italian

## Post-boom *gialli*

Release date (Italy)	Title	Director	Country of origin	Subtype	Location	Main character nationality
16/08/1976	The House with Laughing Windows	Pupi Avati	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
??/??/1976	Plot of Fear	Paolo Cavara	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
06/08/1977	The Cat with the Jade Eyes	Antonio Bido	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Undefined
10/08/1977	Seven Notes in Black	Lucio Fulci	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	American
31/12/1977	The Pyjama Girl Case	Flavio Mogherini	Italy/Spain	M- <i>giallo</i>	Australia	Australian
19/08/1978	Rings of Fear	Alberto Negrin	Italy/Spain/West Germany	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
??/??/1978	The Bloodstained Shadow	Antonio Bido	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
28/09/1982	Tenebrae	Dario Argento	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	American
06/08/1983	A Blade in the Dark	Lamberto Bava	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
31/01/1985	Phenomena	Dario Argento	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Switzerland	American
19/12/1987	Opera	Dario Argento	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Undefined
26/01/1996	The Stendhal Syndrome	Dario Argento	Italy	F- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian
05/01/2001	Sleepless	Dario Argento	Italy	M- <i>giallo</i>	Italy	Italian



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## Filmography

Films are listed under the name by which they are referred to in the main body of the thesis. In the case of *gialli* and other films originating from non-English-speaking countries, the original title in the language of the country of origin follows in brackets. Several *gialli* were marketed and distributed under numerous different English-language titles; where applicable, these are also noted.

*All the Colours of the Dark (Tutti i colori del buio)*. Italy/Spain: Sergio Martino, 1972.

Alternate titles: *Day of the Maniac; They're Coming to Get You*

*Amer*. France/Belgium: Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani, 2009.

*Audition (Ôdishon)*. Japan: Takashi Miike, 1999.

*Autopsy (Macchie solari)*. Italy: Armando Crispino, 1975.

Alternate titles: *The Magician; Sun Spots; The Victim*

*L'avventura*. Italy/France: Michelangelo Antonioni, 1960.

*A Bay of Blood (Reazione a catena)*. Italy: Mario Bava, 1971.

Alternate titles: *Blood Bath; Ecology of a Crime; The Last House on the Left: Part II; Twitch of the Death Nerve*

*The Bird with the Crystal Plumage (L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo)*. Italy/West Germany: Dario Argento, 1970.

Alternate title: *The Gallery Murders*

*The Black Belly of the Tarantula (La tarantola dal ventre nero)*. Italy/France: Paolo Cavara, 1971.

*A Blade in the Dark (La casa con la scala nel buio)*. Italy: Lamberto Bava, 1983.

*Blood and Black Lace (Sei donne per l'assassino)*. Italy/France/Monaco: Mario Bava, 1964.

Alternate titles: *Fashion House of Death; Six Women for the Murderer*

*The Bloodstained Butterfly (Una farfalla con le ali insanguinate)*. Italy: Duccio Tessari, 1971.

*The Bloodstained Shadow (Solamente nero)*. Italy: Antonio Bido, 1978.

*Blowup*. UK/USA: Michelangelo Antonioni, 1966.

*Bicycle Thieves (Ladri di biciclette)*. Italy: Vittorio de Sica, 1948.

*The Case of the Bloody Iris (Perché quelle strane gocce di sangue sul corpo di Jennifer?)*. Italy: Giuliano Carnimeo (as Anthony Ascott), 1972.

Alternate titles: *Erotic Blue; What Are Those Strange Drops of Blood Doing on Jennifer's Body?*

*The Case of the Scorpion's Tail (La coda dello scorpione)*. Italy/Spain: Sergio Martino, 1971.

Alternate title: *Tail of the Scorpion*

*The Cat O'Nine Tails. (Il gatto a nove code)*. Italy/France/West Germany: Dario Argento, 1971.

*The Cat with the Jade Eyes (Il gatto dagli occhi di giada)*. Italy: Antonio Bido, 1977.

Alternate titles: *The Cat's Victims; Watch Me When I Kill*

*Come and See (Idi i smotri)*. Soviet Union: Elem Klimov, 1985.

*Crimes of the Black Cat (Sette scialli di seta gialla)*. Italy: Sergio Pastore, 1972.

*Death Carries a Cane (Passi di danza su una lama di rasoio)*. Italy/Spain: Maurizio Pradeaux, 1973.

*Death in Venice*, 2002, DVD. Directed by Gary Hertz. Anchor Bay Home Entertainment, United States of America. (Interview with Aldo Lado.)

*Death Laid an Egg (La morte ha fatto l'uovo)*. Italy/France: Giulio Questi, 1968.

Alternate title: *Plucked*

*Death Walks at Midnight (La morte accarezza a mezzanotte)*. Italy/Spain: Luciano Ercoli, 1972.

*Death Walks on High Heels (La morte cammina con i tacchi alti)*. Italy/Spain: Luciano Ercoli, 1971.

*Deep Red (Profondo rosso)*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1975.

Alternate titles: *The Deep Red Hatchet Murders; Dripping Deep Red; The Hatchet Murders*

*Django*. Italy/Spain: Sergio Corbucci, 1966.

*La Dolce Vita*. Italy/France: Federico Fellini, 1960.

*Don't Look Now*. UK/Italy: Nicolas Roeg, 1973.

*Don't Torture a Duckling (Non si sevizia un paperino)*. Italy: Lucio Fulci, 1972.

*Double Indemnity*. USA: Billy Wilder, 1944.

*The Exorcist*. USA: William Friedkin, 1973.

*Eyeball (Gatti rossi in un labirinto di vetro)*. Italy/Spain: Umberto Lenzi, 1975.

*The Fifth Cord (Giornata nera per l'ariete)*. Italy: Luigi Bazzoni, 1971.

Alternate title: *Evil Fingers*

*Five Dolls for an August Moon (Cinque bambole per la luna d'agosto)*. Italy: Mario Bava, 1970.

Alternate title: *Island of Terror*

*The Forbidden Photos of a Lady Above Suspicion (Le foto proibite di una signora per bene)*. Italy/Spain: Luciano Ercoli, 1970.

*Four Flies on Grey Velvet (Quattro mosche di velluto grigio)*. Italy/France: Dario Argento, 1971.

Alternate title: *The Four Velvet Flies*

*Frankenstein*. USA: James Whale, 1931.

*The French Sex Murders (Casa d'appuntamento)*. Italy/West Germany: Ferdinando Merighi (as F. L. Morris), 1972.

*Gilda*. USA: Charles Vidor, 1946.

*The Girl Who Knew Too Much (La ragazza che sapeva troppo)*. Italy: Mario Bava, 1963.

Alternate title: *The Evil Eye*

*The House with Laughing Windows (La casa dalle finestre che ridono)*. Italy: Pupi Avati, 1976.

Alternate title: *The House with the Windows That Laugh*

*The Iguana with the Tongue of Fire (L'iguana dalla lingua di fuoco)*. Italy/France/West Germany: Riccardo Freda, 1971.

*In the Folds of the Flesh (Nelle pieghe della carne)*. Italy/Spain: Sergio Bergonzelli, 1970.

*The Killer Must Kill Again (L'assassino è costretto ad uccidere ancora)*. Italy/France: Luigi Cozzi, 1975.

Alternate title: *The Dark is Death's Friend*

*Kiss Me Deadly*. USA: Robert Aldrich, 1955.

*A Lizard in a Woman's Skin (Una lucertola con la pelle di donna)*. Italy/France/Spain: Lucio Fulci, 1971.

Alternate title: *Schizoid*

*The Maltese Falcon*. USA: John Huston, 1941.

*Murder, My Sweet*. USA: Edward Dmytryk, 1944.

Alternate title: *Farewell My Lovely*

*My Dear Killer (Mio caro assassino)*. Italy/Spain: Tonino Valerii, 1972.

*Naked You Die (Nude... si muore)*. Italy: Antonio Margheriti, 1968.

Alternate title: *The Miniskirt Murders; Schoolgirl Killer; The Young, the Evil and the Savage*

*The Night Evelyn Came Out of the Grave (La notte che Evelyn uscì dalla tomba)*. Italy: Emilio P. Miraglia, 1971.

*Nosferatu (Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens)*. Germany: F. W. Murnau, 1922.

*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. UK: Peter Hunt, 1969.

*One on Top of the Other (Una sull'altra)*. Italy/France/Spain: Lucio Fulci, 1969.

Alternate title: *Perversion Story*

*Opera*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1987.

Alternate title: *Terror at the Opera*

*Phenomena*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1985.

Alternate title: *Creepers*

*Play Misty for Me*. USA: Clint Eastwood, 1971.

*Plot of Fear (...e tanta paura)*. Italy: Paolo Cavara, 1976.

*Psycho*. USA: Alfred Hitchcock, 1960.

*Puzzle (L'uomo senza memoria)*. Italy: Duccio Tessari, 1974.

Alternate title: *Man Without a Memory*

*The Pyjama Girl Case (La ragazza dal pigiama giallo)*. Italy/Spain: Flavio Mogherini, 1977.

Alternate title: *The Girl in the Yellow Pyjamas*

*A Quiet Place to Kill (Paranoia)*. Italy/France/Spain: Umberto Lenzi, 1970.

*Rebecca*. USA: Alfred Hitchcock, 1940.

*The Red Queen Kills Seven Times (La dama rossa uccide sette volte)*. Italy/West Germany: Emilio P. Miraglia, 1972.

Alternate titles: *The Corpse Which Didn't Want to Die; Cry of a Prostitute: Love Kills; The Lady in Red Kills Seven Times*

*Rings of Fear (Enigma rosso)*. Italy/Spain/West Germany: Alberto Negrin, 1978.

Alternate titles: *Red Rings of Fear; Trauma; Virgin Killer; Virgin Terror*

*Rosemary's Baby*. USA: Roman Polanski, 1968.

*Se7en*. USA: David Fincher, 1995.

*Seven Blood Stained Orchids (Sette orchidee macchiate di rosso)*. Italy/West Germany: Umberto Lenzi, 1972.

*Seven Deaths in the Cat's Eye (La morte negli occhi del gatto)*. Italy/France/West Germany: Antonio Margheriti (as Anthony M. Dawson), 1973.

*Seven Notes in Black (Sette note in nero)*. Italy: Lucio Fulci, 1977.

Alternate titles: *Murder to the Tune of Seven Black Notes; The Psychic*

*Short Night of Glass Dolls (La corta notte delle bambole di vetro)*. Italy/West Germany/Yugoslavia: Aldo Lado, 1971.

Alternate titles: *Malastrana; Paralyzed*

*Slaughter Hotel (La bestia uccide a sangue freddo)*. Italy: Fernando Di Leo, 1971.

Alternate titles: *Asylum Erotica; The Beast Kills in Cold Blood; The Cold-Blooded Beast*

*Sleepless (Non ho sonno)*. Italy: Dario Argento, 2001.

*So Sweet, So Dead (Rivelazioni di un maniaco sessuale al capo della squadra mobile)*. Italy: Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972.

Alternate titles: *Bad Girls, Penetration, The Slasher... is the Sex Maniac!*

*Spasmo*. Italy: Umberto Lenzi, 1974.

*The Stendhal Syndrome (La sindrome di Stendhal)*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1996.

*Strange Days of the Short Night*, 2002a, DVD. Directed by Gary Hertz. Anchor Bay Home Entertainment, USA. (Interview with Aldo Lado.)

*The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh (Lo strano vizio della Signora Wardh)*. Italy/Spain: Sergio Martino, 1971.

Alternate titles: *Blade of the Ripper; Next!*

*Strip Nude for your Killer (Nude per l'assassino)*. Italy: Andrea Bianchi, 1975.

*Suspiria*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1977.

*The Sweet Body of Deborah (Il dolce corpo di Deborah)*. Italy/France: Romolo Guerrieri, 1968.

*Tenebrae (Tenebre)*. Italy: Dario Argento, 1982.

Alternate titles: *Shadows, Unsane*

*Torso (I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale)*. Italy: Sergio Martino, 1973.

Alternate title: *Carnal Violence*

*Touch of Evil*. USA: Orson Welles, 1958.

*Wes Craven's New Nightmare*. USA: Wes Craven, 1994.

*What Have They Done to Your Daughters? (La polizia chiede aiuto)*. Italy: Massimo Dallamano, 1974.

Alternate titles: *Coed Murders; What Have They Done to Our Daughters?*

*What Have You Done to Solange? (Cosa avete fatto a Solange?)*. Italy/West Germany: Massimo Dallamano, 1972.

Alternate titles: *The School That Couldn't Scream; The Secret of the Green Pins; Solange; Terror in the Woods; What Have They Done to Solange?; Who Killed Solange?; Who's Next?*

*Who Saw Her Die? (Chi l'ha vista morire?)*. Italy/West Germany: Aldo Lado, 1972.

Alternate title: *The Child*

*Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key (Il tuo vizio è una stanza chiusa e solo io ne ho la chiave)*. Italy: Sergio Martino, 1972.

Alternate titles: *Excite Me; Eye of the Black Cat; Gently Before She Dies*