



ALL THE COLOURS OF  
**SERGIO  
MARTINO**  
KAT ELLINGER



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### ALL THE COLOURS OF SERGIO MARTINO - KAT ELLINGER

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## Introduction

Sergio Martino: journeyman, tireless filmmaker, cult figure in Italian cinema, maestro. From his humble beginnings as a script advisor for Titanus, to a major name in Eurocult circles, Martino has travelled the world making many films in many genres. When the Italian film industry started to decline in the 1980s, he then took on the world of television. Even today, at the age of 79, he is still active, giving regular talks on his work and interacting with fans. This book will attempt to honour his legacy in cult cinema and serve as an introduction to his diverse catalogue of film<sup>1</sup>.

With such a wide, and not to mention lengthy, filmography to his name, it's difficult to know where to start. For convenience, this book has been organised into chapters by theme, not necessarily in chronological order, as it was often the case that the director worked in several genres simultaneously. Every attempt has been made to cover all of the director's major work, as well as some of his lesser known cinema and television. However, as this book is designed to serve as an introduction, covering everything (which includes at least 66 directorial credits) would be way beyond the scope of this project. Therefore, care has been taken to include at least all of the work available in English-friendly formats, and some which isn't, with a hope that it will encourage further exploration into all the colours of Sergio Martino.

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<sup>1</sup> All film titles in this book will refer to the main English language title only, unless there is no export title.



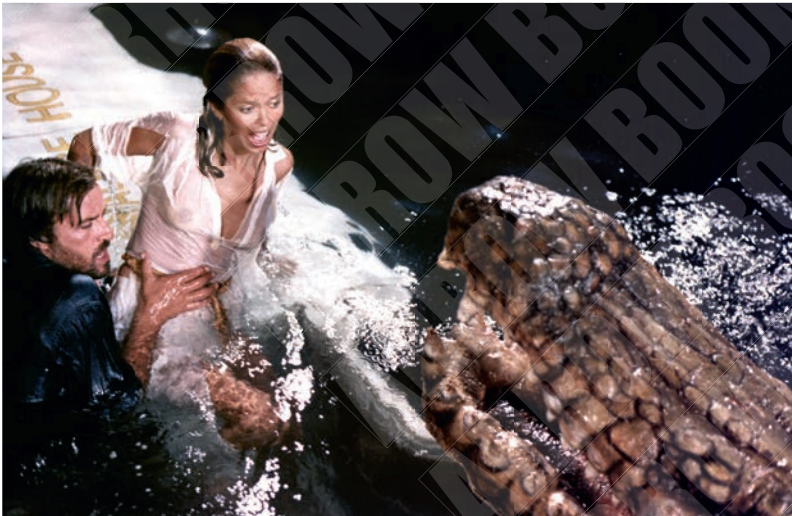
## A man called Sergio Martino: The beginning

Born in Rome, on the 19th July 1938, Sergio Martino was already connected to Italian film before he even took his first breath. Although his father wanted him to go into banking and he initially studied geology, he was destined to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather: Gennaro Righelli.

Righelli was an innovator in Italian cinema. He was the director who produced the first Italian film with sound *The Song of Love* (1930). Sergio's mother, Lea Righelli, and grandmother, Maria Jacobini, were also actresses who appeared in early Italian film. So despite his father's sensible advice to go into a more practical profession, Martino was too enamoured with his family's heritage to do anything else but make films. Indeed, both of the Martino brothers made their careers in cinema: older brother Luciano spent most of his working life as a producer – founding his own company Dania Films, with which he produced a large portion of his brother Sergio's work.

The director remembers,

*"I must have been four or five years old. I went on tiptoe and approached the large living room of the house, with a glass door. It's like a dream image, almost Fellini. Through the opaque glass I glimpsed a study of people, shapes around a large table, for many hours, immersed in a surreal cloud of smoke. They argued in tones, sometimes subdued, sometimes higher. My grandfather was in there writing a screenplay for a movie. I accidentally dropped a statuette, which broke and the noise attracted the attention of the people sitting in the room. I was afraid and tried to hide. But my grandfather forgave me and took me into the studio, where I saw mountains of cigarette butts in the ashtray, cups of coffee and several sheets of paper scattered everywhere full of notes, some stained with coffee. Maybe this was my baptism into the family factory of ideas for movies. My father told me many years later that amongst those*



present in that session was Mario Monicelli, but I have no evidence to that fact.<sup>2</sup>”

Martino also has fond memories of an amateur film his family made in 1955, for which he wrote the story when he was just 17 years old:

“The plot tells of a tired high school student who falls asleep on his chemistry book... From this realistic preamble, the story continues imaginatively and, thanks to an amateur fade, begins to describe the student’s magical dream, that after eating a magic potion he turns into a kind of Mr Hyde (my mother helped with mascara and protruding teeth). Then using the magically acquired powers, he terrorizes the inhabitants of the house. Shooting took place after dinner, especially on Saturday, directing, lighting, and special effects (so to speak) from my father, the protagonist. Actors: my mother (the maid of the house) and one of her sisters (momentary guest), grandmother (the best, thanks to her past in silent films) and exceptionally Luciano, who appears in a “cameo” in the final scene, where the dream fades.<sup>3</sup>”

Older sibling Luciano was already working in the film industry at this point, collaborating on scripts (1955 Gina Lollobrigida and Vittorio Gassman vehicle, *Beautiful But Dangerous*) as early as 1955 – the year the Martinos were making their own version of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* around the family dinner table. Sergio would take a similar route, starting out as a script reader for Titanus, using his connection with producer Gustavo Lombardo, who was an old family friend, as a way in. As the director has suggested<sup>4</sup>, it was easy to find a way into cinema by ghostwriting scripts, for which the writers did not receive credit. Ernesto Gastaldi, who would work on the scripts of many of Sergio’s own films, was also working in a similar field and became acquainted with the brothers early on in their careers.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from Italian by author from: Martino, Sergio (2017) *Mille peccati... nessuna virtù?* Bloodbuster, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid p.24

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.32

It was from one of Luciano’s writing assignments, Sergio Corbucci’s *I ragazzi dei Parioli* (1959), that Sergio got his first taste of acting (he was credited as Sergio Martinori). Apparently Corbucci had come to the Martino house to write with Luciano and proposed he needed an actor in a supporting role. Sergio was volunteered for the part. However, things didn’t go too well and it put him off acting for life. He remembers the scene, in which he appeared as part of a group of young partygoers, and they were supposed to board an American convertible,

“As we entered the car, Ennio Girolami [Enzo G. Castellari’s brother], excited in the emphasis of the moment, closes the door violently, with my finger inside. You can imagine how it felt, but I stoically resisted avoiding interrupting the scene. The car, in fact, goes away in the night... an end, and of my acting career... I had no talent for acting.<sup>5</sup>”

Thankfully the incident didn’t put him off cinema. By 1963 he was moving up the ranks, serving as a second unit director on both Brunello Rondi’s *The Demon* (Luciano’s first producer credit) and Mario Bava’s *The Whip and the Body*. From here the Martino brothers would move into producing a number of key cult films of the period; including giallo forerunners *The Sweet Body of Deborah* (1968) and Umberto Lenzi’s *So Sweet... So Perverse* (1969) – which will be discussed in the next chapter in a little more depth.

Martino’s first steps into directing came via mondo films – sensational documentaries, which focused on the more lurid aspects of culture – with *Mondo Sex* (1969) and *Naked and Violent* (1970). This type of film had become a popular form of entertainment following the success of Paolo Cavara, Franco Prosperi and Gualtiero Jacopetti’s *Mondo Cane* (1962). Martino’s efforts are fairly derivative of the genre on the whole, but *Naked and Violent* does warrant a mention because of Bruno Nicolai’s score. In a scene featuring supposed satanic worshippers, Nicolai’s ‘Drug Party’ theme can be heard – it was also used for Jess Franco’s *Eugenie... the Story of Her Journey Into Perversion* (1970) and Paul Naschy’s *Frankenstein’s Bloody Terror* (1968). Nicolai, who worked on scores for a huge number of cult Sixties and Seventies European films, would

<sup>5</sup> Ibid p.31

go on to score a number of Martino's. As well as *Arizona Colt Returns* (1970) the composer would score the bulk of Martino's gialli *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (1971), *All the Colors of the Dark* (1972) – which is a standout soundtrack in the giallo canon overall, featuring strains of the sitar for occult scenes, as well as an overall western-type epic vibe – and *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* (1972).

*Arizona Colt Returns* was the first conventional feature Martino would direct. It was a sequel to the popular western *Arizona Colt* (1966), which had been directed by Michele Lupo and featured Giuliano Gemma in the lead role. The sequel would replace Gemma with Anthony Steffen, aka “The Italian Clint Eastwood”. Martino said of the picture,

*“I come from a generation of Italian cinema when the western genre exploded. Back then in our industry making movies happened because it was so easy to get financial backing. In those days it was not a problem to get a movie made. A single movie could count on a domestic box-office of around a billion Lira and could also count on successful foreign sales. Before I directed my first movie, Arizona Colt Returns I wrote \$10,000 for a Massacre. At that time Italy was producing 300 films a year. Certainly 50% of those were westerns which were sold all over the world. From big budget movies, like Sergio Leone's, to much cheaper ones. My first movie Arizona, was shot for the most part in Spain.”*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Interview: *A Man Called Sergio*. (2004) DVD Blue Underground.

## Strange vices, torsos and tails: The giallo years.

The Italian giallo, as a cycle or genre (or filone as they are known natively), is one of the most hotly debated topics in the sphere of Sixties and Seventies international cult cinema. As Peter Bondanella acknowledges,

*“It is extremely difficult to pin down any rigid definition of the giallo, since these films cross the generic boundaries of crime films, horror films, and thrillers in general, and film historians often place them quite as easily in the horror genre as in the mystery or thriller camp.”*<sup>7</sup>

While many of the films appeared to present certain formulaic traits, it was a highly experimental period in Italian film history. Aspects such as the lessening of censorship, commercial need, left-wing protests (following an explosive period in the Hot Autumn of 1969), working class disillusionment born from the exploitative side of the post-war economic miracle, the changing nature of gender roles, dirty politics, political violence and the breaking down of traditional values, all played a part in fuelling the giallo and crime thriller genres of the era. Sergio Martino's films in the genre arrived in the midst of the peak years, during a volatile cultural climate and an Italian film industry which was changing at a rapid pace as the restraints of censorship started to break down.

Following the fall of fascism at the end of World War II, Italy's post-war neorealism, in the '40s and '50s, had paved the way for two decades of auteur cinema, where major forces such as Roberto Rossellini, Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Vittorio de Sica and Michelangelo Antonioni dominated Italian film.

By the Sixties, Italian cinema found itself crowded with both serious “art” films and a “B” industry – the latter, headed by the likes of Antonio Margheriti, Sergio Leone, Riccardo Freda and Mario Bava – as Italy attempted to compete in a

<sup>7</sup> Bondanella, Peter (2009) *A History of Italian Cinema*. Continuum, p.374.

global market in the field of horror, action, western, adventure and exploitation films. It was from this more exportable strain of Italian cinema, in the “B” arena, that the giallo was born as the decade drew to a close.

Mario Bava’s *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* (1963), and *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) are widely considered the true originators of the cycle. *The Girl Who Knew Too Much* is more of a typical crime thriller, but it did sow the seeds for the director to pick up his game in far more avant garde style with *Blood and Black Lace*; the film that provided a certain formula: like the black-gloved killer, ultra stylised sadistic murder and a high fashion aesthetic. However, the pre-Seventies films are a very different animal to those made by Martino and his peers from 1970 onwards. As Michael Mackenzie identifies, the late Sixties gialli were mainly composed of what he terms the F-giallo (female-centric giallo) structure, with plots usually focused on a female protagonist, and themes of madness, paranoia and deception. Mackenzie contrasts this with the M-giallo (Male-centric giallo) formula found in the films of Dario Argento<sup>8</sup>, whereby the core centres on graphic murder (influenced by Bava’s forerunner *Blood and Black Lace*) and male protagonists; for example, *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (1970), *Deep Red* (1975) and *Tenebre* (1982). In addition to this, Justin Harries – in discussing the roles Edwige Fenech played for Martino in his giallo films<sup>9</sup> – labels these early examples as “chamber” gialli; pointing to the intimate narrative structures, involving two or three people with a female protagonist at the centre, as defining feature of these early examples of the genre.

It was from these early “F-gialli” or “chamber” gialli, that the Martino brothers got their first taste of the genre. While working on Romolo Guerrieri’s *The Sweet Body of Deborah* and Umberto Lenzi’s *So Sweet... So Perverse* (1969), Luciano was struck by the idea that he wanted to produce his own films in the same vein, with his brother Sergio directing. Stars like Carroll Baker – who reigned as queen of the female-centric giallo – were too expensive. Luciano felt they should find new (affordable) talent, which is where Edwige Fenech later comes

<sup>8</sup> *Dolls of Flesh and Blood: The Gialli of Sergio Martino* – a visual essay by Michael Mackenzie, on Blu-ray (2015) Edgar Allan Poe’s *Black Cats: Two Adaptations By Sergio Martino & Lucio Fulci* (Limited Edition). Arrow Films.

<sup>9</sup> *The Strange Vices of Miss Fenech* – a visual essay by Justin Harries on Blu-ray (2015) Edgar Allan Poe’s *Black Cats: Two Adaptations By Sergio Martino & Lucio Fulci* (Limited Edition). Arrow Films.

into the picture. Umberto Lenzi’s gialli from this period are perhaps some of the finest examples of the F-giallo in action. Taking the lead from Clouzot’s 1955 *Les Diabolique*, the films revolved around actress Carroll Baker in a series of similar roles; which include *Paranoia* (aka *Orgasmo*, 1969) *So Sweet... So Perverse* and *A Quiet Place to Kill* (aka *Paranoia*, 1970). The F-giallo, as well as emulating French noir like *Les Diabolique*, also borrowed an awful lot of inspiration from classic Gothic melodrama. Themes such as doomed romance, deception (usually over inheritance or marriage), sexual repression, madness, neurosis and isolation are key features of the Gothic melodrama. The influence of films such as *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940) *The House of the Seven Gables* (Joe May, 1940) *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944) and even Jack Clayton’s *The Innocents* (1961) is clearly evident in the foundational years of the genre, especially in Lenzi’s aforementioned films.

Working in tandem with these brooding Carroll Baker mood pieces were also the beginnings of the M-giallo. These were a handful of hip, fashion conscious, tight thrillers; such as Tinto Brass’ *Deadly Sweet* (1966), Giulio Questi’s *Death Laid an Egg* (1968) and Lucio Fulci’s *One on Top of the Other* (aka *Perversion Story*, 1969). The films in question centred on slick male protagonists – played by Jean-Louis Trintignant in the case of Brass and Questi (the French star also had a lead role in Lenzi’s *So Sweet... So Perverse*) and Jean Sorel in for Fulci. Martino mixed these two aspects together, adding in the sexual sadism and graphic violence of Mario Bava’s *Blood and Black Lace* for good measure. As Mackenzie argues,

“Death is never far away, however, and it is in this regard that Martino scores his master strokes. Whereas earlier F-gialli tended to focus on the mental breakdowns of their female protagonists, leaving the high body counts and brutal methods of dismemberment to the parallel M-giallo tradition, *The Strange Vice of Mrs Wardh* combines the two, making Martino the first to marry the romantic melodrama giallo of the mid-to-late sixties, with the violent urban bodycount thriller popularised by Dario Argento.<sup>10</sup>”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



*The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (1971) hits the ground running with scenes of a graphic murder in the first few frames, before introducing the main character, Julie Wardh (Edwige Fenech), a woman plagued by flashbacks involving S&M sex games from a previous relationship with Jean (Ivan Rassimov) – someone whom she describes as a “pervert” and “maniac” to her current husband. Now settled down with diplomat, Neil Wardh, Julie uses her new, lacklustre, marriage to a sensible man to forget her past. However, when Jean shows up at a party and continues to haunt her, life descends into chaos for Julie. Matters are further complicated when she meets George (George Hilton) at a party. The two embark on an affair shortly after. As the plot weaves its tangled web Julie finds herself trapped between three men, amidst murder and mayhem, as her fragile psyche begins to collapse.

*The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* was the first of a number of gialli directed by Martino, and it was co-produced by brother Luciano and Antonio Crescenzi (Crescenzi also served as executive producer on infamous video nasty *Cannibal Ferox*, 1981, alongside Luciano). The film was intended to introduce a new giallo “it” couple in stars Edwige Fenech – fresh from her debut in the genre, Mario Bava’s *Five Dolls for an August Moon* (1970) – and George Hilton, and represents the first of six collaborations between the pair, three of which can be classified as giallo films: *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, *All the Colors of the Dark* (1972) and Giuliano Carnimeo’s *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (1972). The latter, while not directed by Sergio Martino, but still produced by brother Luciano, is derivative of *Strange Vice* and *All the Colors*, using many of the same tropes, including the idea of a woman haunted by a promiscuous past. Hilton and Fenech would brush shoulders in three further films; comedy western *Holy God, Here Comes the Passatore!* (Giuliano Carnimeo, 1973) and two Italian sex comedies, Michele Massimo Tarantini’s *Taxi Girl* (1977) and Sergio Martino’s *Don’t Play with Tigers* (1982).

Scriptwriting duties for *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* fell to Ernesto Gastaldi, who then went on to write many of Martino’s key films, such as *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tail* (1971), *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*, *All the Colors of the Dark* and *Torso* (1973). Gastaldi was aided with the story by two

collaborators, Vittorio Caronia and Eduardo Manzanos Brochero. Brochero worked on screenplays for a respectable amount of westerns throughout the Sixties, as well as other popular filone, and also contributed to the script for Martino’s next giallo, *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tail*. For Caronia, who served as assistant director on the film, as well as Martino’s *Your Vice Is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* and *All the Colors of the Dark*, *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* provided his only writing credit in a short, but sweet, career.

As an Italian-Spanish co-production the film made good use of a number of locations in Spain, including Sitges and Barcelona. All of the film was shot on location, apart from George’s swank apartment, which was apparently built on the set previously used as a western. According to Sergio Martino, Italians didn’t think giallo were “believable” unless they were set outside of Italy. In line with this thinking, Martino featured international settings in the first three of his gialli films. Although parts of *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tale* were shot in Rome, other locations included Greece, Spain and London. *All the Colors of the Dark* made use of locations in London, which enhanced the Gothic mystery element found in the film’s central plot. Meanwhile, adding to the Spanish scenery of *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, in line with the story, Martino also filmed in Vienna, Austria. One of the film’s most striking murder sequences takes place in the gardens at the Viennese Schönbrunn Palace, in which a girl is stalked and then has her throat cut by the razor blade killer. Dario Argento would compose a similar park based scene for his *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*, which premiered on 17th December 1971 in Rome (*The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* was released on the 15th January, some 11 months before Argento’s film).

One of the most interesting lines in Gastaldi’s script is the subtext and manifestation of Julie Wardh’s sexual repression. The dream of sunny cosmopolitan city life, evoked by some of the film’s locations, couldn’t be any more contrasting to the darkness which exists within Julie’s subconscious; although the woman’s inner and outer worlds are both marred by violence. During fantasy/flashback and dream/nightmare sequences she revisits her sadomasochistic relationship with former lover Jean. It is during these highly stylised moments – Martino would continue to blur the lines of dream and

reality in *All the Colors of the Dark* – that we see her pushed into the mud, her clothes ripped off and broken glass smashed over her naked body, as she feels the sting of the back of her lover’s hand. Later on in the story, we hear from Jean that Julie Wardh has a blood fetish and a penchant for sexual sadism. In trying to escape her natural urges, and a sexual desire which could be deemed deviant, the woman runs into the arms of a more mundane lover.

Julie Wardh’s desire is something she can’t escape. When George appears on the scene, she sees an end to her suffering in him, ultimately giving into the temptation of the prospect of a sexually fulfilling life with a new man – who appears to offer both the stability of Neil and the excitement of Jean. Scriptwriter Ernesto Gastaldi had already explored the theme of female sadomasochistic desire in the screenplay, which he wrote with the assistance of Luciano Martino and Ugo Guerra, for Mario Bava’s seminal *The Whip and the Body* (1963), some eight years previously. If we take this into account then *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, at least on a spiritual level, could be considered a progression of these themes. Unlike in the later American slasher films, Julie Wardh is not demonised for her sexuality – although she does have her fair share of problems with men – but the film makes no moral judgements about her choice of lifestyle. In fact, although she is a woman who clearly has a powerful and complicated libido, she is still allowed to be the heroine of the story all the same.

Sergio Martino’s *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tail* followed hot on the heels of *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*. The film premiered just eight months after Martino’s previous giallo, on the 16th August 1971. Where *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* borrowed elements of *Les Diabolique* and Hitchcock’s *Strangers on a Train* (1951), *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tail* shares a common thread with *Psycho* (1960). At roughly a third of the way through, one of the film’s main characters is killed off in a shockingly violent murder scene, leaving viewers to wonder exactly where the narrative will go next. In doing this, the film departs, just ever so slightly, from the Lenzian themes he employed in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* and later, *All the Colors of the Dark* – which revolved around female neurosis and repressed sexuality – to instead introduce a number of protagonists (including an M-giallo type in George Hilton’s character) at different points in the weblike

narrative structure. Although the Gothic melodrama is still there – in the guise of morally ambiguous characters, inheritance schemes and illicit affairs – this is offset by a series of graphically rendered murders; mainly involving stabbings, throat cutting and, in one case, a particularly vicious broken bottle through an eye socket.

With Edwige Fenech out of commission – the actress gave birth to her one and only child, Edwin, on the 16th June, 1971 – it fell to Ida Galli (credited as Evelyn Stewart) and Anita Strindberg to provide the all necessary giallo glamour, with Janine Reynaud – a Jess Franco regular – completing the trifecta of Eurocult babes.

The film was the first collaboration between Strindberg and Sergio Martino. The actress would return a year later to take a starring role in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* with another *Scorpion’s Tail* cast member, Luigi Pistilli. 1971 was a bit of a landmark year for Strindberg as far as her association with the giallo went. In 1970 she featured in a very small role in *Quella chiara notte d’ottobre* (1970). Directed by Massimo Franciosa (screenwriter on Luchino Visconti’s 1963 classic *The Leopard*, amongst many other things) *Quella chiara notte d’ottobre* while not a straight up giallo, certainly has some association with the genre. The main plot initially focuses on a neurotic woman experiencing dreams and hallucinations who, thanks to wrongly dialled number, hooks up with her ex-boyfriend and embarks on an affair. Strindberg plays a murder victim, who is watched by the woman and her lover from the shadows, as they hide in the background, powerless to help. The couple can’t go to the police for fear of being found out cheating. It is at this point the film descends into something of a melodrama, before returning to the giallo theme as the plot nears its denouement.

Strindberg would then return as another giallo victim the same year she starred in *The Case of the Scorpion’s Tail*, this time in Lucio Fulci’s in *A Lizard in a Woman’s Skin* (1971). Again that was a virtually silent role for the actress but her image dominates the entire film. She appears in a series of lurid dreamscape sequences as part of the protagonist’s (played by Florinda Bolkan) haunted psyche, and

is seen engaged in lesbian sex with the character, as well as being carved up and murdered in gloriously macabre fashion. The star's role for Martino in *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail*, while still victimising her, offered the actress much more to get her teeth into than her previous parts. Playing a photographer, Cléo Dupont, she carries just the right balance of fragility and independent spirit to give a convincing performance. Scriptwriter Ernesto Gastaldi (who again was aided on the script for the film by Eduardo Manzanos Brochero, as well as Sauro Scavolini – brother of Romano, best known for directing video nasty *Nightmares in a Damaged Brain* (1981) – in the first of many collaborations with Sergio Martino) is on record<sup>11</sup> as saying he felt Strindberg was far more suitable to play a terrorised woman than Edwige Fenech, because the latterly mentioned star was very hard to victimise. Despite this he also acknowledged that Fenech was very good in all the giallo films she appeared.

Ida Galli, on the other hand, had brushed shoulders with the director previously, on *The Whip and the Body* and got to know him on *The Sweet Body of Deborah*. *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* was the only time Martino would direct the actress himself. Like her co-star, Strindberg, Galli also had a long association with the giallo, and was slightly more prolific, appearing in a reasonable amount from the late Sixties onwards: *The Weekend Murders* (Michele Lupò, 1970), *The Bloodstained Butterfly* (Duccio Tessari, 1971), *Knife of Ice* (Umberto Lenzi, 1972), *A White Dress for Mariale* (Romano Scavolini, 1972), *Le Orme* (Luigi Bazzoni, 1975) and *The Psychic* (Lucio Fulci, 1977). For *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* Galli plays Lisa Baumer, a young woman who is married to a much older man, but cheating on him while he is away on business trips. When her husband dies in a plane crash, Baumer is set to become a millionaire. However, she is plagued by people who also want a piece of the action, and stalked by a mysterious figure.

The film, like *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, was another Italian-Spanish co-production, with some investment also provided by a Greek distributor. In addition to filming in Rome and Athens (the Greek location was dictated by the distributor), Martino also ventured to London to shoot some of the film's early scenes. Key London landmarks include the Houses of Parliament and

<sup>11</sup> Interview on "Creepy Crawl: The Scorpion's Shadow". (2005) DVD *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail*. No Shame.

Hammersmith Bridge (the latter is where Ida Galli's character is accosted by her ex-boyfriend at the beginning of the film), thus making it one of a handful of gialli set in the English capital – such as *Deadly Sweet*, Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* and Martino's own *All the Colours of the Dark*. Martino has since explained that the London scenes were shot to extend the film's running time by ten minutes, to bump it up to an hour and a half.

The London filming involved a small renegade crew to keep costs to a minimum and was shot on the fly, around the general public going about their everyday lives. Interestingly, Martino has mentioned that even with the extra footage they were still coming up slightly short. He wanted to include a few more shots of the mysterious stalker who tracks Lisa Baumer. The actor who played the figure, Luis Barboo, was a recognisable face from Eurocult cinema, having appeared in a number of Jess Franco's films, such as *The Female Vampire* (1973), *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), *The Demons* (1973) and *Dracula contra Frankenstein* (1972), as well as Amando De Ossorio's *The Loreley's Grasp* (1974) and Martino's previous western *Arizona Colt*. Barboo had already returned to Spain to begin work on another project and therefore wasn't available to come to London, although apparently he offered to travel there overnight, without sleep, and the director would not allow it. As the existing footage was not adequate, Sergio Martino decided to stand in as a body double for some quick close-ups and a shot with the stalker stood behind a staircase wearing dark glasses. The director stated in his autobiography that no one ever noticed the trick<sup>12</sup>. He would continue to make cameos in his films occasionally. Amongst his most noticeable appearances are an ambulance driver in *All the Colors of the Dark*, a doctor in *Gambling City* (1975), and a man walking past a phone box in a crowded street in *Suspicious Death of a Minor* (1975).

Another year, another giallo. Sergio Martino's next foray into the genre was *All the Colors of the Dark*. Taking its cue from *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), the main plot pivots around occult themes, thus placing it in a unique subset of giallo films which flirted with aspects of black magic: *A Quiet Place in the Country* (Elio Petri, 1968), *The House with Laughing Windows* (Pupi Avati, 1976), *The Perfume of the*

<sup>12</sup> Translated from Italian by author from: Martino, Sergio (2017) *Mille peccati... nessuna virtù?* Bloodbuster, p.102.

*Lady in Black* (Francesco Barilli, 1974), *Short Night of the Glass Dolls* (Aldo Lado, 1971) and even *Baba Yaga* (Corrado Farina, 1973) to some extent (although the latter is more of an erotic mystery-type thriller, than a straight up giallo film).

With two standard formula type gialli under his belt Sergio Martino decided to break all convention and go for something more ambiguous, dreamlike and non-linear with *All the Colors of the Dark*. The main plot involves a young woman, Jane Harrison (Edwige Fenech), who has recently suffered a miscarriage as the result of a car accident. Jane starts to suffer hallucinations and bad dreams – the opening scene of the film is a series of nightmarish, yet artful, images, reminiscent of similar fever dream imagery in Lucio Fulci's *A Lizard in a Woman's Skin* from the previous year – which her boyfriend Richard (played by George Hilton) writes off as neurosis from her recent trauma. It's not all that simple, though. Jane feels like she is being haunted by a threatening presence: a man with piercing blue eyes, played by Ivan Rassimov, complete with uncomfortable contact lenses, in one of many roles where he played a villain. Desperate to be taken seriously Jane confides in her neighbour Mary (Marina Malfatti) who reassures her and offers a solution. According to Mary, Jane must attend a black mass and trust in the powers of the occult if she is to find peace from terrors that plague her.

The casting for *All the Colors of the Dark* reads like a who's who of giallo royalty. As well as the aforementioned Fenech, Hilton and Rassimov, you also have Nieves Navarro (aka Susan Scott) playing Jane's sister Barbara. Scott was the star of a number of gialli including *Death Walks on High Heels* (Luciano Ercoli, 1971), *So Sweet So Dead* (Roberto Bianchi Montero, 1972), *Death Walks at Midnight* (Luciano Ercoli, 1972) and *Death Carries a Cane* (Maurizio Pradeaux, 1973). Joining her is another familiar face, Marina Malfatti, who often fell into the role of a heel or bitch character in giallo films. Money from Spain ensured that Navarro was not the only Spanish native amongst the impressive cast, with the inclusion of cult star Julian Ugarté (who worked with the likes of Paul Naschy). There is also a small role for Luciano Pigozzi (aka Alan Collins), who featured in many Italian B films but is most likely to be remembered for the work he did with Mario Bava, starring in films like *Blood and Black Lace* and *Baron Blood* (1972). The actor was also directed by *All the Colors of the Dark*

scriptwriter Ernesto Gastaldi in his own film *Libido* (1965).

According to Sergio Martino initial reactions to the film were not hugely positive, with audiences apparently heckling in “screams and whistles of disapproval”<sup>13</sup> at the more surreal aspects of the film. As a result, distributors saw fit to cut the more ambiguous scenes, such as those relating to Jane having premonitions. The director felt in doing so, it took away the air of curiosity inherent in these dreamlike moments. Thankfully the film has since been restored to its full glory for home video with the missing scenes wholly restored. When talking about the film today, Sergio Martino has suggested that he feels it was just too ahead of its time and that contemporary audiences seem to have no issue in understanding the enigmatic and uncanny facets involved in the strange plot.<sup>14</sup>

Once again, with *All the Colors of the Dark*, the director veered firmly into the territory of the F-giallo, capitalising on the notion of a woman traumatised by the loss of a child and her recent accident to bring out aspects of Gothic melodrama. The subtext that Jane is infantilised, both by her lover and her sister, when combined with her fragile mental state, runs completely in harmony with classic Gothic, as does the underlying inheritance sub-plot. The director uses locations around London to further enhance this aspect; including a stately block of Regency flats (the exteriors were shot at Kenilworth Court, Lower Richmond Road, Putney), Gothic revival mansion Wykehurst Place (which also featured in Peter Sykes' Hammer horror *Demons of the Mind*, 1972, as well as John Hough's *The Legend of Hell House*, 1973), and Bishops Park, Putney (which was used as a location for *The Omen*, 1976).

Martino continued to embrace Gothic in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*; the title taken from a line which featured in his very first film in the genre, *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* – with the underlying plot based on Edgar Allan Poe's famous short story *The Black Cat* (1843). The film was the director's first Italian-set giallo and took full advantage of the glorious Villa Lugli in Teolo, northern Italy, in which to base most of the action. The crumbling rustic

<sup>13</sup> Ibid p.106.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p.106.

building becomes a centrepiece for the story. It was also the main situ for Elio Petri's Gothic art giallo *A Quiet Place in the Country* (1968).

Ernesto Gastaldi's adaptation of Poe's text (he was co-credited for writing duties with the director) is fluid to say the least. Poe's original story involves an alcoholic man, who has a pure hatred for a black cat he and his wife own as a pet. He becomes obsessed with the cat, thinking it is out to do him harm, and in a moment of madness gouges out its eye. Later on, when the cat nearly trips him on the stairs, he manages to accidentally kill his wife in a fit of rage aimed at the animal. As a result, he walls up his wife's body in the cellar for fear of being arrested for her murder. Her corpse is found by police investigating the missing woman's disappearance, when they hear the cat meowing from behind the wall where her remains are hidden.

*Your Vice is a Locked Room* keeps some of Poe's original concepts, but changes many others. For example, one of the main protagonists, Oliviero Rouvigny (played by Luigi Pistilli) is a failed writer and alcoholic; alcoholism being a main trait in Poe's character. Gastaldi's script extends this notion, by having the man vent his frustrations on his wife, Irina (Anita Strindberg), when drunk. He also takes any opportunity to humiliate her, carrying on an affair with the maid, as well as inviting hordes of young hippie students to the house for drinking sessions, where he leers over young girls. In fact, Oliviero is a cruel and callous man all round, even resorting to rape when the mood takes him. The only time he ever shows tenderness or love is towards his beloved black cat – aptly named Satan – or for his mother's memory (who he seems to have had an unhealthy attachment to, thus hinting at the ever popular Gothic theme of incest). However, in a gender bending move, it is the wife Irina who hates the animal, not Oliviero. Also, the murders which occur are no accident.

*Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* isn't the only adaptation of Poe's story, but it is a highly original one. Lucio Fulci would go on to adapt the text in his version *The Black Cat* (1981), which also took some artistic licence with the original plot.

The reason Sergio Martino's version is so effective lies in its sublime combination of traditional giallo formula – there are some particularly graphic killings peppered around; in one case a nasty throat slashing – and Gothic themes. The film revels in Gothic concepts such as the moralistic decay inherent in the aristocracy, crumbling houses, decadent, libertine deviant behaviour (the bulk of the characters have some form of deviance), perversity, domestic violence and psychosexual themes.

Another notable aspect is the casting of Edwige Fenech in a different role to her previous gialli. Where before, especially in Martino's films, she was a fragile victim, for *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* she is a much more morally ambiguous character. Martino explained in an interview that originally the character was written as someone much younger than Fenech – of around 16–17 years old – but he wanted her for the part, so it was repurposed. The actress also appears with a striking short hair cut, when she is usually seen with long flowing hair, which enhances the effect that the actress is playing against type. The role gave Fenech rather more to work with than many of her thriller roles. Floriana is a femme fatale – manipulative, seductive and greedy – not a quivering Gothic maiden like Julie Wardh or Jane Harrison. On arriving at the Rouvigny's home, the girl manages to find a local lover, as well as seducing uncle Oliver and his wife Irina. She has her eye on the family's riches and is someone not to be trusted. But then she is not alone: hardly anyone in *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* is without sin.

As Sergio Martino explained in a recent interview covering his films in a more general sense:

*“Promiscuity was a central element [for his giallo films]. A bit of morbidity, even perversion, justified the death of the characters. Anyhow, I never loved shooting erotic scenes. They are one of the hardest things to shoot, both for directors and actors, because obviously you feel uncomfortable. Many actresses used patches to hide their private parts, others wanted to keep their arms raised in nudity scenes to hold their breast up and look younger. In fact, everything was always the result of compromise, with the specific task, in the case of*

my cinema, not to jeopardize the box office returns. Therefore, the attempts to intellectualize murder or to make it more psychologically acceptable arose from the fact that certain characters must have perversions to justify their deaths. In *Torso* (1973), for example, Suzy Kendall never has sex scenes and she is the only character that does not die. The others had sexual perversions; thus, potentially, the audience could participate in their deaths, especially in the Italian context, where there was a contested wave of sexual liberation in progress.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, as suggested by Martino, the notion of sin also came into play for *Torso*, which was the last of the director's peak year gialli films. Again, breaking from convention, rather than presenting itself as a straight up formulaic giallo, with the benefit of hindsight it is easy to spot the film as something of a forerunner. Bob Clark's *Black Christmas* and Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (both 1974) are usually credited as being responsible for the concept of the final girl trope; a character-type which ended up dominating the later American slasher cycle of films. Sergio Martino's *Torso* came one year before the aforementioned seminal films. While Martino's film remained more obscure, until recent years where it became widely available on home video, it doesn't take away the fact that it does have its very own final girl, in the form of Jane (played by another giallo regular Suzy Kendall), or that it came before its American and Canadian counterparts.

In fact, you could say that *Torso* is very much a proto-slasher - and commentators such as Mikel Kovel have indeed argued this very point. The film retains aspects of the giallo, but moves into slasher territory in the way in which it revolves around a group of young female students who are stalked, and then killed, by a masked man. Throughout the narrative the girls are brutally murdered, usually after indulging in some sort of sinful behaviour; for example, one young woman is killed in the woods after attending a hippie orgy stacked full of sex and drugs; another couple meet their end after experimenting with lesbian sex. The only one to survive is Jane - sensible, studious and clean. The fact she is a "good girl" saves her to a certain extent, just like Laurie Strode in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978).

<sup>15</sup> Olesen, Giulio (2017) *An Interview with Sergio Martino*. Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies. Intellect Books, p.263.

*Torso* wasn't the first time the Italian giallo foreshadowed the slasher genre. It has been noted many times that Sean S. Cunningham's *Friday the 13th* (1980) bears some distinct similarity to Mario Bava's *Bay of Blood* (1971) - although this could be coincidence and indeed Cunningham has asserted he hadn't seen Bava's film when he made the cult 1980s slasher. However, the lake based location and number of killings (13) featured in both films does seem to connect them, at least spiritually. *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Steve Miner, 1981) also has some resemblance to Bava's film, with a couple impaled by a spear while having sex appearing in Bava and Miner's films (despite being made a decade apart). Again, Miner has suggested he did not see the Italian classic prior to making his film. Coincidence or not, it does give food for thought when you consider just how influential the Italian giallo was on international genre film. It is only recently that this is finally being acknowledged, with many Italian directors, including Sergio Martino, previously being written off by critics. Now finally (and rightfully) the Italian maestros are being heralded for their work, more than 30-40 years later. Modern day Hollywood filmmakers, especially Quentin Tarantino and Eli Roth, are consistently vocal about the influence Martino (and his contemporaries) have had on their own films.

When it came to his own inspiration Martino has highlighted that in the case of most of his thrillers he looked to real life for material, most notably the murder of Maria Martirano Fenaroli in 1958. The Fenaroli story proved to be hot property for the media at the time. The trial of her husband (and murderer) Giuseppe Fenaroli was so high profile, it even attracted the interest of director Vittorio de Sica, who went to watch the drama in the courtroom unfold. What transpired during the trial was the revelation that Giuseppe had his wife killed by a hitman Raul Ghiani, who strangled the woman in the Rome apartment she shared with her husband. The husband made sure he was far away at the time, so he would have the perfect alibi. The motive was thought to be in order to claim a large amount of insurance money; a point particularly relevant to Martino's *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*.

The idea for *Torso* was partly inspired by another Italian murder case. Martino told interviewer Giulio Olesen,

“Newspapers were always a source of inspiration for Italian genre films. In some cases, I commented on their tendency to sensationalize the news, but they were, above all, a source of inspiration. Actually, in *Torso*, the idea for the technique used by the killer to slice his victims came from a major news story. A man killed his in-laws in an apartment in Rome. Then, he dissected the bodies and brought them day by day out of this apartment on the outskirts of Rome. It fascinated me because the man was very fatherly; picking up his son from school and offering him ice cream, before carrying on with the dissection of his in-laws, leaving the child downstairs. There were also movies which inspired our films. With *Torso*, I was inspired by Richard Fleischer’s *See No Evil* (1971) and I tried to create a plot that could combine the fascination with this film with the Roman news.<sup>16</sup>”

Following *Torso*, the director would move into crime thrillers, action, adventure and more general horror. However, he did have a few more tricks up his sleeve when it came to giallo. While his later offerings – *Private Crimes* (1993) and *Mozart is a Murderer* (1999) would follow a more traditional flow, *The Scorpion with Two Tails* mixed giallo formula with magic, mysticism and occult notes.

The film has been criticised over the years for having too many flavours in its winding, complicated plot. This said, when you consider the idea was conceived for a much longer project, it suddenly starts to make sense. According to the introduction on the Mya DVD release of the film,

“*Scorpion with Two Tails* was conceived as a miniseries produced for television. The miniseries was composed of two parts, each running about 100 minutes. Then the project was changed in a movie [sic] for theatrical distribution. The Italian title was then changed from *Lo scorpion a due code* (*Scorpion with Two Tails*) to the less appropriate *Assassinio al cimitero etrusco* (*Murder in the Etruscan Cemetery*). In the USA the movie has been released with both titles<sup>17</sup>”.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p, 263.

<sup>17</sup> *Scorpion With Two Tails*. DVD (2009) Mya Communication.

The intro goes on to explain that the television version has never been “broadcasted or released in any form”.

The film’s intricate plot tells of an American woman, Joan Barnard (played by Elvire Audray), who suffers psychic visions and is plagued by nightmares of bizarre occult rituals. Her husband Arthur (John Saxon) is away on an archeological dig funded by her father at an Etruscan burial ground when she receives a call that he has stumbled on an amazing discovery. Arthur sends a cryptic message for Joan to give to her father that he needs more funds. During the call he is murdered in the most horrific way, when his head is twisted round a full 360 degrees by an unknown assailant. Joan had seen this happen in a dream, just prior to Arthur’s death, but didn’t take it seriously enough to warn him. Now desperate to learn the circumstances surrounding her husband’s death, the woman travels to Rome (against her father’s advice). Once there, she becomes embroiled in an age old mystery of Etruscan occult ritual and supernatural forces. Joining Audray and Saxon are other cult names on the cast list; which include Martino mainstay Claudio Cassinelli, Giovanni Lombardo Radice and Paolo Malco.

Although the film uses the body-count-by-numbers giallo trick, it also capitalises on the mystical Italian horror vibe that was thriving at the time through films like Lucio Fulci’s *City of the Living Dead* (1980), *The Beyond* (1981) and *The House by the Cemetery* (1981). Interestingly, in line with this, part of the Fabio Frizzi score for *The Scorpion with Two Tails* appears to be recycled from *City of the Living Dead*. This approach to horror – occult, mysticism and fantasy – would continue throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s through the work of filmmakers like Michele Soavi (*The Church*, 1989, and *The Sect*, 1991). If taken in this spirit, the film is a decent example of the subgenre in action. It also makes a good title for a double bill when paired with Armando Crispino’s bewildering giallo hybrid *The Etruscan Kills Again* (aka *The Dead are Alive*, 1972).

It is a shame that – at least at the time of writing – the 200-minute cut has never been made available for viewing. The story is so dense it doesn’t really translate well to being packed into a short running time and becomes dizzying

as a result. One has to wonder how differently things would have turned out if the full film had been released. The handful of deleted scenes offered on the previous DVD release indicate that John Saxon would have had a much bigger role. As it stands, in the truncated cut, he barely owns several minutes of the running time.

## Actress spotlight: Edwige Fenech

Sergio Martino worked with a number of key collaborators time and time again, including the likes of George Hilton, Lino Banfi, Claudio Cassinelli, Daniel Greene and Barbara Bouchet. Yet no one was as prolific for the director as Edwige Fenech. In fact, one could argue that the actress was the backbone of many of Sergio Martino's major works. She was also the queen of the giallo and Italian sexy comedy largely because of opportunities given to her by the Martino brothers to star in their cinema.

The director explained in an interview,

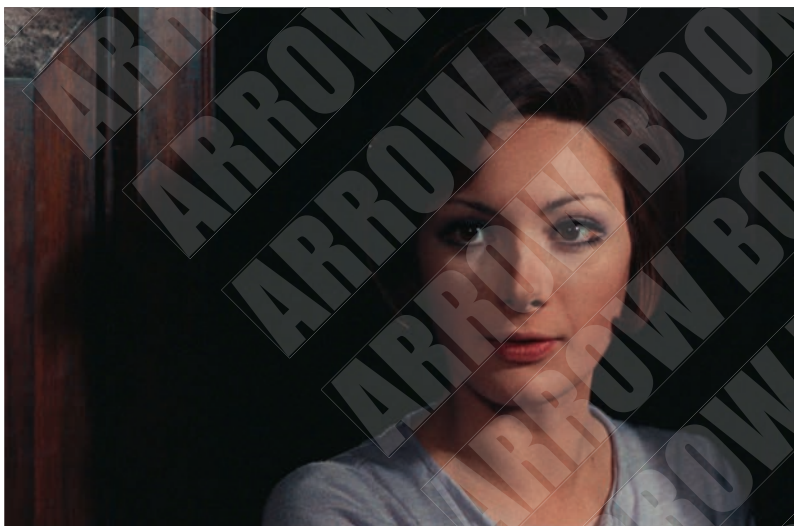
*“Edwige Fenech and I have been close for a long time and we still are. She also worked as a producer for a while. We made a great TV series together entitled Private Crimes in the '90s, which I consider one of my greatest works for television...I think I was the first one to notice Edwige. Our office was in the same building as a dubbing studio...One day I noticed a very beautiful girl, who came in to visit an American actor who was dubbing Italian films into English... I remember this girl, who was 17 or 18 years old, coming to see a friend of hers. I noticed her and told my brother ‘I’ve seen a girl who could be perfect for our kind of films’. We called her and she did Madame Bovary.”<sup>18</sup>*

Fenech's break into cinema came a little earlier than her association with the Martinos. However, it was the brother producer/director duo who would make her a star. The actress told interviewer Manlio Gomasca that her first break came at the age of 14 in a film by Norbert Carbonnaux, she explained,

*“I was born in Algeria, but my mother was Italian, Sicilian to be precise, and my father was Maltese. Algeria was a French colony, so I was born French. After the war of Independence my mother and I went to live in Nice, where I continued to dance classically, as I did in Algeria, and attended high school. I was noticed,*

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Sergio Martino. Blu-ray (2015) *Edgar Allan Poe's Black Cats: Two Adaptations By Sergio Martino & Lucio Fulci* (Limited Edition). Arrow Films.





one day whilst walking down the street, and offered a part in Carbonnaux's *Toutes folles lui* (1967). I was fourteen...I didn't really want to do it, but they said, 'come on, come on!'. So I went and did a small role, where we had to repeat the same line (a joke) thirty-two times. It was a Parisian joke, and I was 14 years old (which wasn't like being 14 today). I didn't really understand it because coming from Algeria, even though I spoke perfect French, I didn't speak the dialect...I never saw the movie! For me it was a nightmare. I felt so inadequate after repeating the same joke thirty-two times, which among other things made no sense to me.<sup>19</sup>

Fenech would return to acting a few years later, when she took a lead role in Guido Malatesta's *Samoa: Queen of the Jungle* (1968); a part which required she was covered in a "brown substance" to make her look more exotic. The offer of the role came when she was spotted by a talent scout after competing in Miss France and other beauty contests. Apparently the actress begged her parents to allow her to do the film and on the agreement of her father, who insisted her mother go with her, she travelled to Italy. This was followed by a part in Malatesta's *Il figlio di Aquila Nera* (1968), shortly afterwards.

From there she would branch out alone, working in Germany, mainly in ribald comedy such as Josef Zacher's *Sweet Pussycats* (1969) and *Sexy Susan Sins Again* (Franz Antel, 1968), which was part of a series of "Sexy Susan" films – a collection of titles where some important Eurocult actresses can be seen in early roles; for example Rosalba Neri and Andrea Rau. This set the blueprint for Fenech's later career as a major player in the Italian sex comedy genre. Fenech remembers,

*"I went where they called me. I did not care... I was very young...for me it was all about cinema. Bergman and Samoa: Queen of the Jungle were the same thing...I have done so many bad movies, but at the time I was unaware of this. So I went to Germany. I made some movies there, and then I got tired. I preferred Italy."<sup>20</sup>*

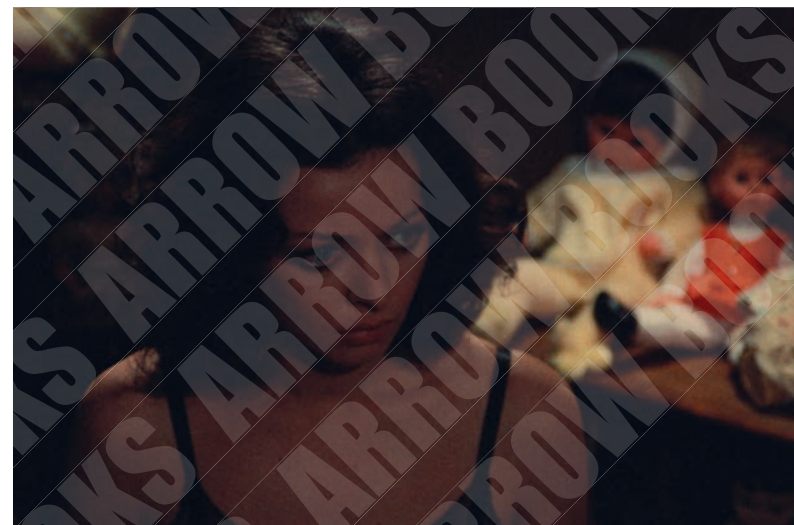
<sup>19</sup> Translated from Italian by author: Manlio Gomasca (2007) *Intervista a Edwige Fenech* accessed at <http://www.nocturno.it/intervista-edwige-fenech/>

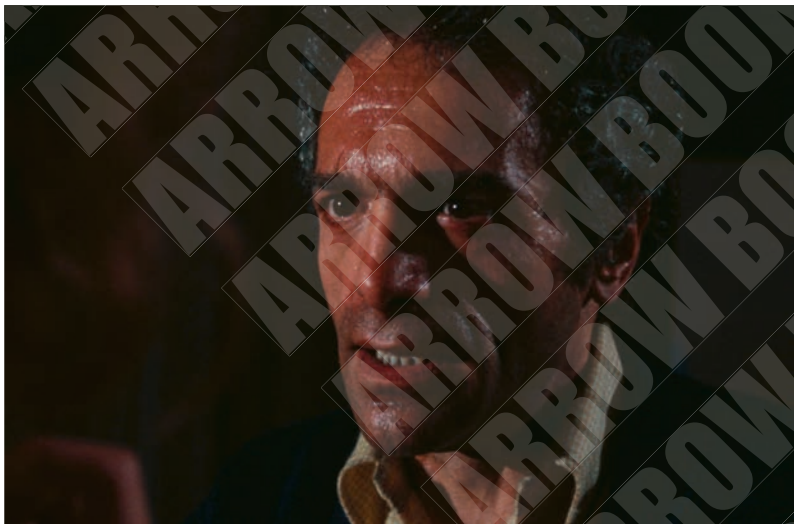
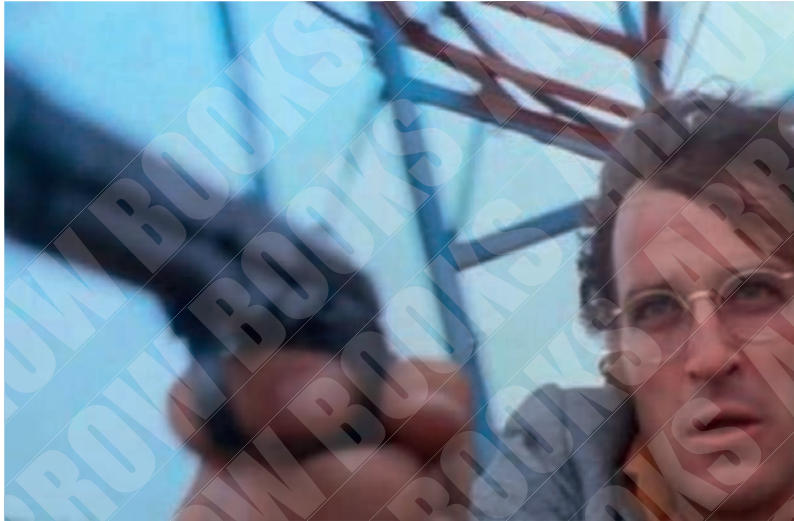
<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Fenech's performance in Hans Schott-Schöbinger's *The Sins of Madame Bovary* (1969), where she starred as the titular Emma Bovary, would be her first collaboration with the Martinos. Sergio Martino directed her in one scene, in which she has to run through the woods in the rain, when it was decided the film needed additional footage. The rest, as they say, is history.

What is often ignored by English speaking commentators is that Fenech was prolific in Italian comedy. The sheer number of films she made in the genre, when compared to her Giallo or thriller credits, far outweighs anything else she ever did. Throughout her career she made numerous comedies for the Martinos, most of which will be explored in a later chapter of this book. She also starred in one of the few films directed by Luciano Martino (also her lover during the 1970s), sex comedy *The Virgo, The Taurus and the Capricorn* (1977). Amongst her other credits of this kind, are Mariano Laurenti's *Ubalda: All Naked and Warm* (1972), Lucio Fulci's *La Pretora* (1976), as well as stints in Michele Massimo Tarantini's sexy school teacher and policewoman series and *Taxi Girl* (1977). This is just the tip of the iceberg. She would work with a number of notable directors in the genre – Giuliano Carminio, Pasquale Festa Campanile, Nando Cicero, Castellano and Pipolo – throughout the Seventies and Eighties.

Later on in her career Fenech turned her hand to daytime television – where she had a chat show with Barbara Bouchet – and to producing. It was during this later stage she worked with Sergio Martino on his *Private Crimes* (1993) series for television, in which she took the starring role. Amongst her other production credits is an adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*, (2004), which starred Al Pacino. As well as this, during the late Eighties/early Nineties, she set up a fashion business “Edwige Fenech Moda”, and even had a perfume made in her honour, which went on sale in 1991. Today, although she did return to the spotlight for a cameo in Eli Roth's *Hostel II* (2007), she prefers to shun the limelight.





## Trembling cities, cops in action: Martino and the poliziotteschi

Peter Bondanella outlined the context of the Italian poliziotteschi by writing,

*“The Italian police film represents a completely contemporary popular genre in the sense that, not unlike the content of the American Law & Order television series, many of its plots and its most popular themes could easily have been lifted from pages of cronaca nera (crime news) of any urban newspaper from the 1960s to the early ’80s, a period of great social, economic, and political unrest in Italy. The first great postwar Mafia bloodbath in Palermo (or first Mafia War) was touched off by the Ciaculli massacre in 1963, where a number of policemen were killed trying to defuse a bomb meant for a rival clan boss.”<sup>21</sup>*

Precursors to the Italian crime thriller or poliziotteschi genre, as it is otherwise known, can be found emerging around the time of the first Mafia war referenced by Bondanella. Throughout the 1960s there was a growing international interest in crime films, with various countries producing their own strains. French filmmakers like Jean-Pierre Melville, Henri Verneuil and Jean-Luc Godard proved to be influential on the Italian films that arrived in the Seventies, through their gritty noir crime thrillers, aspects of which carried over into the poliziotteschi. In Japan, auteurs such as Seijun Suzuki revelled in violent yakuza and gangster type narratives throughout the decade. Meanwhile, in Italy, the first seeds of what would become full blown poliziotteschi can be seen in other crime related films of the era; for instance filmmaker Elio Petri – whose cinema often explored power dynamics and the theme of corruption – focused on Mafia and political corruption for his dark thriller *We Still Kill the Old Way* (1967) and would return to explore a similar law/political themed narrative in *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* in 1970. The work of Carlo Lizzani, in particular *Wake Up and Kill* (1966) and *Bandits in Milan* (1968), can also be seen as something of a forerunner to poliziotteschi.

<sup>21</sup> Bondanella, Peter (2009) *A History of Italian Cinema*. Continuum, p.181.

As Roberti Curti asserts,

*“But the Seventies were the decade that saw the real renaissance of the crime film, predated by such hybrids as Elio Petri’s Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto (Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion, 1970) and Damiano Damiani’s Confessione di un Commissario di Polizia al Procuratore della Repubblica (Confessions of a Police Captain, 1971), which mixed social commitment and genre cinema, and became huge box office success. Damiani’s film, in particular, can be seen as the true antedecessor of the so-called “poliziottesco,” which according to many critics began in 1972 when Stefano Vanzina’s La polizia ringrazia (Execution Squad) became a surprise hit, launching what would be one of the most popular threads of the decade, before the crisis that led to the death of the Italian popular movie industry in the 1980s.”<sup>22</sup>*

Xavier Mendik highlights the importance of the Italian crime thriller in stating,

*“In terms of their popularity, Italian bibliographic sources suggest that poliziotteschi remains one of the most significant cycles produced in the era. Between 1966–1980, 274 poliziotteschi narratives were released as either Italian or wider European co-productions (meaning that the cycle far exceeded the giallo in terms of feature output) – the majority of which were made between the years of 1970 and 1980.”<sup>23</sup>*

It was during these peak years that Sergio Martino made four films which fall into the bracket of poliziotteschi. Also taking their lead from American films – most notably *Dirty Harry* (Don Siegel, 1971) and *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971) – these Italian crime thrillers mixed cultural cynicism with machismo action. As Martino thrived in the action genre, a medium he enjoyed, the subgenre made a good fit for him. Therefore, it is interesting that he only made a handful of films of this specific type – as opposed to Umberto Lenzi,

<sup>22</sup> Curti, Roberto (2007) *File Under Fire: A brief history of Italian crime films*. Offscreen Volume 11, Issue 11 / November 2007 accessed at [http://offscreen.com/view/file\\_under\\_fire](http://offscreen.com/view/file_under_fire)

<sup>23</sup> Mendik, Xavier (2015) *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Italian Cult Cinema 1970–1985*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p.181.

Fernando di Leo and Stelvio Massi who were very prolific in the poliziotteschi – before moving into more straight up action and adventure flicks towards the end of the Seventies and well into the Eighties and Nineties.

Martino’s first poliziottescho was *The Violent Professionals* (1973). This was also the first of three films in which he would cast French actor Luc Merenda in the leading role. Because of the success of *Torso* (which had been produced by Carlo Ponti, as well as sharing a star in Merenda) Ponti co-produced the film with the Martino’s Dania Films. Sergio Martino describes the film as a beginning of a fortunate time for him and Luciano because they didn’t have to worry about making films from a financial point of view. The director has also highlighted the reason their films were so commercially appealing on the export market was because Italian action films cost a lot less to make than their American counterparts, but they could achieve just as much excitement as Hollywood films at half the cost.

Following in the footsteps of American trendsetter Harry Callahan, Merenda plays a disgruntled cop, Commissario Giorgio Caneparo, who is willing to break the rules to avenge the death of his colleague at the hands of violent criminals after he becomes disillusioned with the response of the law. The cop-turned-vigilante narrative would reach its heights in the poliziotteschi through the performances of stars like Maurizio Merli in films such as Marino Girolami’s *Violent Rome* (1975) and Umberto Lenzi’s *Violent Naples* (1976). Merenda has a good crack at the whip, playing a cop who penetrates the underworld, by posing as a getaway driver and petty criminal, in order to take down organised crime on his own terms.

Aside from its car chases the film is most remembered for its harrowing opening scene in which a group of depraved criminals travelling via train escape by killing their guards. After fleeing and hijacking a car, they then capture and murder a man and his young daughter. As the gang are surrounded by cops, it is Caneparo who sneaks up and shoots them dead them at close range – because he’ll be damned if they are going to lounge around in prison with so much blood on their hands. This preamble, according to Sergio Martino at least, was written in

by himself – he is co-credited on the script with his old sparring partner Ernesto Gastaldi – because he thought the opening in the original script needed to be livened up a bit. Similarly, the film is packed with high octane car chases, as the Commissario gets himself embroiled further and further with the criminal network. The director has acknowledged, and many fans have noticed, one shot of a Citroen getting wrapped around a tree – along with other moments during the chase scenes – has been recycled for other films. Martino identifies at least two films in which the footage was used: Giancarlo Ferrando's *The Girl From Cortina* (1994), where the crash is shown in a flashback scene, and Umberto Lenzi's bonkers classic *Almost Human* (1974), a film which set a new bar in regards to the Italian crime thriller, especially because of Tomas Milian's outrageous performance as a petty criminal who is completely out of control (a proto-Tony Montana of sorts).

Following *La Bellissima Estate* (1974), his only melodrama from this period, about a woman who conceals her son's father's death from the child, and comedy *The Visitor* (1974) Martino returned to the crime genre with *Gambling City* (1975), featuring Merenda again as the main protagonist. Various comparisons have been made between this film and the American production, *The Sting* (1973), however the connection is a very tenuous one. The film also has flavours of an earlier Paul Newman vehicle, *The Hustler* (Robert Rossen, 1961). Martino cited his main influence for the film was *Borsalino* (1970) – a French gangster film, set in the 1930s, directed by Jacques Deray, starring Jean Paul Belmondo and Alain Delon. Martino also marks the feature out as something of the turning point for both him, his brother and Dania Films, stating that Luciano had begun to constantly complain to him about the budgets of his films. Yet, he felt, as a director, this issue was out of his hands to a certain degree. As the Martino brothers looked around for financial support, *Gambling City* marked the beginning of what was to become a fruitful partnership. Martino says,

*“The most significant event, however, was that *Gambling City* inaugurated the production relationship between my brother Luciano and Medusa distribution, owned by Franco Poccioni. This was a long and fortunate collaboration, which would carry a series of different genre films made, not just*

*by me, but other directors in the Dania team: Giuliano Carnimeo, Nando Cicero, Massimo Tarantini, Mariano Laurenti. Since then, it became almost a daily rite, before going home in the evening, to stop in at Medusa...We would have a laugh – it was crazed – on various topics, but we also developed ideas for new movies, often just from a title conceived by the imagination of Luciano, which then paved their way to the canvas of film.”<sup>24</sup>*

The central plot for *Gambling City* is concerned with the trials and tribulations of small time hustler, Luca Altieri (Merenda), who, after scamming a load of money at a local casino playing cards, gets an offer he can't refuse from the owner of the establishment, The 'President' (Enrico Maria Salerno). Life seems good for Luca until he becomes romantically involved with Maria Luisa (Dayle Haddon), who just so happens to belong to The President's no good son Corrado (Corrado Pani). Determined to rescue the girl from exploitation at the hands of Corrado – the despicable man thinks nothing of having his girlfriend raped by his gross henchman when he sees she is getting out of line – Luca finds himself locked in a battle of wills, which will ultimately cost lives. The film is notable for its downbeat ending, showing that, at least in this game, there can be no winners.

Scholar Roberto Curti notes the influence of the spaghetti western inherent in some of action scenes, highlighting,

*“...the scene where Merenda has his hands broken by Pani so that he can't cheat at cards is a riff on a classic Spaghetti Western moment, namely Franco Nero's torture in Sergio Corbucci's *Django* (1966). Another nod to Westerns is the device hidden under Merenda's sleeve to get an ace, which curiously predates Robert De Niro's automatic gun device in *Taxi Driver* [1971].”<sup>25</sup>*

Interestingly, regarding Merenda's broken hands, a similar device was also used in Massimo Dallamano's *Bandidos* (1967) in a scene with Enrico Maria Salerno – who also appears in *Gambling City* as the wheelchair-bound casino boss – where the protagonist's hands are subjected to violence to prevent him from

<sup>24</sup> Translated from Italian by author from: Martino, Sergio (2017) *Mille peccati...nessuna virtù?* Bloodbuster, p141.

<sup>25</sup> Curti, Roberto (2013) *Italian Crime Filmography, 1968-1980*. Macfarland p.131.

accomplishing something he is skilled at. Salerno's aforementioned character in *Bandidos* has his hands injured to stop him from being quick-on-the-draw with his gun. For Merenda, in *Gambling City*, his hands are smashed to pieces to stop him playing cards. A tenuous link admittedly, but it does highlight the intertextual nature of Italian action genres, where certain tropes became interchangeable across genres; often with the same actors and directors working in a range of different film types.

According to Ernesto Gastaldi,

*"I wrote the story with Enrico Maria Salerno in mind as the boss of a sharp – and not just violence – criminal organization which has a succession problem when the son shows he's not cut from the same cloth as his father...I believe the actors were very good on this film, improving upon a story that, although not very original, was different from crime films of the era. There's no happy ending, and that's quite unusual. I like abrupt ending, and I always laughed at those Hollywood movies that after showing the REAL ending, which is not happy, add a little bit where the hero recovers and kisses his wife and sons."*<sup>26</sup>

The same year as *Gambling City*, Merenda was cast in a similar unlucky in love role for Andrzej Żuławski's *That Most Important Thing: Love*, up against another gang of mercenaries, trying to save the girl he loves from an exploitative, seedy life.

One final note on the film: the director revealed that in order to keep costs down – and to enable the film to be made in just five weeks – he shot about 60% at the Hotel Hilton in Rome. Martino noted the hotel was often used as a location for films at the time, and he became acquainted with it when it was used for James Bond ripoff *James Tont operazione U.N.O.* (Bruno Corbucci & Giovanni Grimaldi, 1965), where he served as a production manager early on in his career. He also pointed out in his autobiography that he used the same hotel in *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* for one of the office-based scenes. When it came to *Silent Action*, Martino was back to the standard poliziotteschi mode. Roberto Curti has argued,

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p, 131.

*"The most significant and accomplished example of the politically committed poliziotteschi, Sergio Martino's Silent Action was release in Italy in April 1975, just a few months after Pier Paolo Pasolini's vibrant appeal on the first page of "Il Corriere della sera" and the Italian title ("The Police Accuse: The Secret Service Kills") makes for an equally strong statement of sorts"*<sup>27</sup>.

*Silent Action* was made slap bang in the middle of what have been termed the "Years of Lead", which was a period in Italian history – spanning from the late Sixties to early Eighties – plagued by terrorism and violence from both right and left wing groups. One of the signature episodes during this time was the killing of police officer Luigi Calabresi in May 1972. According to Anna Cento Bull and Philip Cooke,

*"Luigi Calabresi became the target of a Lotta Continua character assassination through its newspaper, following the death of anarchist Pino Pinelli after he fell from a fourth-floor window while in police custody under suspicion of having planted the bomb in the Piazza Fontana. Lotta Continua's virulent campaign was, however, only the most radical manifestation of a widely held opinion that Pinelli had died as a result of maltreatment by the police and by Commissioner Calabresi himself, who it is claimed later threw his dead body from the window to make it look like a suicide."*<sup>28</sup>

Police and secret service corruption is very much at the heart of *Silent Action*. Channelling the tumultuous political climate of the time, the film opens with a series of killings; in one instance brake failure causes a car to career into a truck, killing the driver. Another victim – this time a colonel – is assaulted in his home, shot in the head and the smoking gun placed in his hand to make it look like a suicide. Shortly afterwards a group of men travel with an unconscious man in the back of their van. His body is left on railway tracks, ready to be run over by a train. Martino spares none of the details when the victim's decapitated head, and accompanying blood, splash all over the camera as the wheels of the train make their fatal impact.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid p,149.

<sup>28</sup> Cento Bull, Anna & Cooke, Philip (2013) *Ending Terrorism in Italy*. Routledge p, 173.

It remains up to Commissioner **Giorgio Solmi** (Luc Merenda in his final film for Martino) to investigate the series of deaths, as he picks his way into the heart of secret service corruption.

The film is backed up with a strong cast, which contains poliziotteschi regular **Tomas Milian** – playing against his usual comedic or outlandish character type – as well as **Delia Boccardo** and **Mel Ferrer** (who would carry on over into Martino's next crime thriller *Suspicious Death of a Minor*, 1975, with co-stars **Gianfranco Barra** and **Carlo Alighiero**). Merenda, giving arguably one of his best performances, inhabits the spirit of the age: a man full of distrust for the authorities, trying to do right, but crushed by an oppressive and corrupt establishment. Because of this, the film has a thoroughly depressing ending. The final message seems to suggest: no matter how hard you try, you can't beat the system.

Never one to do things strictly by the numbers, for Martino's final crime thriller he produced the strange giallo-poliziotteschi hybrid *Suspicious Death of the Minor*. It belongs to a unique subset of likeminded films which include *What Have They Done to Your Daughters* (1974), *Calling All Police Cars* (1975) and *Shadows in an Empty Room* (1976).

As Martino explains, “*The film, distributed by the Titanus, and was to be called Violent Milan or something similar, because it told of a city still in the grip of terrorism.*<sup>29</sup>” Instead the title was changed post-production, a move Martino felt was confusing for audiences.

The film marked the first of many projects with actor **Claudio Cassinelli**, who plays undercover cop **Paolo Germi**, trying to get to the bottom of the murder of a young girl. During his investigation he uncovers a prostitute ring and heinous corruption from money men in powerful positions. Cassinelli is joined by an interesting Eurocult cast which includes the likes of **Mel Ferrer** (who would then go on to feature in Martino's *The Great Alligator River*, 1979), **Barbara Magnolfi** (two years off her role in **Dario Argento's** *Suspiria*, 1977), **Jenny Tamburi** (who,

as well appearing in a fair amount of erotic films in the early to mid-Seventies, also featured in **Lucio Fulci's** *The Psychic*, 1977) and **Carlo Alighiero** (who had small parts in Martino's *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh*, *All The Colors of the Dark*, *Torso*, *The Violent Professionals*, *Silent Action*, *Gambling City* and featured in **Argento's** *Cat O'Nine Tails*, 1971).

Technically the film could have appeared in either the giallo or poliziotteschi sections of this book. It feels like a giallo because of the style of the killings – for instance a graphic slashed throat; a prostitute trapped and stalked in her apartment by an intruder – and the Goblinessque score, which comes courtesy of **Luciano Micheli**. It becomes a poliziotteschi through the plot device of a lone detective who goes undercover to crack the case and frequently rallies against his superiors for breaking the rules, as well as the line that powerful men control society and corruption in places of power is a widespread issue for Italian culture. The film often veers into dark, excessively violent territory, but Martino offsets this by using moments of comedy to lighten the mood – an unconventional approach when compared to other genre pieces of the same ilk. But **Sergio Martino** never was conventional. *Suspicious Death of a Minor* is a perfect example of his willingness to break new ground, even within established cycles or genres.

<sup>29</sup> Translated from Italian by author from: Martino, Sergio (2017) *Mille peccati...nessuna virtù?* Bloodbuster, p.144.

*Titanus*

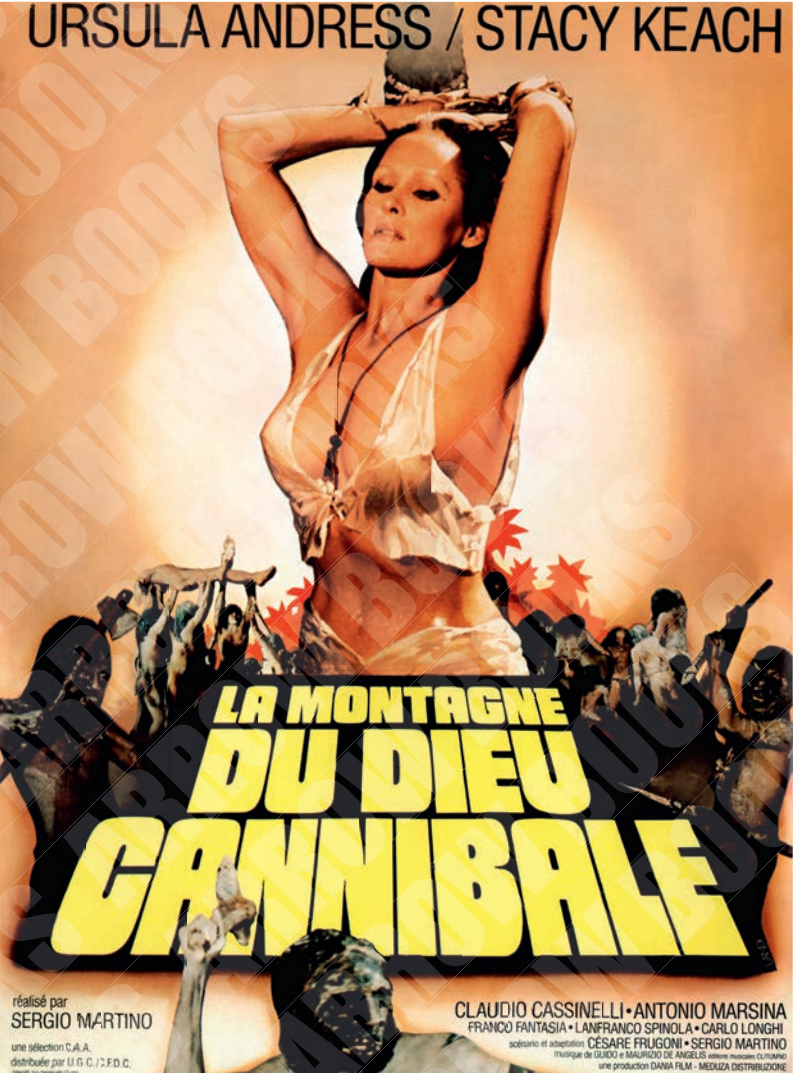
EDWIGE FENECH • ANITA STRINDBERG  
LUIGI PISTILLI



**IL TUO VIZIO È UNA STANZA CHIUSA  
E SOLO IO NE HO LA CHIAVE**

CON IVAN RASSIMOV E NON FRANCO NEBBIA  
RICCARDO SALVINO REGIA DI SERGIO MARTINO  
UNA PRODUZIONE LEA FILM REALIZZATA DA LUCIANO MARTINO EASTMANCOLOR

URSULA ANDRESS / STACY KEACH



**LA MONTAGNE  
DU DIEU  
CANNIBALE**

réalisé par  
SERGIO MARTINO

CLAUDIO CASSINELLI • ANTONIO MARSINA  
FRANCO FANTASIA • LANFRANCO SPINOLA • CARLO LONGHI  
scénario et adaptation CESARE FRUGONI • SERGIO MARTINO  
musique de GIORDO e MAURIZIO DE ANGELIS adattamento musicale CLAUDIO CASSINELLI  
une production DANIA FILM - MEDUSA DISTRIBUZIONE





## Sex and spaghetti: The stars of Martino's Italian sexy comedies

While Sergio Martino is well-known in cult cinema circles in English speaking territories for his giallo, action and crime films, very little is known about the comedy films he made outside of his native homeland, at least when it comes to mainstream commentary. That's not to say there are no English speaking fans of these films. However, because of the difficulty in obtaining many of them (especially the later ones), their current unavailability on home video format in many cases, and lack of suitable translation for roughly a third of them, this territory remains relatively unmined, especially in critical circles. Despite this, throughout his lengthy career approximately a third of the films the director has made to date are of the comedy variety. It would be impossible to survey them all in any depth within the scope of this book; their number is too vast. In addition to that, very little exists in the way of production information about the films in question. It is often the case that when Martino is interviewed about his work, his massive contribution to the comedy genre is unfortunately ignored. Therefore, this chapter will take a slightly different approach, by grouping the films thematically around a few of the director's key collaborators – Edwige Fenech, Lino Banfi and Gigi and Andrea – with a hope that it will provide just enough of an introduction to whet the appetite for further exploration.

Between 1973 and 1982 Edwige Fenech made seven sexy comedies under the direction of Sergio Martino. The first of these, *Giovannona Long-Thigh* (1973), was also the director's first foray into the comedy genre. It set down the formula for the others to follow: bawdy jokes, farce, bad language, plots involving mistaken or hidden identities, all with a generous sprinkling of nudity. The film saw Edwige cast as the titular Giovannona, aka Coco, a prostitute with a heart of gold, who is hired by Mario Albertini (Pippo Franco; another mainstay in the Italian sex comedy, who had already appeared alongside Edwige in Mariona Laurenti's *Ubalda: All Naked and Warm*, 1972), to seduce a local judge working on the orders of his boss, La Noce (Gigi Ballista). The plan is to blackmail the man

into reopening La Noce's cheese factory, which has been closed down because it is considered a public health hazard. It is known that the official has a bit of a penchant for other men's wives, so La Noce engineers a situation where he and Mario can travel with the man by overnight train – with Giovannona there posing as his wife – in the hope of obtaining the necessary dirt to carry out their sly plan. There is just one issue, though, and it takes Mario until they are all couped up together on a moving train to notice it: every time Giovannona opens her mouth, obscenities flow out. She may look like an angel, but she certainly doesn't talk like one. It becomes Mario's job to not only ensure the judge sneaks into Giovannona's bed, but also to stop the woman talking to anyone, in case she wrecks the entire mission.

The director has appeared on record several times (usually during discussion on his gialli films) to state that he felt Fenech was much more suited to comedy than thrillers, because the roles were far more in tune with her natural sunny disposition. Even from watching Giovannona alone, it is difficult to argue with him. Fenech's comic timing is always spot on. The same can be said for the way she manages to juggle being seductive and sexy (as is par for the course with these films) with certain traits of an ingenue; it shouldn't work, but it does. Just as Fenech usually appeared as the "good girl" in giallo films, this was also her place in the comedies of Sergio Martino too.

*Cream Horn* (1981) would see her play a similar role to her previous project with Martino. Not a prostitute this time, but an opera singer, Marianna, who wants to leave her jealous boyfriend and their abusive relationship. She falls for sweet little Domenico Petruzzelli (Lino Banfi), who is something of an accidental hero. However, unbeknownst to her, Domenico (or Gabriele as she thinks he is named) is actually married, with a child, works as a tailor for the Catholic church and has assumed the identity of his best friend and neighbour, the real Gabriele (Gianni Cavina), in order to take her to bed. Cue plenty of farce and swapping apartments and identities. Fenech remains sweetness and light throughout the proceedings and is an absolute delight in the role.

One of Fenech's most entertaining moments in Martino's comedies arrives in

the short, but sweet, segment for the director's anthology *Don't Play With Tigers* (three of the comedy films the star did with the director fall into this subcategory of popular Italian comedy). The 1982 film, and Fenech's last comedy for the director, teams her with her old sparring partner George Hilton, playing a lustful Arabian prince. Once again, in order to save a factory, this time from foreclosing due to lack of investment, Fenech's character Francesca becomes the bait in a honey trap for her husband, the factory's owner Berto (Renato Pozzetto). After she bellydances for him at a special dinner organised in his honour, the prince wants one night of passion to secure a massive investment in the business.

For the remaining comedies in which Fenech starred for Martino, the roles are slightly more diverse, but still hold the "good girl" factor to some extent. In *Sugar, Honey and Pepper* (1980) – currently one of the most difficult of these films to track down – the actress plays an ass-kicking reporter who sets out to seduce a man she believes is a gangster, in another case of Martino mistaken identity farce. In *Sex with a Smile* (1976) – which is most notable for the appearance of American actor Marty Feldman, in an episode where he plays an overzealous bodyguard to a nubile young woman (Dayle Haddon from *Gambling City*) – Fenech is cast alongside cult legend Tomas Milian. The latter is decked out with the most ridiculous costume, complete with bottle top glasses and goofy teeth. The actress plays a bored housewife who receives dirty phone calls from Milan (acting anonymously) and as he recounts his erotic dreams to her it acts as a sexual awakening for the woman. Sexually stunted men – usually unattractive ones – being overwhelmed by sexually aggressive – usually glamorous – women is a key trope for the Italian Seventies sex comedy.

For Martino's instalment *Sabato in Saturday, Sunday, Friday* (1979) – which he co-directed with Castellano & Pipolo and Pasquale Festa Campanile (all prolific names in Italian comedy) – Fenech assumes the rather strange role as a Japanese engineer, who is courted as part of a PR exercise when she visits an Italian factory. Her suitor is Lino Banfi playing another two-timing character.

The theme of infidelity is a standard fallback for Italian sex comedies goes and is put to good use for *Wife on Holiday, Lover in the City* (1980). The film

is a jewel in the crown amongst Martino's wildly entertaining comedy films, pitting Fenech against Barbara Bouchet; the pair playing two women involved with the same man. Renzo Montagnani stars as Andrea Damiani, whose wife Valeria (Bouchet) has withdrawn sex from him for several years. Little does he know, she is sick of his cheating ways and has a bit of action of her own planned with a man she thinks is an aristocrat, Giovanni La Carretta (Tullio Solenghi); he's actually one of her husband's employees posing as a rich man to impress her. Andrea has a lover, Giulia (Fenech), who is fed up with playing second fiddle. When all the major players converge at a ski resort (and Lino Banfi steps in to help his friend Giovanni, passing himself off as a gay butler named Peppino) matters descend into bedroom swapping farce. Both actresses play their roles well, but Fenech is particularly hilarious as the ball-busting, slinky catsuit wearing, uber-stalking, fed up lover Giulia. Although she isn't a sleazy character, she does play against type somewhat, in that her portrayal of Giulia contrasts to the usual happy-go-lucky tone she exhibits in many of the other roles she played in Martino's sex comedies.

When it came to Lino Banfi, the actor was often cast as the unlucky-in-love inept cuckold; a character type at which he excelled. Banfi's performances for Martino belong to a long tradition in Italian comedy of male leads with flawed personalities. With the rise of "Comedy Italian style" in the Sixties came a new breed of male: the "inetto", or "inept", personified by actors like Marcello Mastroianni. Jacqueline Reich argues,

*"Italian masculinity, with its cultural associations of Ancient Rome, Renaissance sculpture and the Latin Lover, has been widely seen as the masculine ideal for Western civilisation. Rather than the dashing and debonair Don Giovanni, the inetto, the particularly Italian incarnation of the schmiel or anti-hero, comes to dominate the representations of masculinity in Italian cinema, and in Mastroianni's films in particular. This figure is a man in conflict, with an unsettled and at times unsettling political and sexual environment. Since the fall of Fascism and the end of World War II, Italy has been mired by radical change in the social and economic fabric of daily life. Mastroianni's roles provide a*

*window into important shifts in gender roles in this turbulent and unstable period as they came to be reflected on the silver screen.*<sup>30</sup>"

Mastroianni, along with his peers – including Alberto Sordi, Ugo Tognazzi and Vittorio Gassman – created a new type of comic Italian antihero. These were flawed characters, overgrown babies often driven by their base desires, such as greed, lust, laziness, who populated Commedia all'italiana (Comedy Italian style) throughout the 1960s. The cycle began with Mario Monicelli's *Big Deal on Madonna Street* (1958) and was cemented through Pietro Germi's *Divorce, Italian Style* (1962). As the Sixties transitioned into the Seventies and censorship loosened, along with market forces driving Italian film into more gratuitous territory, Commedia all'italiana evolved into Commedia sexy all'italiana (its sexier, bawdier, more grotesque counterpart). It was in this genre that stars like Lino Banfi were made.

Banfi began his career in the early Sixties, with parts in five of Lucio Fulci's early comedies – *002 operazione Luna* (1965), *How We Got Into Trouble with the Army* (1965), *I due parà* (1965), *Two Escape from Sing Sing* (1964) and *Howlers of the Dock* (1960) – where he took small roles, sometimes alongside Italian comedy legends Franco Franchi and Ciccio Ingrassia. The actor would join Sergio Martino in 1979 for the *Sabato* installment in the previously mentioned *Saturday, Sunday, Friday*. This kicked off a partnership which would continue for many years. The actor and director's last collaboration to date took place in 2008 (*L'allenatore nel pallone 2*).

Of the nine roles in which Banfi starred for Martino, *Cream Horn* and *Spaghetti at Midnight* (1981) showcase the comic actor at his best. This is especially true for the way in which these films allow the star to engage in a multitude of slapstick situations (in which he continuously loses his trousers). Banfi possesses a particular knack for physical comedy. Plus, the fact he bears a likeness to Danny Devito – short, chubby, balding – ramps up the hilarity tenfold when he is paired up with glamorous actresses like Edwige Fenech or Barbara Bouchet.

<sup>30</sup> Reich, Jacqueline. *Beyond the Latin Lover: Marcello Mastroianni, Masculinity, and Italian Cinema*. Indiana University Press p, 1.

Banfi's role in *Cream Horn* is a particular highlight in the canon. Family man, tailor to some of the most important people in the Catholic Church, the character he plays, Domenico, couldn't be any more perfect. While he, his wife and their overweight, somewhat mentally challenged, son, sit at the family dinner table, Domenico scoffs at his sexually promiscuous neighbour, whose bed is once again causing the plaster to fall out of the family's ceiling as they attempt to ignore the commotion and eat their food. However, things change for Domenico when he stumbles upon Marianna (Fenech) and falls instantly in love. Persuading his neighbour Gabriele to allow him to take his name and apartment – so he can woo the woman there, away from his family's prying eyes – *Cream Horn* descends into high farce and slapstick action, while Banfi runs from apartment to apartment, disguising himself as a woman, as well as dodging women, priests and the building concierge. He ends up so exhausted, it is no wonder he can't manage to perform when he finally gets Marianna into Gabriele's bed.

In *Spaghetti at Midnight*, Martino turns the pacing up to eleven, making *Cream Horn* look relatively slow moving by comparison. Banfi plays lawyer, Savino La Grasta; a man who is married to the beautiful Celeste (Bouchet), who is unhappy with her husband's appearance so forces him to exercise excessively, use treatments for his hair loss and keeps him on a strict diet. He finds solace in the arms of his lover (Alida Chelli), who is also married. The central conceit for the comedy to develop is provided when Banfi, after being forced out of his lover's room and onto a rooftop (when her husband arrives home), spies his own wife with a young architect. Assuming the worst, he makes a deal with a local mafia boss, Don Vito Malisperi (Ugo Bologna) whereby he will help him in court, if, in return, the mob will provide a hitman to kill his wife and her lover. After discovering he has made a massive mistake, Savino instantly regrets his decision. Martino designs a number of elaborate stunts for comic effect. Of particular note is the sequence where Banfi scales a rooftop, falls off a building and ends up stuck on the top of his wife and her lover's car, with a ball wedged in his mouth, his arms unable to move. Further comedy is extracted from the fact that Savino accidentally kills the hitman who comes looking for his wife and then tries to hide the body in the midst of a surprise birthday party Celeste has sprung on him (it also appears his lover has been invited, just to add to

the farce). The fact this all takes place in a home stuffed with modern gadgets and erotic looking furniture lends an additional element for some fun physical comedy to take place.

In addition to the other roles mentioned, *L'allenatore nel pallone* (1984), which starred Banfi as a football coach Oronzo Canà (reportedly based on real life trainer Oronzo Pugliese) was a particular success for the director and star. It also allowed Banfi a little bit of variation to his usual cheating husband line. The film was shot in Rome and Brazil and has attracted particular attention for the fact that it features footage from a number of genuine football matches, as well as cameos from football players, coaches and commentators, plus the inclusion of stadium locations Maracanã stadium (Rio De Janeiro), Stadio dei Marmi (Rome), Moretti Stadium (Udine) and Flaminio Stadium (Rome). In 2008 Banfi and Martino would reunite for a sequel to the original film.

*L'allenatore nel pallone* also starred another pair of Martino collaborators worth commenting on: comedy duo Gigi and Andrea (Gigi Sammarchi and Andrea Roncato), who, while relatively unknown outside of Italy, were a fixture on Italian television during the 1980s. They also made a number of Italian comedy films during this time, a handful of which were directed by Martino. The pair were often cast in buffoonish loser roles, through which they would perform a mixture of slapstick and farce, littered with bad language and sex. *Acapulco, prima spiaggia... a sinistra* (1983) – the first of the films they did for Martino – is certainly worth tracking down for fans of Italian sexy comedies. Gigi and Andrea hang around the beach attempting to pick up women, failing badly, whilst making complete fools of themselves along the way (think Frank Spencer crossed with Beavis and Butthead). The follow-up *Se tutto va bene siamo rovinati* (1984) is no less entertaining. This time, after Andrea is released from a mental hospital, he and Gigi manage to sneak a girl they rescue into Gigi's prudish aunt's house – they also live with the aunt in the previous film, which indicates their inability to support themselves like real adults. What they don't know, and are about to find out is, the girl has a brother who is in the mafia and she has stolen a load of money from him. Stand out moments in the film include a *Weekend at Bernie's* situation – where Gigi and Andrea are pushing a dead mafia man around in a

wheelchair on a busy city street – and a showdown with gang members fighting Andrea’s friends from the mental institute. As well as *L’allenatore nel pallone* the duo would also make another sports comedy *Mezzo destro mezzo sinistro – 2 calciatori senza pallone* in 1985 for Martino and a further comedy *Doppio misto* for television in 1986.

## Cannibal slaves, cyborgs and other exciting stories

Once the popularity of the ’70s giallo and poliziotteschi cycles had started to wane, Martino – always the opportunist, ready to embrace any new popular fad – went into the exportable fields of action, adventure and straight up horror films (as well as making his sex comedies, which started to take up a large part of his time during the latter end of the decade). Despite his willingness to diversify in terms of genre, the director was always inspired by other filmmakers associated with action films. He told interviewer Giulio Olesen,

*“Actually, the director who influenced me the most was Costa-Gavras, while Peckinpah and Spielberg were the American directors I especially loved. Anyway, budget limitations differentiated our genre films from the American ones. Our cinema collapsed when our handcrafted effects had to compete with the Hollywood digital special effects and politicians were not able to stimulate our technological progress. The cars that exploded in our movies were old, unlike those of Dirty Harry... but the final effect was the same. In any case, in my most productive years I became American, because shooting those scenes required a degree of precision and attention that I had acquired shooting in the United States. Nonetheless, it is absurd to think how much we risked making our films.”<sup>31</sup>*

Even as far back as 1973, Martino was looking to break into the action field as a serious contender. Technically you could label his crime thrillers as “action”, but their downbeat endings and political subtext hardly classed them as pure entertainment. For Martino, it was always about entertainment first and foremost.

In February 1973, the director was contacted by producer Carlo Ponti and scriptwriter Tonino Cervi about a film they were interested in him directing. It was essentially a 007 ripoff, set in Goa, and they wanted Bruce Lee to play

<sup>31</sup> Olesen, Giulio (2017) *An Interview with Sergio Martino*. Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies. Intellect Books, p.262.

the main hero. This involved a trip to Hong Kong for Cervi and Martino, where they were wined and dined by Run Run Shaw — one of the founding members of the Shaw Brothers Studio, which was a major force in the Hong Kong Film industry — attending film premieres, lavish dinner parties, being driven around in limousines and Rolls-Royces. Although Lee had abandoned the Shaw Brothers at this point, Run Run Shaw was happy to play mediator and set up an appointment for the Italians to meet with the actor and his agent. After a rocky start – Cervi and Martino were late to their first meeting because of a traffic jam, and found Lee had already left, annoyed – when they finally got to his agent’s office, director and soon-to-be-icon Lee hit it off. The actor was excited at the prospect of working in Italy, seemingly fascinated with the culture. He regaled Martino with stories of how he had worked as Steve McQueen’s martial arts trainer and divulged his own aspirations to reach the same Hollywood heights as the aforementioned American icon. It wasn’t to be, though. Lee’s agent, and lawyer, both declined the figure Ponti had in mind to invest (according to an interview with Martino in *Fangoria* magazine the amount they were asking was \$2 million<sup>32</sup>) and they wouldn’t budge. So Martino and Cervi left empty-handed. Run Run Shaw offered the services of one of his contracted actors Lo Lieh, but the Italian producer wasn’t interested. During the trip Martino had the opportunity to visit the Shaw Brothers studio and was amazed at what he saw there. Impressed by the industrial way the Shaws had of working – including having actors live at the studio – and the fact they produced films almost on an assembly line, Martino saw for the first time what life was like for a rich and successful producer; a far cry away from how things worked in Italy. The journey appears to have had a profound effect on Martino and he gives a particularly vivid account of it in his autobiography. Like he says, though, you can’t change the past. It was only after Lee’s death that he realised just how much of a cult legend the star would become.

So it was that when Martino returned to the action film, it would be to the genre of his first ever film, the western, with *A Man Called Blade* (1977). An odd choice, maybe, but the director’s second and last western is a prime example of

a late-in-the-cycle picture, that displays a certain amount of flair for the subject matter. In discussing the making of the film Martino said,

*“Actually for many years the western was on the decline because of weak productions and the general poor quality of the product. Consequently my last, well, my second western, I believe it was the last or second to last Italian western.”<sup>33</sup>*

In the same interview the director revealed his casting choice of Maurizio Merli for his leading man, pointing out his reasons were somewhat inspired by the fact the actor bore more than a passing resemblance to Franco Nero, but also partly fuelled by the fact the actor was a major star in action films at the time, appearing in several high profile crime thrillers. This would be the only time Merli would work for the director. The film is a fitting tribute to the end of a genre that was all but played out by 1977.

Merli, as the lone cynical bounty hunter Mannaja (which incidentally was the Italian title of the film), rolls into Suttonville to take revenge for the death of his father on wheelchair-bound mining boss McGowan (Philippe Leroy) – the incident is shown in melodramatic flashback – but then decides he can’t be bothered to go ahead with it. What he does instead is go to rescue McGowan’s daughter, who he finds has been kidnapped by the nefarious Voller. John Steiner played Voller and the director said was perfect for the role because he had a mean face, when in reality he was very nice to work with, joking later about how the actor could not ride a horse and in many of the close-up scenes where he is supposedly on horseback, he is actually sat astride planks which were being moved by the production team. Bloodshed and beatings ensue, and the all-important showdown, which was filmed in the particularly atmospheric Manziana, Italy. The director described the location as, “a very unusual site...dry grounds; sulfurous, volcanic.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Interview: *A Man Called Sergio*. (2004) DVD Blue Underground

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

*A Man Called Blade* summons up the grit and dirt of the wild west in grim style, with some scenes shot in either atmospheric fog or pouring rain. Martino revealed that far from a stylistic choice, the use of dreary weather had a much more practical reason for being there,

*“I used the rain and fog. And the reason the movie was shot in the rain and fog was due to the fact that the only Western village in Italy, the old Elios studios, was falling apart. To fix it or renovate it would have been too expensive. So the fog in the long shots helped a lot. Therefore I could portray a kind of ghost town.”*<sup>35</sup>

The ghost town analogy, to which Martino makes reference to, is a pertinent one considering the state of the Italian film industry when *A Man Called Blade* was made. The film represents the end of a prosperous era, where popular cycles of Italian film, for instance the western, Gothic horror and the peplum, enjoyed much success in the export market. By the late Seventies the industry was in crisis, both for domestic theatres and international business. Danny Shipka attributes the downturn to the following reasons:

*Films such as Polanski’s Rosemary’s Baby (1968) Romero’s Night of the Living Dead (1968), Craven’s Last House on the Left (1972) and Friedkin’s The Exorcist (1973) not only proved to strike a chord in audiences around the world, they were to have a profound impact on the Italian film industry. In the ‘70s, European cinema, including Italy, was experiencing a general decline. The drop in attendance in Italy was close to catastrophic. From 1976 to 1979, ticket revenues fell from 514 million to 276 million lire. The cause of this was a deep neglect by the state, both institutionally and financially, as well as the proliferation of private television stations that successfully competed against filmmakers by churning out derivative product.”*<sup>36</sup>

As a response, many Italian filmmakers working in the territory of popular entertainment such as horror or exploitation were forced to up their game,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Shipka, Danny (2011) *Perverse Titillation: The Exploitation Cinema of Italy, Spain and France, 1960–1980*. Macfarland p.112.

resorting to far more violent or sexually graphic oeuvre to ensure a decent return on their investment. Producers started to demand more and more exploitative material – a factor which impacted on Martino’s next couple of films. As noted by Shipka, “the Italian exploitation films of the ‘70s appealed to the basest of entertainment choices and showcased pornographic (soft and hard) representation of sex and violence.

The cannibal, zombie, nunsplotation and violent sex subgenres were among the most exploitative in the world for their time.”

Martino managed to avoid cashing in on the popular zombie and nunsplotation cycles of the period, but he did delve into cannibalistic territory with *The Mountain of the Cannibal God* (1978), which eventually ended up on the UK video nasties list together with other genre defining pictures such as Ruggero Deodato’s *Cannibal Holocaust* (1980) and Umberto Lenzi’s *Cannibal Ferox* (1981). An early example of the cycle in development, Martino’s feature was released two years before the far more infamous *Cannibal Holocaust*, three before *Cannibal Ferox*, and is markedly different to either picture when it comes to levels of violence and the overall tone and pacing. Martino’s feature takes a far more restrained approach to the material, but is still not without its moments of excessive violence or sexual transgression. The film, released in two cuts, depicts simulated bestiality and real life animal cruelty in its uncut form. In addition to this, both cuts of the film cover the theme of rape and castration.

When taken as part of a package, with *The Great Alligator River* and *Island of the Fishmen* (1979), *The Mountain of the Cannibal God* demonstrates the director’s love of travel and penchant for interesting locations in their most exotic form. Martino explained in his autobiography that he originally studied geology because he thought it would give him the opportunity to travel, but soon tired of academia. Instead, he realised this dream through his working life in cinema, often travelling to locations around the world to make his films.

The director replied in a 1997 interview, when asked about the context of Italian cannibal films, especially the fact they have been heavily criticised by modern-day commentators,

*“As far as I’m concerned, these films were inspired by American adventure cinema of the 40’s like King Solomon’s Mines, and other American and European adventure cinema. I can understand the “cruelty against animals” charge, but the scene in which the python strangles the monkey, for instance, was shot almost by chance. Admittedly, the monkey was put next to the snake, but it had every opportunity to escape... there was nothing inevitable about it being killed. Anyway, in the jungle the law of life is the law of survival. I don’t believe, moreover, that the makers of all these “respectable” nature documentaries we see on TV just shoot what they find... I think that many of their violent scenes of jungle life are contrived and reconstructed.”<sup>37</sup>*

In the same interview the director also spoke about the location, revealing,

*“I made Montagne Del Dio Cannibale and The Great Alligator River in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The most effective jungle scenes were actually shot in the botanical garden of Kandj, in very comfortable circumstances. I remember though, shooting in the cave in Montagne Del Dio Cannibale... it was so hot and humid, even more so under the lights. In addition, we’d just had to climb 500 metres up a mountain!”<sup>38</sup>*

As well as its striking location *Mountain of the Cannibal God* also benefits from a decent cast. Ursula Andress, Stacy Keach, Claudio Cassinelli all star in the adventure laden tale. Andress (playing Susan Stevenson) – the popular Sixties sex siren had previously appeared in one of the episodes for Martino’s sex comedy sequel *Sex With a Smile 2* (1976) – has to trek through the jungles of New Guinea to locate her husband, an anthropologist, who has gone missing. She is aided by her brother (played by Stacey Keach), who is something of an

<sup>37</sup> “The Ruthless Logic Of Commercial Production”... The Sergio Martino Interview (2016) accessed at <https://houseoffreudstein.wordpress.com/2016/12/04/the-ruthless-logic-of-commercial-production-the-sergio-martino-interview/>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

expert on the mysterious mountain Ra Ra Me, which is the place they believe the man could be found. Along the way they encounter an extremely resourceful explorer Manolo (Claudio Cassinelli) and he joins them as they continue their hunt for the missing man. Cue plenty of wrestling with animals and a subplot which features some double crossing and intrigue. It’s all to do with the climax, however, which arrives when Manolo and Susan are kidnapped by a cannibal tribe who are living up in the mountain. For some reason they seem rather taken with Susan and tie her up naked so she can be worshipped as a goddess (during these scenes Andress is stripped). It remains up to the intrepid Manolo to save the day, and Susan’s modesty, without ending up on the menu for the inhabitants of Ra Ra Me’s latest entrails banquet.

Martino would continue the adventure vibe in his next horror crossover, mixing in aspects of fantasy for *Island of the Fishmen*. The project started life under the working title “Volcano Island”, which doesn’t really convey much about the narrative, especially when you consider the plot embraces elements of *The Creature of the Black Lagoon* (Jack Arnold, 1954), and more than a little flavour from *The Island of Dr Moreau*, with lashings of mad science. Far from being a generic creature feature, the film displays the director’s willingness to mix things up a little bit, with the underlying plot also exhibiting little flashes of dark fairytale and mythology. Martino would go on to develop this line more fully in the film’s official sequel *The Fishmen and Their Queen* (1995).

*Island of the Fishmen*, in its Italian cut, is less of a horror and more fantasy/adventure. However, when it was picked up by Roger Corman’s New World Pictures, a new opening sequence was filmed to spice things up a bit and make the film more appealing to horror fans and the film was retitled: *Screamers* (released in 1981). Marketing involved a pretty bold trailer which declared, “See a man turned inside out!”, which certainly didn’t occur in the film, new cut or otherwise and no doubt left some fans disappointed after such a sensational claim failed to materialise. Martino explained the reasons for the changes in an interview, by stating,



“I do not know what happened with *Island of the Mutations*. Foreign distributors often made changes without our consent, but we were a minor film industry and we accepted many compromises. The use of violence was often instrumental to production demands, as we had to accept the cheapest solutions. Meanings have been given to certain situations in my movies when, in fact, they were just attempts to solve problems from time to time. Sometimes, erotic or violent scenes were shot in a deliberately sloppy way to meet to the censorship cuts. Distributors had their demands: the ban on minors under eighteen years of age was a key vehicle to attract audiences, and violence had the same profitable values as swear words do in comedy.”<sup>39</sup>

The new opening displays a group of travellers arriving on the island and being killed in horrifically gory ways by fishmen (effects by Chris Walas who also worked on effects for Richard Marquand’s *Return of the Jedi*, 1983, Joe Dante’s *Gremlins*, 1984, and David Cronenberg’s *The Fly*, 1986) and includes appearances by Cameron Mitchell, and Mel Ferrer. The main narrative begins when a group are shipwrecked on the island and their leader, Lieutenant Claude de Ross (Casinelli), encounters Richard Johnson playing a Dr Moreau type character called Edmond Rackham (Johnson would play a similar mad science role the same year for Lucio Fulci in *Zombie Flesh Eaters*). Rackham forces his assistant (Barbara Bach) and her father (Joseph Cotten) to control the fishmen who live in the water surrounding the island, in order to dig up gold from the lost city of Atlantis. The film also follows a similar a line to Jack Cardiff’s *The Mutations* (1972), in regards to the fishmen origin story.

A quick note on *The Fishmen and their Queen* – which was made much later for Italian television, and removed the story completely away from horror and into children’s adventure and fantasy – Martino heavily recycled footage from his 1983 sci-fi number 2019: *After the Fall of New York* (including action scenes with Hal Yamanouchi’s Rat Eater King) for some of the opening shots. The tone of the feature is quite different to the original, in that it plays out as a fairy tale steeped in magic and mythology (although the original did have a bit of a witchcraft vibe). Edwige Fenech had originally been cast as the queen, but

<sup>39</sup> Olesen, Guilio (2017) *An Interview with Sergio Martino*. Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies. Intellect Books, p.263.



declined the project because she did not want to wear a heavy costume. The role eventually went to Ramona Badescu.

*The Great Alligator River* shares some of the cast from *Island of the Fishmen*, which was released the same year (*Island of the Fishmen* premiered in January 1979, *The Great Alligator River* in November): namely Claudio Cassinelli, Barbara Bach, Richard Johnson and Mel Ferrer. Only this time it isn't a tribe of cannibals, or mutated fishmen, but a man-eating alligator posing as the biggest threat to a group of city dwellers, who have somewhat naively travelled to the tropics without a thought for the dangers they might face there. The story is set on an island which houses a holiday resort and some very superstitious locals. Claudio Cassinelli takes the role of a photographer, who has arrived on the island to undertake a fashion photoshoot, but seems more interested in Alice Brandt (Barbara Bach). Things don't go as planned when the model for the shoot gets eaten by an alligator. The locals blame this on the fact she was off having sex with one of their tribe during a traditionally prohibited time and are understandably angry about this. When the alligator starts eating tourists, it causes an all-out uprising from terrified inhabitants of the island, resulting in a bloodbath and chaos. Actor Richard Johnson has a glorious small cameo as a crazed hermit who lives in a cave on the island.

Although Martino is often associated with the horror genre, outside of the giallo he made very few straight up horrific films, often mixing in other strains like comedy, action, adventure or fantasy. Of the few pictures he made which could be classed as purely horror, *The Great Alligator River* is one of them. The feature taps into the "nature attacks" subgenre that was thriving at the time, through films like *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975), *Piranha* (Joe Dante, 1978) and *Long Weekend* (Colin Eggleston, 1978). Despite its limitations, the film does a great job at tackling the subject matter and remains entertaining throughout.

*2019: After the Fall of New York* (1983) abandoned the exotic, and went for an altogether otherworldly setting: a post-apocalyptic New York, inspired by John Carpenter's cult hit *Escape From New York* (1981). Following the release of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) and *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979) Hollywood moved

into the domain of blockbusting, effects-driven, science fiction and horror, a tradition which still remains alive today. This resulted in putting many European filmmakers out of business, and is a factor which Martino has been particularly vocal about. Previously, countries like Spain and Italy had enjoyed great success on the international market with their cheap and cheerful exploitation pictures. However, a lack of investment in technology, and relatively small budgets by comparison to their American counterparts, meant they couldn't keep up. As far as the Italians went, though, it didn't stop them from trying. This resulted in a pocket of low-budget science fiction films, which were made in the late Seventies, early Eighties, such as Luigi Cozzi's *Starcrash* (1978) and *Contamination* (1980). Spain also had a go emulating the huge success of *Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) with the delightfully cheesy *Supersonic Man* (Juan Piquer Simón, 1979).

The post-nuke cycle, to which *2019: After the Fall of New York* belongs, also enjoyed a bit of a boom in the early Eighties. Martino's film owns a place in this canon, joining the likes of Enzo G. Castellari's *The New Barbarians* (1983), Joe D'Amato's *End Game* (1983), *2020: Texas Gladiators* (Joe D'Amato & George Eastman, 1983) and Giuliano Carnimeo's *Exterminators of the Year 3000* (1983). As did many of these films, *2019* also channels a little bit of the massively influential independent picture *Mad Max* (George Miller, 1979).

When asked about *2019: After the Fall of New York*, Martino told *Fangoria* magazine,

*"That's a movie that Quentin Tarantino likes a lot! I added some original ideas to that, like the romantic subplot about the survivors of a nuclear catastrophe seeking the last fertile woman on Earth. I showed a destroyed New York, and years later, when I watched the tragic events of September 11 on TV, my mind immediately went back to those images. It was another change of genre for me, and an enthusiastic one, and the budget we had was comparatively high: \$1 million allowed us to build some great sets. Obviously the movie was deeply inspired by *Escape From New York*, but I also tried to recreate the atmosphere of *Blade Runner*. At the time, distributors believed that science fiction movies could not take place in Italy, because it wasn't a credible location! Therefore,*

*Italian directors weren't considered suitable for them, so some of my colleagues and I began to use pseudonyms. An American name also suggested that a picture could be a sequel made by the same people who did the original. In France, 2019, had great success, probably because the audience thought it was an American film. Producer Fulvio Lucisano saw it in Paris and wondered who the hell Martin Dolman was; when he realized it was me, he was very surprised and called me, and offered me some television projects to direct, which I did.*<sup>40</sup>"

The film concerns the hero, Parsifal (Michael Sopkiw), travelling through the post-apocalyptic, ravaged streets of New York, where inhabitants are oppressed by a totalitarian corporation, in order to find the last fertile woman on earth. Chaos reigns supreme and he is forced into the sewers where he encounters all manner of carnival freakery, like Big Ape (George Eastman), The Rat Eater King (Hal Yamanouchi), a community of dwarves, as well as his love interest Giara (Valentine Monnier).

The director explained in another interview,

*"In fact 2019 is clearly a special genre film among my vast credits. It's among the ones that I remember most fondly. To tell the truth it also benefited from the talent of the excellent art director Antonello Geleng... he made this scale model of New York City with many of the skyscrapers in the background made out of black fruit crates. When 2019 was released in U.S theatres, the American critics thought the special effects were too crude yet they were still acceptable. This was before the huge, huge gap that was created when special effects went digital. From that time forward we lost the ability to compete with American cinema. I remember that my tiny spaceships had cables and that's how we moved them around, pulling them. There were some optical effects in the film but it's true that the special effects were barely tolerable.*<sup>41</sup>"

<sup>40</sup> D'Onoforio, Roberto E. (2015) *Torso and More So*. Fangoria Magazine, #340 March 2015 p.45.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Sergio Martino on *All the Colors of the Dark* DVD. (2004) Shriek Show.

1986 would mark the beginning of a series of films, some of which were shot in America, starring Daniel Greene. The first of these, *Hands of Steel* (1986) – a riff on both *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984) and *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) – is most remembered by fans for the unfortunate accident co-star Claudio Cassinelli suffered, which will be discussed shortly, in which he lost his life during filming in a freak helicopter crash.

Again directing under the name Martin Dolman, Martino wanted to make the film in America, using desert locations in and around Arizona. On arrival the director found casting the production a frustrating process, which required several trips to New York and Los Angeles to find the right people for the project. With money an issue, as was usually the case, the director found he was limited in his choices. His main frustration was SAG (the Screen Actor's Guild) which governed many of the better known, more talented actors, and also placed a number of restrictions on working conditions including dictating breaks and the distance between dressing room trailers.<sup>42</sup> Hailing from the rough and ready, get things done at any cost (as long as it wasn't actual cash) Italian tradition, this mode of working seemed completely alien to Martino. He persevered, and while on a scouting mission to Beverly Hills discovered Daniel Greene (a non-SAG actor, who horror fans will be familiar with for his part in James Signorelli's *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*, 1988).<sup>43</sup> The director described Greene as good natured, big and physically a cross between Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger.<sup>44</sup> According to Martino he could also act proficiently enough for the part and had some experience in television, making him perfect for the role as main cyborg Paco Queruak. Joining Greene on the cast list were veteran John Saxon, the aforementioned Casinelli, George Eastman and Janet Agren.

The plot is fairly basic, but allows for plenty of fun fist-fighting action and gunplay. Paco has been designed to assassinate a professor, but instead escapes his creators and runs to the desert where he takes up with Linda (Agren), a young woman who runs a bar in the middle of nowhere. Once there, he annoys the

<sup>42</sup> Martino, Sergio (2017) *Mille peccati... nessuna virtù?* Bloodbuster, p.197.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

local gang of ruffians (headed by Eastman), and tries to take them on in a series of arm-wrestling contests. Cue the arrival of villains Peter Howell (Cassinelli) and Francis Turner (Saxon), who are intent on shutting Paco down. He won't go without a fight – of which there are plenty.

In a very candid interview with Arrow Films <sup>45</sup> the director explained that he cast Casinelli because he thought he didn't have any work at the time and that the actor had come to him asking if there were any opportunities. During the shooting Casinelli received a call from France, with another offer of work, and so the director had rearranged shooting so that he could leave earlier to undertake his new project. After working so closely together for many years, often in foreign environments like Sri Lanka and Malaysia, the director and actor had become good friends, bonding through the experience of making films under difficult conditions. The accident, which occurred when the helicopter Cassinelli was travelling in smashed into a bridge it was supposed to fly under, could have been wholly avoided. Casinelli had only wanted to go and fly in the craft so he could tell his children about it. He didn't even need to be there and Martino had originally refused, but then relented because of the actor's enthusiasm – he described Casinelli as someone who embraced any opportunity to experience a new thrill. Because of the loss of his friend, it made Martino very cautious in the future, especially as far as stunts were involved.

The director's next set of action films, all starring Daniel Greene, are certainly less stunt-driven than the previous productions, as a result of the accident. Despite this, all of them are entertaining. In 1988 Greene would land the leading role in Martino's Rocky spin-off *The Opponent*, which co-stars Ernest Borgnine in the "Mickey" part. The film digresses a little bit from its Hollywood predecessor, by having a mob related subplot, excessive violence and an overall sleazier vibe. In 1990, the relationship between actor and star continued for the kung-fu occult flavoured *American Tiger*, which gave Greene the opportunity to play a bad-guy; a brainwashed cult minion to Donald Pleasence's main villain. Pleasence had also appeared in Martino's bizarre WWII set actioner, *Casablanca Express* (1989), which was a fast paced shoot-em-up involving a Nazi plot to kidnap Winston

Churchill from a train; co-starring Jason Connery and Jean Sorel.

For 1990's *Beyond Kilimanjaro* (an Italian production where Greene played second fiddle to the film's lead, Richard Hatch in the starring role as the archetypal Martino "man haunted by his past" character). Although the film is often overlooked, it reunited Martino with Luigi Pistilli. Martino described his dismay, in an interview, at how much the actor – and star of his giallo *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key* – had changed since he had last worked with him. Tragedy had befallen Pistilli when he lost his son, which had caused him to change from being a fun and outgoing man, who was always lighthearted on set, to someone who was obviously troubled. Pistilli would eventually take his own life in 1996.

Greene would return as the central protagonist in *After the Condor* (1990), where he played a cheeky journalist, Mark Lester, who is driven out of the USA when he threatens to expose a local senator for sordid relations – of which he has photo evidence. He's sent off on assignment to South America (the production was partly filmed in Argentina) where he uncovers a mystery of lost treasure. Charles Napier has a short but very sweet role as Lester's editor.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Sergio Martino (2017). *Suspicious Death of a Minor*. Arrow Films.



## Private desires, craving crime: Martino's notable work in the 1990s

From the 1980s onwards, Martino took the world of Italian television by storm, as well as continuing to direct feature films – some for theatrical release, and others for the newly establishing direct-to-video market. It was a fertile time for the director, however many of his credits from this period remain relatively obscure outside of his native Italy. During this period Martino worked on projects as diverse as the super obscure television movie *Un Australiana a Roma* (1987) – which starred a yet to be discovered Nicole Kidman – and successful TV series *Rally* (1988). He also had spots on crime series *Caccia al ladro d'autore* (for which Martino directed three episodes between 1985–1986) and made the wonderfully bizarre childish comedy *Un orso chiamato Arturo* (Translated: *A Bear Called Arthur*) in 1992. One of his biggest achievements post-millennium was to direct 48 episodes of series *Carabinieri* (made between 2006–2007) at the age of 67.



In something of a return to previous form, the director considers his four part giallo series *Private Crimes* the best thing he ever made for television<sup>46</sup>. Edwige Fenech served as a producer on the show, as well as playing the leading role, and her fashion company provided help with the wardrobe department on the production. The series was screened on British television (Channel 4) in the mid-to-late Nineties with full English subtitles, but since then the production has rarely been seen outside of Italy. Sadly, for those who missed its English language friendly broadcast when it was aired in the UK, subtitled prints of the series are hard to come by.

What is particularly interesting about the show is the fact that Fenech, by now in her early forties (and still looking as glamorous as ever), is playing completely against the stereotype she is usually associated with in the giallo genre. Instead

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Sergio Martino. Blu-ray (2015) *Edgar Allan Poe's Black Cats: Two Adaptations By Sergio Martino & Lucio Fulci* (Limited Edition). Arrow Films.

of the sultry sex kitten she was well known for in the earlier part of her career, she is cast as Nicole Vanturi, a French journalist and mother. She had previously played a more “mature” role for *Ruggero Deodato in Phantom of Death* (1988), alongside Donald Pleasence and Michael York, and her part in *Private Crimes* seems to indicate the actress was entering a new phase in her career, attempting to establish herself as more of a serious actress, rather than a sex symbol.

The story begins when Nicole’s daughter Sandra (Vittoria Belvedere) is found murdered. With the police failing to come up with the perpetrator, Nicole takes it upon herself to investigate. Along the way she becomes close to detective Stefano Avanza (Ray Lovelock). She avoids his advice to leave things up to the police, instead following her journalistic instinct and relying on another reporter she befriends, Andrea Barasi (Spanish actor Manuel Bandera, who had appeared in Pedro Almodovar’s *Kika* that same year), to help crack the case. What she uncovers is a sex trafficking ring, which involves seedy nightclubs and the exploitation of teenage girls, as well as the fact her daughter was having an affair with a much older man, who just so happened to be married and from a wealthy family. As Nicole moves closer to the identity of the killer, dead bodies start to pile up around her. Joining cult stars Fenech and Lovelock on the cast list is classic actress Alida Valli.

With each episode an hour and a half long, Martino is given the opportunity to really absorb himself in the subject and the tension develops in a slow burn. Red herring after red herring provides a twisting turning plot, while other revelations slot neatly together like a jigsaw puzzle. Just when you think you have it all figured out, the narrative veers off in the opposite direction, with each part ending on a cliff hanger. The narrative keeps you guessing right until the end. And when all is revealed it is in the usual “out there” giallo tradition.

With any luck the series will be made available to English speakers at some time in the future. Not only is the show thoroughly entertaining, but it also demonstrates, even by this late-point in his career, Martino could still produce a solid giallo. The series is a far cry away from the action films he was making during this same period. Far from exploitation, it is a thoughtful piece of television.

*Private Crimes* star Vittoria Belvedere would return for Martino’s riff on the bunny boiler theme – a subject popular in Hollywood during the early Nineties – *Craving Desire* (1993). Since the release of Adrian Lyne’s *Fatal Attraction* in 1987, there seemed to be an outpouring of likeminded pictures which featured dangerous women, who were all consumed by an obsession of some sort and prepared to kill for it: see *Basic Instinct* (Paul Verhoeven, 1992), *Single White Female* (Barbet Schroeder, 1992), *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Curtis Hanson, 1992). The director harnessed the current trend to a certain degree for *Craving Desire*, but in his usual unrestrained style had to rack things up several notches by adding loads of sex into the equation.

The story surrounds the life of Luigi Muscati (Ron Nummi), an up and coming yuppie type with a wildly successful career, a ball-breaking fiancée and a wealthy family. When his cousin Sonia (Belvedere) arrives on the scene, Luigi’s life becomes a living nightmare. At first he is seduced by the young woman and is happy to go along with the flow, shocking his family when he declares at a party, ironically in honour of his engagement, that he is leaving his fiancée for his cousin. Yet, Sonia is too wild to be tamed. Her behaviour is erratic. Her sexual drive is out of control. And because of this she leads her lover into threesomes and partner swapping escapades, only to become insanely jealous afterwards. When the woman loses Luigi his job, he decides he has had enough. That is just the beginning of his problems, though.

While somewhat derivative of other films of its type, and the ending predictable, Belvedere gives an intense performance in her role, making it a wholly worthwhile venture on entertainment value alone. The fact that the director doesn’t skimp on the sex scenes also helps things along. The film manages to encompass the sleazy atmosphere of coke snorting, free sex yuppiedom, while keeping the story riveting enough as it hurtles along at a fairly breezy pace. Martino also adds in some of his favourite staples – a mystical element (witchcraft) – which isn’t as developed as it could be, but still provides a nice edge, as well as that all important dummy death from a rooftop. The film also features a small role for Serena Grandi.

*The Smile of the Fox* (1992) also falls into the erotic thriller category, but takes a slightly different route than expected, when compared to *Craving Desire*. The story kicks off with a professional hitman Mark (Steve Bond) being contracted for his services. He is given an apartment, a load of money and some weapons and told to wait for further instructions. Then, in a complete curveball, the film moves from straight up crime thriller, into erotic territory, when the man becomes enchanted with a beautiful young woman, Marina Valdez (Debora Caprioglio), who lives next door. Suffering PTSD following the death of his wife and child in a car bomb, he is forced to relive that fateful day over and over. So, he finds solace in the arms of Maria. Or so he thinks.

Just like *Craving Desire*, *The Smile of the Fox*, for a director who is on record saying he doesn't enjoy shooting erotic scenes, isn't exactly backwards in coming forwards regarding the inclusion of sex and ample nudity. A lot of this is down to the fact that it stars Debora Caprioglio, the former Mrs Klaus Kinski and star of Tinto Brass' exhilarating take on *Fanny Hill, Paprika* (1991). Although Caprioglio isn't as intense as she is in Brass's picture – where she gives a spellbinding performance as good girl turned prostitute – her presence is nevertheless interesting. Because of the energy she injects into her role, the narrative never seems to tread water. Likewise, the pacing, although slightly more low key than *Craving Desire*, is maintained throughout.

The final project of note, and one that finished off the decade for the director, is another television film, which again put Martino back into the giallo fold. Considering the time it was made and the medium for which it was produced – Italian small-screen, as opposed to a theatrical release intended for an international market, as his earlier gialli were – *Mozart is a Murderer* (1999) is a competently made giallo which exhibits style and substance. The film isn't as gory as Martino's Seventies efforts. This said, it isn't short of murders either, but the director does allow the suspense to build by investing in the narrative's main characters, as opposed to just following a body count by numbers formula.

The central storyline revolves around a group of young people who study together and are all talented musicians performing in the school orchestra.

One of them, Chiara (Elena Astone), is killed and a strange symbol is etched into her flesh. Others soon follow and their bodies display the same markings. Investigating officer Commissario Antonio Maccari (Enzo De Caro) starts to suspect it is the work of a serial killer, but he can't figure out the motive. Whoever it is, they are close to the kids, as well as his girlfriend Daniela (Daniela Scarlatti) – a psychotherapist, who has some contact with a troubled young man. What Maccari uncovers in the process of his investigation is a tragic story of trauma, shattered innocence and child abuse.

The film goes into some deep territory, exploring themes of child abuse, childhood neglect, trauma and substance abuse. In many ways *Mozart is a Murderer* displays the same maturity seen in *Private Crimes*, suggesting the director had moved away from sensationalism, in many respects, and wanted to work on more serious projects. If *Mozart is a Murderer* shows us anything, it is that Martino hadn't quite lost his old touch, even at the age of 61. Into the next decade the neo-giallo would start to bloom. Filmmakers like Hélène Cattet and Bruno Forzani (*Amer*, 2009; *The Strange Color of Your Body's Tears*, 2013) began to pay homage to maestros like Martino, in their flashy uber gialli, which revolved around the art and sound design of the peak years Seventies giallo films, elevating the genre and making it appealing to a completely different audience bracket. Who knows, maybe Martino will come back and show the new guard he isn't ready to cash in those black gloves just yet. If we have learned anything about the director, from watching his films over the last forty years or so, it is to always expect the unexpected.



## **Martino on disc**

### **2019: After the Fall of New York**

Shriek Show/Media Blasters, USA  
DVD, Region 1

Code Red, USA  
Blu-ray, Region free

88 Films, UK  
Blu-ray, Region free

### **All The Colors of the Dark**

Shriek Show/Media Blasters, USA  
DVD, Region 1

Marketing Film, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

Shameless Films, UK  
Blu-ray, Region B

### **Arizona Colt Returns**

MYA Communication  
DVD, Region 0

Wild East Productions  
DVD, Region 0

Koch Media, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

### **Casablanca Express**

Argent Films, UK  
DVD, Region 0

### **Craving Desire**

MYA Communication  
DVD, Region 0

### **Gambling City**

No Shame, USA  
DVD, Region 0

FilmArt, Germany  
DVD, Region 0

### **A Man Called Blade (Mannaja)**

Blue Underground, USA  
DVD, Region 0

Marketing Film, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

Another World Entertainment,  
Scandinavia  
DVD, Region 2



Vipco, UK  
DVD, Region 2

**Giovannona Long-Thigh**

No Shame, USA  
DVD, Region 0

**Hands of Steel**

Another World Entertainment,  
Scandinavia  
DVD, Region 2

X-Cess Entertainment, Germany  
DVD, Region 0.

Brentwood Home Video, USA  
DVD, Region 0

Mill Creek Entertainment  
DVD, Region 0

Code Red, USA  
Blu-ray, Region A

88 Films, UK  
Blu-ray, Region B

**Island of the Fishmen**

MYA Communication, USA  
DVD, Region 0  
Scorpion Releasing, USA

(As *Screamers*)  
Blu-Ray Region A, B

Marketing Film, Germany  
DVD, Region 0

No Shame, Italy  
DVD, Region 0

**Naked and Violent**

Mya Communications  
DVD, Region 0

**Sex with a Smile**

MPIR Laser and Video, Hong Kong  
DVD, Region 3

**Suspicious Death of a Minor**

Sazuma, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

Arrow Films, UK, USA  
DVD, Region 2. Blu-ray, Region A,B

**The Case of the Scorpion's Tail**

No Shame, USA  
DVD, Region 0

X-Rated, Germany  
DVD Region 2

Arrow Films, UK, USA  
Blu-ray, Region A,B

**The Great Alligator River**

MYA Communication  
DVD, Region 0

No Shame, USA  
DVD, Region 0

X-Rated Kult, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

**The Scorpion with Two Tails**

MYA Communication  
DVD, Region 0

**The Smile of the Fox**

MYA Communication  
DVD, Region 0

**The Mountain of the Cannibal God**

Anchor Bay, USA  
DVD, Region 0

Blue Underground, USA  
DVD, Region 0

EC Entertainment  
DVD, Region 0

No Shame, Italy  
DVD, Region 0

Triple X Film, Thailand  
DVD, Region 0

Neo Publishing, France  
DVD, Region 2

Another World Entertainment,  
Scandinavia  
DVD, Region 2

Vipco, UK  
DVD, Region 2

**The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh**

No Shame, USA  
DVD Region 1

Shameless Films UK  
DVD Region 0. Blu-ray Region Free

**The Violent Professionals**

Vipco, UK  
DVD, Region 2

Alan Young Pictures, Italy  
DVD, Region 2

**Torso**

Arrow Films, UK, USA  
Blu-ray Region A, B.

Anchor Bay, USA  
DVD, Region 0

Blue Underground, USA  
DVD, Region 0. Blu-ray, Region A, B

Visual Stomp, Australia  
DVD, Region 0

Another World Entertainment,  
Scandinavia  
DVD, Region 0

Shameless Films, UK  
DVD, Region 0. Blu-ray, Region Free

X-Rated Kult, Germany  
DVD, Region 2

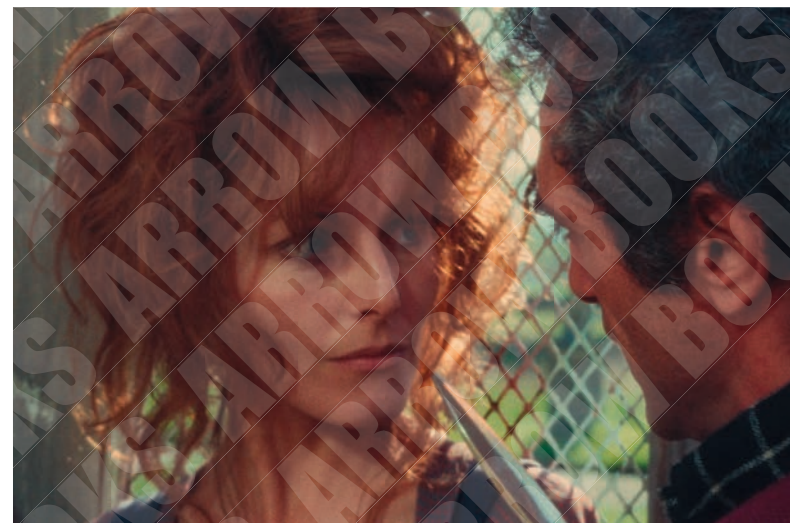
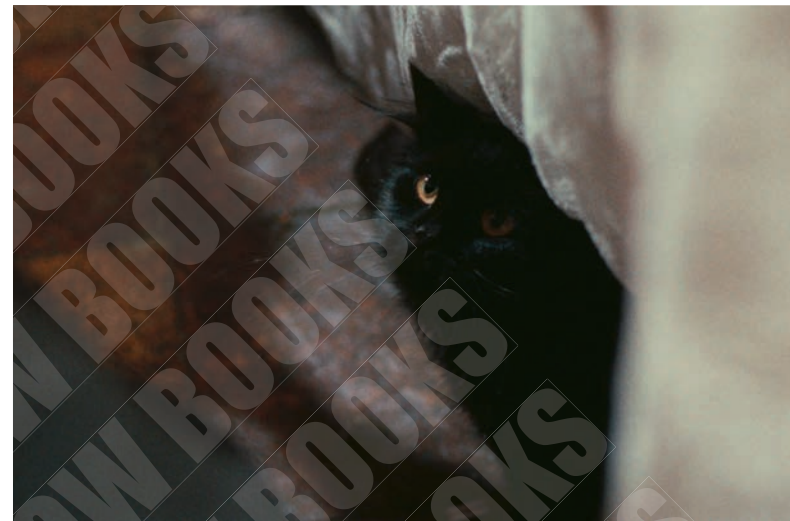
Arrow Films, USA  
Blu-ray, Region A

**Uppercut Man (The Opponent)**

MYA Communications, USA  
DVD, Region 0

**Your Vice is a Locked Room and  
Only I Have the Key**

No Shame, USA  
DVD, Region 0





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