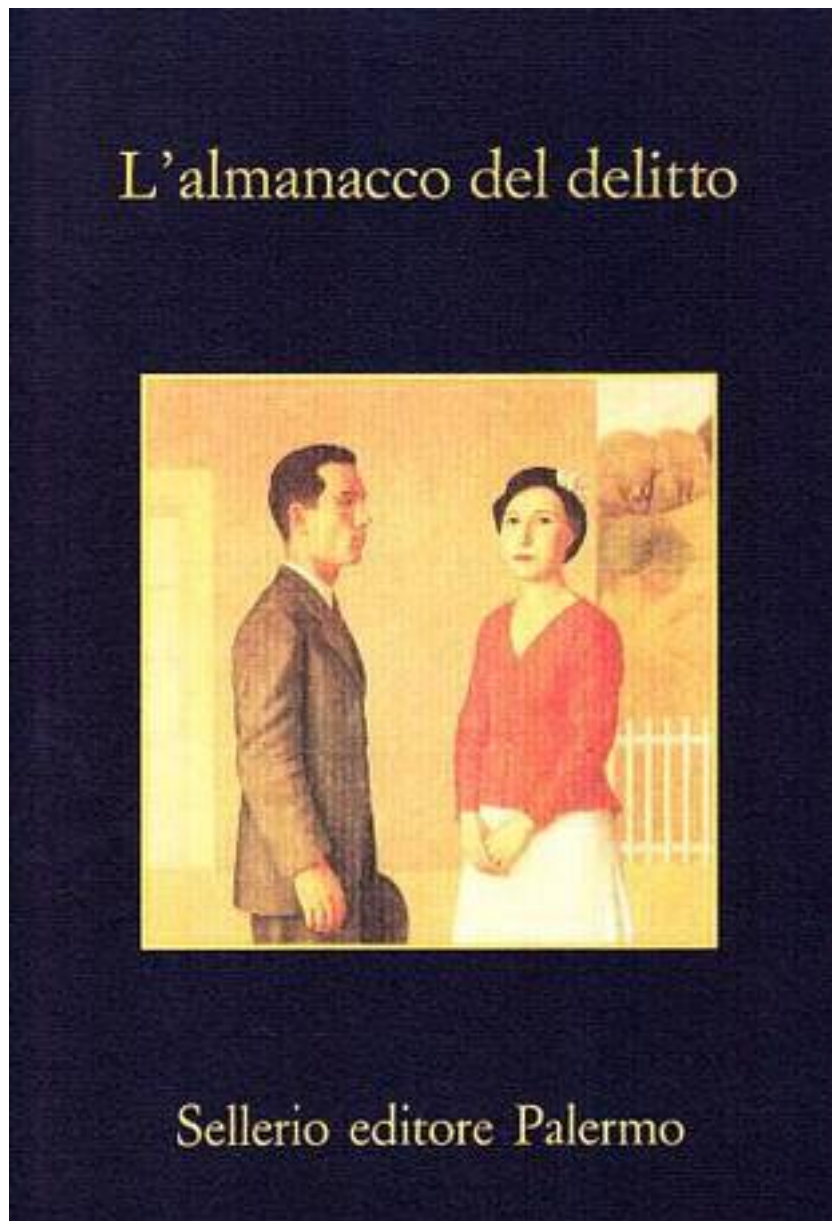


L'Almanacco del delitto

Traci Andrighetti (January 02, 2014)



Selections from "Il Cerchio Verde:" Italian Detective Fiction from the Fascist Era



[L'almanacco del delitto](#) [2] (The Crime Almanac) (Sellerio, 1990, 1996) is an anthology of 21 short stories from “**Il Cerchio Verde (The Green Circle)**,” a weekly magazine created by Arnoldo Mondadori in 1935 to showcase the police fiction of international and Italian writers. The stories in this collection present a fascinating look at the ways in which Italian authors—both male and female—adapted the hard-boiled genre made famous by the likes of Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett and Agatha Christie to the Italian context.

FASCIST CENSORSHIP

Despite the popularity of “Il Cerchio Verde,” Mondadori ceased publication of the magazine on June 17, 1937, in part because of pressure from the Fascist Ministry of Popular Culture (Minculpop). That year, Minculpop placed restrictions on the mystery genre, mandating that “the killer must absolutely not be Italian and cannot escape justice in any way” and forbidding the depiction of suicide, which the regime viewed as a weakness. Minculpop continued to tighten its censorship of mysteries until it banned the genre altogether and ordered the closure of the Mondadori mystery division following a robbery that the Ministry claimed was inspired by a mystery novel.

HARD-BOILED AUTHORS IN ITALY

In the Note to the text, the editors of L'almanacco del delitto, Gisella Padovani and Rita Veditame, explain that they selected “**i racconti più gradevoli e ancor oggi appetibili (the most pleasing and still today appetizing stories)**” featured in “Il Cerchio Verde.” Authors include Luigi Antonelli (b. Ascoli, 1882), the Futurist journalist and theater critic; Eugenia Consolo, the Venetian poet and the sister-in-law of Benito Mussolini’s lover, Margarita Sarfatti; and Tito Antonio Spagnol (b. Vittorio Veneto, 1895), a writer, international journalist and screenwriter who once worked with Frank Capra.

ITALIAN HARD-BOILED LANGUAGE

With respect to the language of the stories, it bears noting that Italian hard-boiled authors couldn’t quite capture the gritty street slang characteristic of the English models of the genre. Words such as “dick,” “dame,” “goons,” “hooch” and “hoosegow” were difficult if not impossible to translate. As the editors themselves state, however, the stories of “Il Cerchio Verde” are clearly marked by the Italian “**patina linguistica dell’epoca (linguistic patina of the epoch)**.” Below are some of the more interesting lexical features from these exemplars of 1930s Italian detective fiction.

ANGLICISMS

milady

Devo pregarvi, milady, di volermi mostrare le due collane...

(I must beg you, milady, to be willing to show me the two necklaces...)

speakeary (an old-fashioned variant of speakeasy)

Le ore passavano lente e tormentose nel nascondiglio sotterraneo dello speakeary di Pat Sullivan, dove il grosso Ned e i compagni si erano rifugiati dopo l’avventura della notte.

(The hours passed slowly and tormentingly in the underground hiding place of Pat Sullivan's speakeary, where Big Ned and his companions had sought refuge after the night's adventure.)

ARCHAISMS

ischerzo (contemporary Ital.: scherzo; Eng. joke)



E perciò in quindici anni, molti sostituti e molte dattilografe erano passate nell'ufficio, ma Giovanni, "il giovane di studio," era sempre là facendo per ischerzo la "faccia feroce."

(And so in fifteen years, many temps and many typists had passed through the office, but Giovanni, "the young man of the study," was always there making a "ferocious face" as a joke.)

lagrime (contemporary Ital. lacrime; Eng. tears)

Uno spazio vuoto con traccia di lacrime e, in fondo al foglio, a caratteri fermi, si legge: "È l'ora...".

(An empty space with a trace of tears and, at the bottom of the sheet, in firm letters, one could read: "It's time...".)

BORROWINGS

sciampagna (an Italianization of the Fr.: champagne)

I leggendarii fiumi di sciampagna erano corsi davvero, perché a un certo momento Vialin era andato a finire sotto la tavola del buffet rovesciandola e facendo ruzzolare tutto quel che c'era sopra e parecchie bottiglie si erano rotte.

(The legendary rivers of champagne had run indeed, because at a certain moment Vialin had gone and ended up under the buffet table, overturning it and knocking off everything there was on top, and many bottles had broken.)

gabardino (Eng. **garbardine**)

Dalla vettura scese un signore di mezza età, in gabardino e lobbia: vide subito dei baffi grossi e un mezzo toscano acceso.

(A middle-aged man, in gabardine and a homburg, descended from the car: he immediately saw some big whiskers and a lit half-Tuscan cigar.)

DIALECT (Milanese)

matt (Ital. **matto**; Eng. **crazy**)

straved (Ital. **visionario**; Eng. **visionary**)

Luigi Berton si precipitò fuori brontolando: —Ma lù l'è matt! Ma lù... lù el straved...!!

(Luigi Berton hurried out, grumbling: —He's crazy! He... he's a visionary...!!)

REGIONALISM

allea (a northern Italian term for **viale**; Eng. **avenue** or **boulevard**)

La roggia dell'allea si trovava all'opposto della piazza del Municipio.

(The avenue's irrigation ditch was located opposite the Piazza del Municipio.)

TECHNICAL TERM

coltella (contemporary Ital. coltello; Eng. knife)

Ma il tempo non doveva distruggere quelle due cose ancora fresche, pure e belle e dolci: e allora avete preso una coltella in cucina...



(But time wasn't supposed to destroy those two still fresh, pure and beautiful and sweet things: and so you took a knife in the kitchen...)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As promised, many of the mysteries in L'almanacco del delitto are still gripping even by today's standards. But the real appeal of these stories lies in their socio-historical value. For one thing, they serve as literary documents of how Italian mystery writers worked within the parameters set by Fascist censors. These stories are also testaments to the expectations of Italian readers of the period. As noted in Verdirame's epilogue to the anthology, the Italian mysteries of Il Cerchio Verde aren't pure detective fiction but instead contain elements of "giallo-nero-rosa" (literally, yellow-black-pink but used to refer to the book cover colors of the mystery, horror and romance genres, respectively). And the result is not at all what you would expect, which is exactly what you're looking for when you read a mystery novel.

Note: If you're interested in 1930s Italian detective fiction, don't miss [my post](#) [3] on [Il candeliere a sette fiamme](#) [4] (The Candelabrum with Seven Flames) (Mondadori, 1936; Feltrinelli, 1963; Garzanti, 1973; Sellerio, 2005) by Augusto De Angelis, the father of the Italian **giallo (mystery novel)**. Also be sure to read [my interview](#) [5] with University of Toronto Professor Luca Somigli about De Angelis and his work.

In Translation: L'Almanacco del delitto has not been translated into English, which is unfortunate because these stories are truly an intriguing adventure for the reader. Here, you'll find scheming lovers, severed body parts and even a homicidal black cat in exotic locations like Africa, Egypt and the Orient. On the other hand, it's really entertaining to see characters named Alex Dean, Van Röder, and Casimir speak such perfect Italian.

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