

# CRIME SCENE: ITALY

## A PRACTICAL GUIDE

*The latest in Crime Time's major series of crime fiction overviews, trends, key facts, country by country. This profile is written and compiled by Gian Franco Orsi. Once a director of Mondadori, Italy's largest publisher, he is now a respected anthologist and a regular on the jury for the Scerbanenco Prize, Italy's most prestigious prize for crime fiction.*



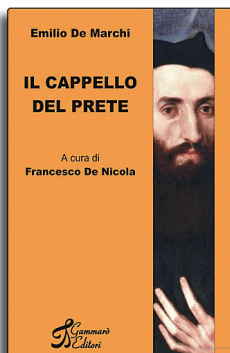
### A SHORT HISTORY OF ITALIAN CRIME FICTION

The earliest mystery-related Italian novels include *Il Mio Cadavere* (My Corpse) and *La Cieca di Sorrento* (The Blind Woman from Sorrento) both written by **Francesco Mastriani** and published in serial form in 1852. Later came **Cletto Arrighi's** *La mano nera* (The Black Hand, 1883), and **Emilio De Marchi's** *Il cappello del prete* (The Priest's Hat, 1887) both considered pioneers of the Italian mystery. Another important step came in 1910 with the publication of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in the leading

Italian newspaper, *Il Corriere della sera*.

Along with the influence of such as Émile Gaboriau, Gaston Leroux and the creators of *Fantomas*, *Pierre Souvestre* and *Marcel Allain*, there were soon local imitators, often under British or American pseudonyms.

Another key development was the establishment by Mondadori Publishing in 1929, of the world's longest-running crime imprint, *I Libri gialli* (Yellow Books), then published weekly. The yellow covers of the imprint came to signify crime fiction and the term 'gialli' is still widely used to cover the genre, extending into film. Early titles included books by S.S. Van Dine, Edgar Wallace,



Freeman Wills Crofts and Agatha Christie, all for the first time in Italy. The first Italian writer to be featured in the series was **Alessandro Varaldo**. His *Il Sette Bello* (Seven is Beautiful, 1931) is considered to be the first Italian detective story and features the police inspector *Ascanio Bonichi*.

With Italy now under fascist rule Mondadori was asked to ensure that at least 20% of its literary production was by Italian writers. As a result Italian authors started to write *gialli* in greater numbers, imitating the most famous foreign mystery writers, in plot, in the characters of detectives and in setting. Moreover the regime did not want the villain to be an Italian. Among the most important Italian authors of this era are **Ezio D'Errico** who set his stories in France, imitating George Simenon, **Giorgio Scerbanenco\***, at the beginning of his career, who set his mysteries in Boston USA, and **Tito Spagnol** who created the character of *Don Poldo*, clearly based on Chesterton's *Father Brown*.

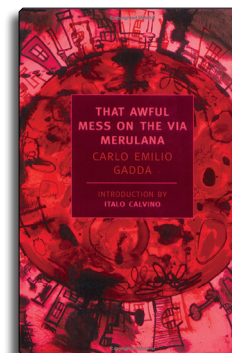


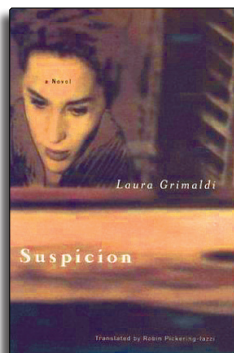
In 1941 the fascist Ministry of Culture decided to stop the publication of *I Libri gialli* and other similar publications citing 'moral' reasons, the corruption of youth, for example. The only noteworthy Italian writer who rebelled against this imposition was **Augusto De Angelis**, the creator of the Milan-based *Commissario De Vincenze*. Arrested, he later died as a result of a beating from a Fascist activist.

After the war Mondadori re-established their imprint as *Il Giallo Mondadori*, and (responding to public taste) resumed their previous policy of publishing mainly non-Italian writers. Nevertheless in the 1950s other Italian writers emerged, notably **Franco Enna**,

**Sergio Donati** (later a long-time collaborator of film director *Sergio Leone*), and (writing under a male pseudonym) **Laura Grimaldi\***, Italy's first important female writer. But the most important development came in 1966 when **Giorgio Scerbanenco\***, today considered the father of Italian noir, returned to crime writing after 25 years with a series of five novels featuring *Duca Lamberti*. Once a doctor, *Lamberti* becomes a tough amateur detective in Milan as it evolves into a major Italian metropolis. The series came to an end in 1969 with the death of Scerbanenco. In 1993 Italy's major crime fiction award, the *Scerbanenco Prize*, would be named after him.

Meanwhile, in 1957 **Carlo Emilio Gadda\***, a key figure in Italian literature, published *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, a crime novel translated into English as *That Awful Mess on Via Merulana* (1965), a precedent that would encourage other literary novelists to





use ideas from the crime novel, but in many differing ways. The most important are **Leonardo Sciascia\*** and **Umberto Eco\***.

The 1970s were notable for the classically-inclined mysteries of the writing duo of **Carlo Fruttero\*** and **Franco Lucentini\***. Other notable debutants include the prolific **Loriano Macchiavelli**, creator of *brigadiere* Sarti Antonio, the hard-boiled **Attilio Veraldi\***, another key figure in the development of Italian crime, as well as **Renato Olivieri**, the creator of Commissario Ambrosio. The 1980s saw the emergence of Rome-based **Corrado Augias**, thriller writer **Sergio Altieri** (later the 1997 Scerbanenco prize-winner), along with the return to writing of **Laura Grimaldi\*** from editorial jobs

at Mondadori and her own imprint, Interno Giallo. Two other female writers emerged at around the same time, thriller and noir writer **Claudia Salvatori**, later 2001 Scerbanenco prize-winner, as well as **Silvana La Spina**, creator of Maria Laura Gangemi, Sicilian police commissioner. The scene was now set for a major expansion of Italian crime writing in the late 1980s and early 90s.

NB \* indicates title(s) available in English

## RECENT PUBLISHING TRENDS

Italy is the fifth largest publishing market in Europe, down slightly in value in 2008. Over 50,000 titles were published in 2007, 81% of which were Italian in origin, up from 75% ten years ago. The number of non-Italian titles has been roughly static over the same period, but still account for over 30% of sales (down from 40% ten years ago).

Statistics covering crime fiction are hard to come by, but approximately 430 crime titles were published in 2004. 180 were of Italian origin. That number may have increased a little over recent years, but the dominance of non-Italian writers in crime continues for the time being.

### THE BEST SELLERS

Best-selling non-Italian crime and thriller writers include Dan Brown, Alicia Giménez Bartlett, Patricia Cornwell, John Grisham, Thomas Harris, John le Carré, Fred Vargas, Arturo Pérez-Reverte and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. Stieg Larsson (all three titles) has recently joined that number.

**Andrea Camilleri** and **Massimo Carlotto** are the Italian writers most likely to be amongst the best-sellers. Recently **Giorgio Faletti** has featured strongly.

## THE KEY REFERENCE BOOKS

- **Un secolo in giallo** (A Century of Giallo) by Maurizio Pistelli (Donzelli Editore, 2006)
- **Tutti colori del giallo** (All Colours of Giallo) by Luca Crovi (Marsilio Editore, 2002)
- **Storia del Noir** by Fabio Giovanni (Castelvecchio, 2000)
- **L'Italia in giallo** (Italy in Giallo) by Massimo Carloni (Edizioni Diabasis, 1994)
- **C'era una volta il giallo** (Once Upon a Time in Giallo) ed. Gian Franco Orsi & Lia Volpatti (Alacran, 2004, 2006, 2007)

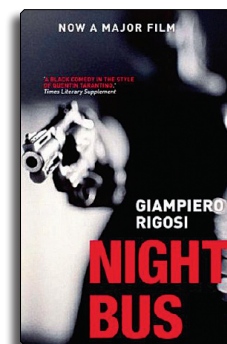
Three volumes of biographies, essays and interviews covering the key (non-Italian) writers featured in Mondadori's 'gialli' series. NB A fourth volume, to feature the Italian winners of the Alberto Tedeschi Award (see below), has never been published.

Volumes in English include:

- **Differences, Deceits and Desires: Murder and Mayhem in Italian Crime Fiction**, ed. Mirna Cicioni and Nicoletta Di Ciolla (University of Delaware Press, 2008)
  - **Italian Crime Fiction**, ed. Dr. Giuliana Pieri (University of Wales, 2010 ?)
- NB Announced for 2008, this volume has yet to appear.

## THE ITALIAN CRIME NOVEL TODAY

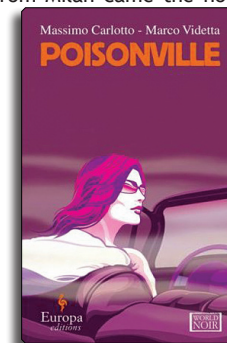
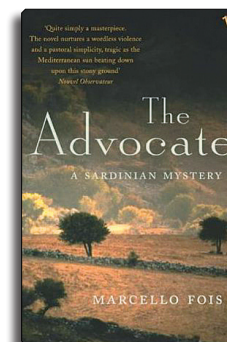
There are now upwards of 150 crime writers in Italy, with new writers being published on a regular basis. Many of those active today emerged in the early 1990s, notably from Gruppo 13, a loose association formed around the Bologna-based veteran **Loriano Macchiavelli** and the younger **Marcello Fois\***, a winner of the Scerbanenco prize in



1998. Notable also were **Carlo Lucarelli\*** (Scerbanenco prize-winner in 1996) the female writer **Danila Comastri Montanari**, and later, **Giampiero Rigosi\***. Meanwhile in Rome **Carmen Iarrera**, Italy's first female writer of spy fiction, and in Milan **Andrea G. Pinketts** published their first novels, the latter a Scerbanenco prize-winner in 1995. Also from Milan came the noir (or even 'post noir') writer **Raul Montanari** and **Gaetano Savatteri**. Best-sellers **Andrea Camilleri\*** and **Massimo Carlotto\*** (Scerbanenco prize-winner in 2002) were

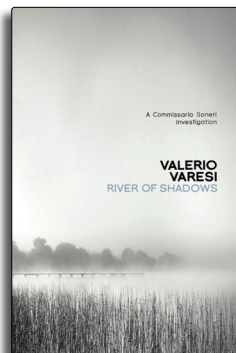
next to arrive, along with three notable females **Diana Lama**, the sci-fi/crime writer **Nicoletta Vallorani** and noir novelist **Barbara Garlaschelli** (a Scerbanenco prize-winner in 2004). **Luigi Guicciardi\*** and the versatile **Alessandro Perissinotto** emerged towards the end of the decade.

With publishers both large and small thus encouraged to publish



native writers, it is not surprising that the genre continues to attract both new and established writers. Novelist and children's writer **Giuseppe Pederiali** has created in Camilla Cagliostro one of the best Italian female detectives, whilst new writers include **Giulio Leoni\***, **Valerio Varesi\***, female writer **Valeria Montaldi**, thriller writer **Giorgio Faletti\***, as well as the widely translated **Gianrico Carofiglio\*** and **Michele Giuttari\***. Recent 'stars' may possibly include **Donato Carrisi\*** and **Barbara Baraldi\***.

One 'fact' is clear. It is less and less easy (and it was always difficult) to categorise Italian writers. Some, like **Antonio Tabucchi\***, **Sebastiano Vassalli\***, **Domenico Starnone\***, **Niccolo Ammaniti\***, the female writer **Dacia Maraini\***, all winners of the Strega Prize



(Italy's Booker), along with **Elena Ferrante\*** take up the baton of Sciascia and Eco and write occasional novels with noir themes.

But more write police novels (**Macchiavelli**, **Camilleri\***, **Guicciardi\***, **Giuttari\***, **Varesi**), historical mysteries (**Danila Montanari**, **Montaldi**, **Leoni\***), thrillers (**Altieri**, **Pinketts**, **Iarerra**, **Savatteri**, **Carlotto\***, **Faletti\***), even legal thrillers (**Carofiglio\***). Some write novels of social comment (**Giancarlo De Cataldo\***, **Roberto Saviano\***), or psychological suspense (**Lama**). Many are associated with a specific city or region, Sardinia for instance (**Marcello Fois\***), Parma (**Varesi**), or Bologna (**Macchiavelli**, **Lucarelli\***) and Sicily (**Silvana la Spina**, **Camilleri\***, **Savatteri**). Some write noir like **Raul Montanari**,

**Vallorani** and **Patrizia Pesaresi**; many of the others listed above would also claim 'noir' status. Many take their talents into theatre, film and television, sometimes into comics (*fumetti*). But most have left the whodunit behind and prefer to reflect the real-life problems of modern Italian society. And perhaps they achieve a better result than those writers who remain outside the genre...

NB \* indicates title(s) available in English

## SHORT STORIES

Many Italian crime writers are also short story writers (**Carmen Iarrera**, for instance, has had three stories in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine). But as the printed crime fiction magazine has declined, occasional anthologies are now the major outlet for such work.

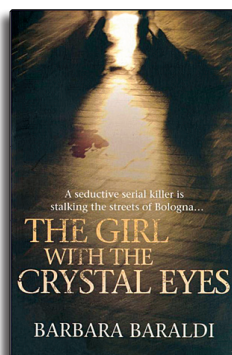
Recent anthologies include :

- **Seven** ed. Gian Franco Orsi (Piemme, 2010)

Mystery stories featuring the seven deadly sins.

- **Alle signore piace il nero** (All the Women Love Noir) ed. Barbara Garlaschelli & Nicoletta Vallorani (Sperling & Kupfer, 2009)

An anthology of female noir including stories by **Diana Lama**, **Garlaschelli** and **Vallorani**,



Scerbanenco nominee **Elisabetta Bucciarelli**, and **Claudia Salvatori**.

- **Il ritorno del Duca** (The Return of Duca) ed. Gian Franco Orsi (Garzanti, 2007)

Stories inspired by the character of Duca Lamberti created by Giorgio Scerbanenco.

- **Crimini** (Crimes) ed. Giancarlo De Cataldo (Einaudi, 2005)

Short stories from the top Italian crime writers, available in English (Bitter Lemon Press).

Further volumes from the same publisher followed in 2007, 2008, & 2009. They have resulted in an Italian TV series of the same name.

- **Fez, struzzi e manganelli** (Black Hats, Ostrich Feathers and Truncheons\*) ed. Gian Franco Orsi (Sonzogno, 2005)

Mystery stories with settings in the fascist years.

\*The title includes references to iconic items of the fascist era, the feathers a feature of the 'white telephone' movies of the time.

## KEY PUBLISHERS

Most major Italian publishers publish crime novels.

NB When looking for crime fiction on the websites, look out for tabs labelled *Giallo/i*, *Thriller*, *Suspence* or *Nero/Noir*. If not specified, try *Narrativa*, *Narrativa Straniera* (foreign fiction).

Otherwise look for *Catalogo* or *Autori*...

### MAJOR PUBLISHERS INCLUDE:

- Einaudi (see Note 1): [www.einaudi.it](http://www.einaudi.it)
- Garzanti (see Note 2): [www.garzantilibri.it](http://www.garzantilibri.it)
- Longanesi (see Note 2): [www.longanesi.it](http://www.longanesi.it)
- Mondadori

[www.mondadori.it/libri/index.html](http://www.mondadori.it/libri/index.html)

NB Information on Il Giallo Mondadori is best accessed through its comprehensive blog (see blogs)

- Piemme (see Note 1): [www.edizpiemme.it](http://www.edizpiemme.it)
- Rizzoli (see Note 3)

<http://rizzoli.rcslibri.corriere.it/>

- Sonzogno (see Note 3)

<http://sonzogno.rcslibri.corriere.it/sonzogno>

- Sperling & Kupfer (see Note 1): [sperling.it](http://sperling.it)

### SMALLER BUT IMPORTANT

#### PUBLISHERS INCLUDE:-

- Alacran : [www.alacranedizioni.it/](http://www.alacranedizioni.it/)
- E/O: [edizionieo.it/](http://edizionieo.it/)
- Fanucci: [fanucci.it/](http://fanucci.it/)
- Fazi: [www.fazieditore.it/](http://www.fazieditore.it/)
- Marcos & Marcos: [marcosymarcos.com/](http://marcosymarcos.com/)
- Marsilio (see Note 3): [www.marsilioeditori.it/](http://www.marsilioeditori.it/)
- Meridiano Zero: [www.meridianozero.it/](http://www.meridianozero.it/)
- Polillo (specialist in classic crime fiction in translation): [polilloeditore.it/](http://polilloeditore.it/)
- Sellerio: [www.sellerio.it/](http://www.sellerio.it/)
- Todaro (actually based in Switzerland where it serves the local Italian population and, increasingly, the Italian national market): [todaroeditore.com](http://todaroeditore.com)
- Tropea: [marcotropeaeditore.it/](http://marcotropeaeditore.it/)

### NOTES

1. Part of Mondadori
2. Part of Gruppo editoriale Mauri Spagnol (GeMS)

### NOTES

3. Part of RCS Libri



## CRIME FICTION: WHERE TO FIND IT

**Sherlockiana**, the specialist bookshop (and mail order operation) founded in 1984 by **Gian Franco Orsi**, was closed in 2008. The shop was located in Milan. There are no other specialist crime bookshops in Italy.

### OTHER BOOK SHOPS

Most major book stores however, particularly those found in the larger cities, will feature crime fiction departments. Look for store guides and author events (*Eventi*) on the web-sites of the three largest chains.

- **La Feltrinelli** has 97 stores across Italy. Fascias include Feltrinelli Librerie, Libri e Musica (both in high streets), Feltrinelli Village (in shopping centres). Also as Express. [www.lafeltrinelli.it/fcom/it/home/pages/puntivendita/negozi.html](http://www.lafeltrinelli.it/fcom/it/home/pages/puntivendita/negozi.html)
- **Giunti al Punto** runs smaller stores but plenty of them, well distributed around the country. [www.giuntialpunto.it](http://www.giuntialpunto.it)
- **Mondadori's** retail division, the largest book chain in Italy, operates as Mondadori Multicenter, Librerie Mondadori, Librerie Gulliver, and Edicolè.
- [negozimondadori.it/](http://negozimondadori.it/)

## NEWS AND REVIEWS

Recent years have seen the closure of all the regularly appearing Italian print magazines devoted to crime. The list of closures includes the following magazines :-

- **DELITTI DI CARTA** (Crime on Paper)

Established by writers **Loriano Macchiavelli** and **Renzo Cremante**.

- **IL FALCONE MALTESE**

A superb magazine in print form, but sadly its announced web replacement has yet to appear.

- **LA RIVISTA DEL MISTERO** (Mystery Review)

Edited by writers **Andrea G. Pinketts** and **Andrea Carlo Cappelletti**. Mainly short stories.

### NEWSPAPERS

The majority of newspapers in Italy originate in the regional capitals, of which there are 20. The best newspapers will feature best-seller lists, book reviews and the occasional interview with crime writers. Look particularly for the Saturday arts sections (usually as *Cultura*).

The best-known newspapers distributed nationally are :

- Corriere della sera: [www.corriere.it](http://www.corriere.it)
- Il Manifesto: [www.ilmanifesto.it](http://www.ilmanifesto.it)
- Il Messaggero: [www.ilmessaggero.it](http://www.ilmessaggero.it)
- La Repubblica: [www.repubblica.it](http://www.repubblica.it)
- La Stampa: [lastampa.it](http://lastampa.it)

## FESTIVALS

There is a strong tradition of festivals devoted to crime fiction in Italy, dating back to 1973 when the coastal town of Catollica on the Adriatic coast staged its first gathering, later named **MystFest**, but now largely superseded by **Courmayeur** (see below). Current festivals are often promoted by local or regional authorities, with many events free, and accessible to the public. One or two feature art, music and children's events. The key festivals include: -

### COURMAYEUR NOIR IN FESTIVAL

Held in the popular ski resort in northern Italy at the beginning of December every year, the 19th edition was held in December 2009, with **James Sallis** heading the international jury. A highly successful blend of the best in both national and international crime writing and (in particular) film-making. Full details, news, programme etc (in both Italian and English) at this website.

[noirfest.com/movie.html](http://noirfest.com/movie.html)

- **GIALLO LUNA, NERO NOTTE** ('Yellow' Moon, Black Night)

Seven days of crime fiction events held in Ravenna on the Adriatic coast near Bologna in early October. The seventh edition awarded its prize to publishing house Edizione Ambiente for its 'green' imprint Verde NeroNoir. Guests included **Asa Larsson** and **Stephen Hunter**.

[www.gialloluna.it](http://www.gialloluna.it)

- **LA PASSIONE PER IL DELITTO** (A Passion for Crime)

The 8th edition took place in Monticello Brianza near Milan between 27 September and 12 October 2009. Participants included **Marco Vichi** (later, the 2009 winner of the Scerbanenco Prize), **Michele Giuttari**, **Elisabetta Bucciarelli**, and **Massimo Carlotto**. International guests included **Dominique Manotti** and **Asa Larsson**. The festival's fifth Premio Azzecagarbugli (look it up!) was awarded to screenwriter **Luca Podelimgo's** first novel *Odia il prossimo tuo* (Hate your Neighbour).

[lapassioneperildelitto.it](http://lapassioneperildelitto.it)

- **A QUALCUNO PIACE GIALLO** (Giallo, if you Please)

Brescia, a large town between Milan and Verona, held its 10th annual festival of crime-writing and film between 16-23 April 2010. Its interviews and discussions with writers featured, amongst others, **Sergio Altieri**, **Guiseppe Pederiali**, **Michele Guittari** and **Danila Comastri Montanari**. The international guest was **Gunnar Staalesen**. The festival also makes an award for an outstanding contribution to the health of the genre. In 2009 it went to Luca Zingaretti who plays Camilleri's Inspector Salvo Montalbano in the Italian TV series.

[www3.provincia.brescia.it/giallo/](http://www3.provincia.brescia.it/giallo/)

## MAJOR PRIZES FOR CRIME FICTION

There are three major prizes for crime fiction in Italy. All three are presented at the Noir in Festival (see Festivals), held in Courmayeur in northern Italy every December.

### IL PREMIO GIORGIO SCERBANENCO ( The Giorgio Scerbanenco prize)

Awarded annually for the best Italian crime novel of the year. Named after a key figure in the development of Italian crime fiction (see A Short History), books are nominated by Italian publishers from which the jury choose twenty. Those titles are then voted on by visitors to the website of the Noir in Festival (see Festivals section). The top five then go forward to the Festival for the jury to make its final choice.

Recent winners:

- 2007 **Francesco Guccini, Loriano Macchiavelli**: Tango e gli altri, Romanzo di una raffica, anzi tre (Tango and the Others, the Story of a Squall, or Three)
- 2008 **Paola Barbato**: Mani nude (The Hand in Knots)
- 2009 **Marco Vichi**: Morte a Firenze (Death in Florence). Highly commended was *Io ti perdono* (I forgive you) by **Elisabetta Bucciarelli**.



### IL PREMIO ALBERTO TEDESCHI

Awarded to the best unpublished Italian novel of the year. Named after the key editor of *Il Libri Gialli* (later *Il Giallo Mondadori*) from its early days until his death in 1979, it has been in existence since 1980, and is appropriately sponsored by Mondadori. The prize is publication as an *Il Gialli Mondadori* title.

Recent winners:

- 2007 **Gianluca Durante**: Altravita (Another Life)
- 2008 **Enrico Luceri**: Il mio volto è uno specchio (My Face is a Mirror)
- 2009 **Roberto Riccardi**: Legame di Sangue (Blood Ties)

### IL PREMIO RAYMOND CHANDLER

Chosen by the organisers of the Noir In Festival (see Festivals section), and which recognises a distinguished contribution to crime fiction over many years, not necessarily via the written word.

Recent winners: -

- 2007 **Scott Turow** (USA)
- 2008 **Alicia Giménez-Bartlett** (Spain)
- 2009 **Leonardo Padura** (Cuba)

## KEY WEBSITES

By way of compensation for the lack of dedicated bookshops, Italian crime fiction has a lively presence on the internet. Websites are in Italian, unless otherwise stated.

- **Giallo & Co**: Website of L'Associazione Culturale Giallo & Co., founded in 2004 by Carlo Lucarelli, Marcello Fois, Giorgio Faletti and others to promote *gialli* and noir fiction.

[gialloandco.it/home.htm](http://gialloandco.it/home.htm)

- **GialloWeb** : Reviews, interviews, bibliographies etc.

[www.gialloweb.net](http://www.gialloweb.net)

- **Il Gruppo Milanonera**: *'il primo web press in noir'*.

[www.milanonera.com](http://www.milanonera.com)

- **Thriller magazine**: News, books, TV, cinema, DVD etc).

[www.thrillermagazine.it](http://www.thrillermagazine.it)

Key blogs include

- **Blog del Giallo Mondadori**: Most things you might wish to know about *Il Giallo Mondadori*.

[blog.librimondadori.it/blogs/ilgiallomondadori/](http://blog.librimondadori.it/blogs/ilgiallomondadori/)

- **Corpi Freddi**: News, reviews, interviews.

[corpifreddi.blogspot.com](http://corpifreddi.blogspot.com)

- **Misterioso**: More on the world of *Il Giallo Mondadori* this time by Danilo Campanella

[www.danilocampanella.com/giallo](http://www.danilocampanella.com/giallo)

- **Non Solo Noir** ie not only noir, but music and cinema also.

[nonsolonoir.blogspot.com](http://nonsolonoir.blogspot.com) (NB omit www.)

- **L'Angolo Nero**, Alessandra Buccheri's 'blog del mistero'.

[angolonero.blogosfere.it](http://angolonero.blogosfere.it) (NB omit www.)

- **Thriller Café**: News and reviews by Guiseppe Pastore.

[www.thrillercafe.it](http://www.thrillercafe.it)

## OTHER KEY CONTACTS

Crime writers organisations in Italy are largely local or regional in character eg *Il Gruppo Milanonera* (see News and Reviews). The closest to a national organisation is AIEP-IACW under its local President **Gian Franco Orsi**, shortly to retire from the post. AIEP Italy can be contacted through writer **Carmen Iarrera**.

- [carmeniarrera@libero.it](mailto:carmeniarrera@libero.it)