Film noir has gained a significant degree of visibility in recent years, both through the revival of interest in the work of such major practitioners of the form as Robert Siodmak, Jacques Tourneur, Edgar Ulmer, and Billy Wilder as well as through analyses of the films of more contemporary directors who have worked in the genre, such as Robert Altman, Lawrence Kasdan, Arthur Penn, and Roman Polanski. Ironically, despite the fact that the lonely, dark streets down which the genre’s beleaguered protagonists must walk are distinctly American, the form’s very name comes to us from France, specifically having been coined by the film critic Nino Frank. Frank first employed the phrase in a 1946 article, “Un Nouveau Genre Policier: L’adventure Criminelle,” and took it in turn from the generic title assigned by the noted publisher Gallimard for their paperback series of novels of detection, série noire.¹ The genre then received its initial extended discussion with the publication of Raymond Borde and Etienne Caumeton’s groundbreaking study Panorama du film noir Americain (1941-1953).² The title stuck and later became imported by American critics.

The relationship between generic film narratives produced in America and Europe remains a complex one, particularly when those films emerge from an explicitly commercial, one might even say exploitation, market. By doing so, they contravene the ordinarily clear if misleading determination of the boundaries between American and European cinema. As Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau write in their introduction to a collection of essays devoted to popular European films, “Part of the existing map of cinema is coloured in quite clearly: there is America, which is Hollywood, which is popular entertainment, and there is Europe, which is art.”³ A consequence of this largely arbitrary set of distinctions remains the marginalization, if not obliteration, of that work produced on the continent that lies outside the European art film tradition. Of course, as Dyer and Vincendeau admit, the very term popular European cinema reeks of ambiguity, for the geographical terrain distinguished by the term “Europe” undergoes constant transformation, and the term “popular” begs the question of popular to whom and for what reason? Furthermore, in a period of cultural history in which the hegemony of cultural materials produced in the United States threatens the very existence of virtually every other national culture, very few clear characteristics enable one to determine just what might constitute a manifestation of popular European cinema. Dyer and Vincendeau nonetheless isolate three crucial features of European cinemas:

European cinemas do have three things in common at the level of their situations: first, the problem of exportability; second, the national standing of high culture, repository of official national identity and the nation’s international face; third, not being Hollywood.⁴

However, while these films may distinguish themselves as not being Hollywood in origin, they do draw upon narrative forms and stylistic conventions that the American cinema has established over a period of years. Certainly the popularity of film noir in any number of national cultures illustrates that a fascination with the literature and cinema of detection remains relatively universal. The work of such noteworthy French directors as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, who critiqued the genre in works like Shoot the Piano Player (Tirez sur le pianiste [1962]) and Band of Outsiders (Bande a part [1964]), as well as that of less well-known figures such as Jean Pierre
Melville (who chose the maritime novelist’s name as his cinematic nom de plume and gave the visual and verbal tropes of detective fiction a Gallic accent) have obscured the fact that the West Germans and Italians share the French predilection for this narrative form, and have amassed a body of films rich in style and ample in substance that deserve, and have yet to receive, the kind of attention and adulation heretofore lavished on the film noir.

The West German crime narratives draw their name from the line of paperbacks known as Taschenkrimi, the paperback form of the Kriminalroman, that the society read in prodigious numbers, and of which quite a few were written by British crime specialists Edgar Wallace and his son, Bryan Edgar. From 1959 to 1972, more than forty West German films were adapted from their work, the majority produced by either Rialto Film, a production company run by Horst Wendlandt and Preben Philipsen, or by the Central Cinema Comp. (CCC), headed by the better known Artur Brauner. As a body they have come to be referred to on the part of many non-German critics by the abbreviated designation Krimi, a diminutive of what, more accurately, would have to be labeled the Wallace-Krimi. Likewise, in Italy a series of crime novels was published, which no one writer dominated the way it was the case in West Germany; due to the series’ uniform yellow covers, the books and the films which either were adapted from, or merely influenced by, them have come to be known pluralistically as Gialli. Beginning in 1962 and continuing, with alternating periods of greater and lesser volumes of production to the present day, over sixty Giallo features have been released, the most prolific or influential practitioners of the form including Mario Bava, Dario Argento, and Sergio Martino.

Both the Krimi and the Giallo genres demonstrate a distinct awareness on the part of their creators of preexistent cinematic traditions both internationally and within the film-historical context of their own national cinemas. The resulting films are, in effect, self-conscious acts of bricolage. Each ransacks established visual and narrative codes and interpolates elements from them, giving each work a distinct intertextual dimension. The Krimis specifically adapt the visual strategies of German Expressionism—Fritz Lang’s body of work being the dominant but not single influence—and those practices that stretch back to the early silent German crime films of Joe May or Harry Piel, to each adaptation of Wallace, father and son. The Gialli constitute a more varied and stylistically heterogeneous form. Their visual and thematic excesses result from the aesthetic/economic demands of the Italian commercial industry—specifically its dependence upon predetermined generic tropes and types commonly referred to as filone—and its tendency to engage in technical or narrative experimentation as a response to market forces which encourage violent excess and visual bravado as convenient means of capturing a public easily wearied by standard cinematic fare.

If the Krimi and Gialli resemble one another in their interpolation of established national and extranational visual and narrative codes, they differ in how their detective figures engage in a search for the truth, as well as in the ways in which the films resolve their often concatenated plots. The Krimi scenarios most commonly focus upon a desire for revenge or an urge to exert individual and excessive power, the murderer or arch criminal in each case carrying out his or her deeds in order to assuage some humiliation suffered in the distant past, or assert their control over others in the future. The uncovering of that figure’s identity at the narrative’s conclusion more often than not resolves any anxieties or ambiguities that might complicate the plot. In effect, the Krimi allows the viewer to be only temporarily mystified. Faith in the dependability of the social order which the detective figure—often a police inspector—embodies remains unquestioned. The Gialli, on the other hand, often tend to center their mysteries on the fluctuating substance of the social contract—lovers or
mates engaging in harassment or worse of their traumatized partners—or the undependable nature of human sense perception. The detective figure in a number of these films must uncover something he or she fails to see, hear, or understand, yet resolution of that epistemological conundrum fails fully to restore either the viewers' or the characters' faith in a coherent moral or perceptual universe. Further, several of the Gialli, particularly the recent films of Dario Argento and Michele Soavi, incorporate a supernatural dimension and thereby imply that crime may be precipitated by malign or extrahuman forces that we can neither hope to understand nor alleviate. Although some Krimis also incorporate what appear to be forces of supernatural origin, unlike in the case of the Italian films, in most Krimis, those forces, like the narratives' bogus epistemological mystification, are neutralized if not eradicated by the films' conclusions. I will, in the remainder of this essay, examine the production history, visual codes, and the processes of deduction exhibited by the Krimi and Giallo films. Space will not permit any but the most cursory analysis of a few selected films, which should nonetheless illustrate that these too little known genres deserve the kind of exact and detailed study that film noir has received in recent years.

Edgar Wallace (1875-1932) must be counted among the most prolific writers of popular fiction, one of whom Julian Symons calls the "Big Producers." His list of works includes 170 novels, 17 plays, and hundreds of short stories. This prodigious output was the result of consciously directed energies—Wallace is reputed to have written one of his most famous plays, The Ringer (1926), in fourteen hours over the course of two days—but also of deliberate, overweening haste. Few scholars of popular fiction have argued that Wallace's novels bear the imprint of careful and deliberate artistry, as they were routinely composed in nine days apiece. Whatever the substance of his skills, Wallace's fame was at one time as prodigious as his output; in his native England in 1928, one quarter of all books manufactured in the country, exclusive of bibles and textbooks, bore Wallace as author. That popularity spread abroad, too, for between 1922-32, one-quarter million copies of his works annually were read by Americans. It should therefore come as no surprise that his event-filled, breathless narratives found their way to the screen. As early as 1916 cinematic adaptations appeared, but ten of these early features appear to be lost; the first readily available adaptation is an American serial, The Green Archer (1925, Spencer Gordon Bennett), but soon, in England and on the continent, other works were released. Germany in particular became one of the writer's major marketplaces, as it was later for his son, Bryan Edgar. In sum, with their work having served as the source for over 150 films, the two may well be among the most often filmed authors in history.

Wallace saw and took advantage early on of the opportunities film offered for the merchandising

of his material. While the Americans might have been the first to adapt one of his stories, the British took on the task soon thereafter in 1929. *The Ringer* was released by the British Lion Company, founded in 1927 with the object in mind of adapting Wallace’s work, and on whose board of directors the author was actively involved. Wallace, however, seems to have been dissatisfied with the experience, for he traveled to Hollywood in November of 1931 in order to break into the American film market, only to die of pneumonia three months later after completing the screen story that would become *King Kong* (1933, Merian C. Cooper & Ernest B. Schoedsack). The British films adapted from his work in the 1930s as a group emphasize only a portion of the writer’s macabre and overactive imagination, focusing on the more sedate and at times imperialistic strain in his work. While not mysteries, perhaps the best known Wallace adaptations of the decade remain the Paul Robeson “White Man’s Burden” vehicle *Sanders of the River* (1935, Zoltan Korda) and *The Four Just Men* (1939, Walter Forde). The latter, an adaptation of Wallace’s first major work and one of the few to remain in print, dispenses with most of the novel’s plot, save for its depiction of a clandestine body of private agents of vengeance against untried villains, and transforms it into an encomium to the British Empire, which the eponymous heroes save from the unnamed but clearly European forces of the Fifth Column who endeavor to sabotage the Suez Canal.

The British mysteries of this period, on the other hand, tend to lack the kind of hysterical narrative energy that attracted the West Germans in the later films, and are typified by the adaptation of *The Terror* (1938, Richard Bird) in which the stereotypical comedy of a dipsomaniacal character (the chief policeman in disguise) supersedes the murderous exploits of the title villain. *Dark Eyes of London (The Human Monster)* (1939, Walter Summers), on the other hand, engages in the kind of horror more typical of Wallace’s work in general and the American cinema of the period—a point underscored by the performance of Bela Lugosi as both the chief villain and his sedate alter ego, the director of a home for the blind. The other chief body of British adaptations of Wallace material came in the early 1960s when the Anglo-Amalgamated company distributed some thirty-nine hour-long second features produced by Stuart Levy and Nat Cohen’s Meron Park company; described by Robert Murphy as “drab, low-key little films, which, better than any documentary, chart the progress from austerity to tacky affluence,” they transfer the focus from the drawing room to the demimonde of the criminal classes.7

The West German interest in Wallace began in the early days of sound, before which such silent film icons as Stuart Webbs, Joe Debs, Dr. Mabuse, and Harry Piel laid the groundwork for a national fascination with crime. *Der Zinker (The Squeaker)* (1931, Mac Fric & Karel Lamac) and *Der Hexer (The Ringer)* (1932, Karel Lamac) seem to be the first sound adaptations of his work in the German cinema, but the genre did not take hold until the release of *Der Frosch mit der Maske (The Face of the Frog)* (1959, Harald Reinl). It remained active until 1972, although its height occurs in 1962, when seventeen adaptations appeared within a single year. Part of the reason the *Krimi* took hold at this point in time might well have been the return of Fritz Lang to West Germany for the filming of his last pictures: the two-part 1958 release *Der Tiger von Eschmapur (The Tiger of Eschmapur)* and *Das indische Grabmal (The Hindu Tomb)*, and the final installment of his Mabuse trilogy, *Die tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse (The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse)* (1960). These works deliberately reanimated visual and narrative tropes of the German Expressionist heyday, the former being a remake of a film Lang wrote for Joe May in 1921, and the latter an updating of an established icon. These films were produced by Artur Brauner’s CCC Films, one of the major producers of *Krimis*, and photographed by Richard Angst and Karl Loeb, who would each later lens a number of them.
In the catalog to a recent exhibition of German crime films, Fritz Gottler writes of how the anarchic energies released by the genre always attracted the German public: "The detective film, in general, thus developed its own subversive form of explosive power, presenting both the apotheosis and the collapse of middle-class culture." However, not every German crime picture embodied such a subversive ideology; for every well-known film of substance like Lang's M (1931) or the virtually invisible but far from inconsiderable Die Nacht der 12 (1949, Hans Schweikart), there appeared countless trivial if entertaining crime narratives, amongst them any number of Krimis. The best of the Krimis combine established visual and narrative conventions with the more transgressive sense that, even if the villain might get his just rewards in the end, the world remains a disturbing and dangerous place. In Norbert Grob's words, the best Krimis

play a double-edged game with what happens on the film's surface and what seems to have happened. What glimmers through is the level at which the images take on a third meaning that tell it like it really is: images of the crude and the garish, of the sardonic and the shocking. These crime films punch a hole in the accustomed order of things. They challenge us to see the world differently, to get away from habitual ways of thinking, to clear the way for imagination."

The less successful Krimis, on the other hand, remain, Grob asserts, "carnivals of crime," merely "pure country fair fun" in which "the theatrics aren't hidden" but accentuated, reminding most intelligent viewers how foolish and debased the crime form can be. In sum,

The special ambiance of the series was calculated, a unique combination of crime and horror, a bag of adolescent magic tricks. What counted was the atmospheric setting: the dimly perceived threat that undermines every sense of security, the half-darkness, all of which contributed to an eerie mood of nightmare and terror."

That eerie mood furthermore illustrates the degree to which the Krimis carried over from German Expressionism, particularly from the works of the silent period, the practice of Stimmung or mood. In the hands of such prominent Krimi directors as Alfred Vohrer or Harald Reinl (the best practitioners of the genre), standardized generic tropes help to conjure up a bleak and uncertain universe, while on the part of less proficient filmmakers, Stimmung becomes an altogether abbreviated and mechanical use of a once sophisticated technique. For Lang and others, Stimmung was not an intermittent presence in a film, a matter of localized, accidental effects, but, in the words of Lotte Eissner, "the eternal, permanent meaning of facts and objects." In the Krimis, Stimmung remains by and large an expedient device in
the construction of an ersatz environment. The films retain Wallace's English settings but do not appear to include location footage, and the directors therefore conjure up in the studio, with the help of some efficient fog machines and a well-selected library of stock footage, a cliché England of dimly light streets, fussing Scotland Yard inspectors, and the lavishly decorated country homes of a decadent upper class. The narratives routinely shift between the offices of the police, the homes of the wealthy, and the streets of a disreputable demimonde—customarily identified with Soho and which truly comes alive, visually or otherwise, only once darkness falls. Exaggerated and excessive camera angles, chiaroscuro lighting, and a breathless editing style thereafter disorient the viewer. Nonetheless, whatever Stimmung the Krimis might convey remains as much of a ruse as the red herrings of their plots. Once the obfuscation of that plot is removed, the Stimmung disappears as well. This can best be seen in Das Phantom von Soho (The Phantom of Soho [1963, Franz Joseph Gottlieb]) where the camerawork of Richard Angst incorporates the sinuous point-of-view tracking shot we currently associate with the murderers featured in slasher narratives, as well as a number of artfully constructed but thematically vacant images of sinister derelicts who inhabit the district after which the film is titled. Like them, the images seem little more than window dressing, visual static that temporarily detracts from, but never completely detrails, the forward trajectory of the plot.

The supernatural dimension of the Krimi is as vacuous as these vacuous images. What at first appear in the narratives to be manifestations of extra-human forces soon become yet one more red herring meant to overdetermine the plot. This can be observed in one of the characters of one of the best Krimis, Die toten Augen von London (Dead Eyes of London [1961, Alfred Vohrer]). Henchman to the bogy minister, Reverend Dearborn, and leader of the "blind killers of London," Blind Joe (Adi Berber) memorably contributes to the film's Stimmung: corpulent but powerful, his burly, almost anthropoidal physique seems at once less and more than human. However, he is disposed of by Dearborn partway through the film, dumped unceremoniously into a garbage pit as if he were a noteworthy but finally dispensable element to the narrative. An even more curious instance of the Krimi's inclusion of the spurious supernatural is the hirsute butler Bhag in the Der Rächer (The Avenger [1960, Karl Anton]). Originally an actual orangutan in Wallace's source novel The Hairy Arm (1925), Bhag in the film is not only depicted as a conventional monster figure, but also as the racist embodiment of degenerate otherness, "an animal from the jungle," as the hero contemptuously dubs him. Thick black hair covers Bhag's anthropoidal features. He grunts rather than speaks, and his eyes bulge stereotypically in moments of distress or when he threatens the heroine. Ultimately, neither Bhag nor his master, suspects in a series of decapitation murders, are the culprits. The servant saves the heroine he earlier threatened and executes the villain with the very guillotine with which the latter had committed the murders.

However, in the end, human revenge and not any extrahuman or supernatural force remains the dominant motive generating the Krimis' narratives. The killers act as they do more often than not to ameliorate wrongs committed against them or others in the past, or to act out insane scenarios existing exclusively in their own minds. The former is the case in Das Phantom von Soho whose murderer turns out to be a woman who kills a series of men who once sexually humiliated her. (The female killer is a rare culprit in the Krimis, even though they include any number of women implicated in crime.) A murderer with a more maniacal modus operandi appears in Der Rächer and Das Ungeheuer von London City (The Monster of London City [1964, Edwin Zbonek]). In the first film, the killer perpetuates the executions of an ancestor who operated the guillotine during the French Revolution, while the second
film's killer murders prostitutes in imitation of Jack the Ripper to avenge his father's syphilitic dementia. However, once they are captured or killed, the disorder perpetuated by these characters disappears with them. Even when the identity of the culprit might appear to tear at the ideological fabric of society, the conclusion indicates that the substance of that fabric remains intact. This can be observed in Der Henker von London (The Mad Executioners [1963, Edwin Zbonek]) in which a police inspector, driven mad by the death of his sister at the hands of a sex maniac, sets up a kangaroo court that locates, tries, and executes elusive criminals. Caught in the end by his own fellow officers, the inspector dies while the criminal activity he illegally attempted to halt continues. Unsurprisingly, therefore, a vast number of Krimis end either with the romantic alliance of the hero and heroine, or with a humorous tag line. In Der Henker von London, despite the fact that the inspector, the film's hero, proves to one's genuine surprise to be the villain, the last shot remains a deep focus composition in which his best friend follows after the inspector's girlfriend, whose hand, one must assume, now remains his. Thoughts of the import of the inspector's homicidal actions disappear as the final credits roll. At the same time, the suggestion of a romance does not completely remove the unsettling revelation that a policeman is the villain of the piece, and instead confirms Grob's observation that "These films may verge on nonsensical sleight of hand, but yet they also document something beyond the purely trivial."

To understand the Italian Giallo film, one must turn to the prior history of that national cinema but, instead, to a brief consideration of how the commercial cinema works in Italy—specifically the manner in which the formulae, or filone, that constitute the narrative and cinematographic elements of various generic models are amalgamated into novel combinations to satisfy the desires of the domestic film-viewing audience. As Christopher Frayling has stated in his analysis of the Spaghetti Western, the production practices of the commercial cinema in Italy lead producers to seize upon whatever genre attracts the greatest immediate consumer interest at any one time, and then to saturate the marketplace with product in that genre until interest in it dissipates and another type of story takes its place. Admittedly, this may not seem as a practice to differ from the form of film production in any other national context. However, as Frayling states, what sets Italy apart is its filmmakers' readiness not only to mix together seemingly disparate genres, but also their ingenious invention of ever more outrageous plots designed to fulfill consumer demand. As Frayling explains, "[p]erhaps the most crucial side-effect of this ... production system ... was a certain competitiveness between rival production companies working within a given genre, which in turn sometimes led to a type of internal pressure toward bizarre experimentation." In effect, a certain tendency toward excess is built into the very system—a tendency that has lead to frequent accusations of a lack of control, even of good taste, against any number of Italian commercial genres, including the Gialli—as in the criticism of William K. Everson, whose writings on the horror film indicate an attraction to the suggestion of carnage and not its actual display:

Italy's horror films ... have always had a rather unhealthy tendency towards the excesses of Grand Guignol, to dwelling on the detailed unpleasantries of death or torture. There has been an especial obsession with facial disfigurement, and an almost clinical attention to the methods by which it was achieved (a girl's head enclosed in a cage of live rats being quite typical). However, rather than through an emphasis on the presumed excess in the Gialli, the films might more productively be examined in the context of specific market and production forces.
Another study of the Spaghetti Western by Christopher Wagstaff underscores and expands upon Frayling’s analysis. Wagstaff explains that the Italian exhibition system was for many years built upon three tiers: the *prima visione* associated with the urban middle class audience, and the *seconda* and *terza visione* associated with the regional provinces. Much of a film’s gross receipts came from the *terza visione* in which a film might well be shown over a period of several years. This occurs in a system that typically produced too many films at any one time, few of which could possibly receive adequate exhibition or advertisement. Therefore, little impetus existed to push for quality if the chances that a fine film would draw attention in an overcrowded market were minimal. To appeal to their long-term market, the *terza visione*, genre-based filmmakers therefore stressed the three elements that most drew that public: laughter, thrills, and titillation. “Italian formula cinema,” Wagstaff writes, “simply juggled with plot items to produce the required recipe that would stimulate the appropriate number and kind of these ‘physiological’ responses.” Repetition was not in and of itself a problem, so long as enough variation was included not to annoy the regional audience. This led to the use of genre forms, the *filone*—a type of standardized, yet sufficiently variegated product. “The audience of a given cinema,” Wagstaff observes, was being offered a nightly appointment where it would receive a series of discrete gratifications that were part of a longer-term sequence ... Hollywood marketed genres which were constituted by the meanings of whole films; Italy marketed *filoni* made up of items.

Account was also taken of that audience’s viewing practices, which resembled the kind of attention ordinarily given to television. Filmgoing serves not just an aesthetic but also a social function to the *terza visione* audience; their attention drifts with the level of their interest, and narrative cues, which include everything from musical scores to moments of violent spectacularity, serve as means to prod the public’s errant consciousness.

The *Giallo* then is but one of many *filoni* that the Italian film industry has developed. The first example of the genre is arguably Mario Bava’s *La Raggaza che sapevo troppo* (*The Evil Eye* [1962]). In it, an emotionally distraught young American woman, traumatized by the death of her aunt and displaced in an alien culture, observes what appears to be the murder of a young woman on the Spanish Steps. When no body can be found, the woman finds her sanity questioned. The emphasis upon mistaken perception set a narrative pattern for many examples of the genre, while its visual style fully is instituted in Bava’s *Seidonne per l’assassino* (*Blood and Black Lace* [1964]). The film features Bava’s “hard, lacquered style with its penchant for coldly sadistic oddities and laconically blood-bolstered shocks.” The film’s plot (at once logically thin and yet chockful with action and red herrings) takes a backseat to its lush,
baroque, color-drenched visuals and forces one's attention upon the enactment by a featureless killer of a series of excessively brutal crimes. Little time or narrative focus is given over to the process of deduction; no policemen solves the crimes, which come to an end only when the killers destroy one another in a fit of jealousy. Bava's work in the Giallo form so fully abandons the demands of logic or psychological determination to the flow of elaborate imagery that his later entry in the genre, Ecologia del delitto (Twitch of the Death Nerve aka Bay of Blood aka Carnage aka Last House on the Left Part II [1971]) obliterates any need for the process of deduction, as each killer is in turn killed, leaving thirteen bodies at the film's conclusion, and no survivor to profit from or be blamed for any of the murders.

The Giallo form continues, unlike the Wallace Krimei, up to the present day, though the output of the genre has diminished in recent years (the highest number of pictures was produced in the 1970s). Many involve intricate plots of cross and double- or triple-cross, with a narrative structure akin in many aspects to that of Henri-Georges Clouzot's Les Diaboliques (1955). Like Clouzot's film, the Gialli plots depict mates or lovers at odds with one another, and engaged in various forms of deceit and malevolence to recover inheritances or positions of power. A quintessential example is Lo strano vizio della Signora Wardh (Blade of the Ripper aka Next aka The Next Victim [1970]), directed by one of the most prolific Gialli creators, Sergio Martino. In it, the wife of a diplomat believes herself to be pursued by a sex maniac plaguing her town. In the end, her genuine antagonists prove to be her husband, ex-lover, and present romantic interest, all of whom have conspired to recover her wealth. The plot becomes further confused by the actions of the actual sex maniac, whose crimes the three conspirators use as a cover for their own—a narrative strategy common to the genre.

While the narrative complexity and thematic dislocation of Martino's film typifies most Gialli, some of the most interesting and cinematically substantial works in the genre were written and directed by Dario Argento. He, like Bava (whom he claims as a principal influence), relishes upsetting an audience through deliberate epistemological confusion, and tantalizing them with an emphasis upon visual style rather than narrative coherence. To an even greater degree than Bava, Argento engages in deliberate and excessive manipulation of image, sound, and screen space. His films don't, in the words of Maitland McDonagh, his principal American critic, "so much walk as caper on the wild side." Proving the point, one often finds it altogether difficult to account for the camera's point of view in many of his films. At times, Argento employs the camera's point of view as a means of audience identification with the actions of a character, most often the killer. Just as often, however, the camera appears to possess a consciousness of its own—as during a bravura two-and-a-half minute tracking shot in Sotto gli occhi dell'assassino (Tenebrae aka Unsane [1982]). The shot begins outside the apartment house of two young women who will shortly be killed. One initially assumes the camera's point of view parallels that of the killer, until the point of view becomes other-than-human as the camera airily surmounts the walls, roof, and opposite side of the building to then resume its original position. An act, it would seem, of bravura for bravura's sake, and not the only such gesture in Argento's work.

Most often Argento's Giallo narratives center around a detective figure who impotently attempts to comprehend something he has seen or heard, and they routinely deny the kind of narrative closure that typifies the Krimei. This pattern of epistemological confusion begins with his first work L'uccello dall'occhi di cristallo (The Bird with the Crystal Plumage [1970]). Here, a writer observes a woman being attacked inside a closed art gallery, only to be trapped himself between the glass doors of its entrance when he attempts to rescue her. The puzzle referred to in the title is that of an obscure sound heard in the background of a threatening
phone call, and whose identification eventually helps to solve the mystery. Similar puzzles appear in other Argento works. An image left on the retina of a dead woman holds the key to the crimes committed in Quattro mosche di velluto grigio (Four Flies on Gray Velvet [1971]). Profondo rosso (Deep Red aka The Hatchet Murders [1975]) depicts the frustrating quest of a pianist who observes the attack on a woman in her apartment. When he enters to save her, he sees in passing what eventually proves to be the face of the murderer reflected in a hallway mirror. The pianist is played by David Hemmings, the star of Michelangelo Antonioni’s Blow Up [1966], and Profondo rosso shares with the latter a fascination with the potential indecipherability of all phenomena. Both films, and most of Argento’s works to date, are “informed by an obsessive interest in the process of representation, a fascination rooted in inherent mistrust of the veracity of the picture traditionally worth a thousand words.”

The Giallo, like the Krimi, exhibits an interest in the supernatural, but, unlike the West German works, rarely treats it as mere narrative subterfuge. In Bava’s La Ragazza che sapevo troppo, a physician suggests to the distraught heroine that her observation of what she believes to have been a murder may in fact be an instance of metapsychosis, of a “resurrection of the memory,” allowing her to relive a murder committed on the same spot years before. However, the plot reveals that it is the murderer who is trapped by memory, as she committed the earlier crime and acted out the more recent killing in the same place. Argento, on the other hand, takes the supernatural more seriously. Two of his films, Suspiria (1976) and Inferno (1980), are not really Gialli, but out and out horror films that depict the malign destructiveness of the demonic “three Mothers.” At the same time, Argento carries this interest in the supernatural back over to his recent Gialli—as in Phenomena (aka Creepers [1985]), where a young woman able to communicate telepathically with insects connects in a similar manner with a necrophiliac killer and eventually calls upon those same insects to destroy him. One of Argento’s most recent gialli, Opera (1988) features a flock of prescient ravens, cast in a production of Verdi’s Macbeth, who oversee an attack by the film’s murderer and are then latter attacked by him. When the opera’s director releases the birds who he believes will identify the killer, they not only do so but engage in vengeance against him by pecking out his left eye.

Argento’s protégé Michele Soavi shares his fascination with the supernatural and has incorporated it in all of his three films to date. His first work, Aquarius (Deliria aka Stagefright [1987]), depicts a faceless killer who, in his successful execution of virtually all of the members of a show troupe trapped in their theater, appears to possess extrahuman powers,
but proves in the end to be all too human and mortal. Soavi’s successive features, The Church (1988) and La setta (The Sect aka The Devil’s Daughter [1991]), incorporate visual and narrative strategies germane to the Giallo, with the powers behind the mayhem being of supernatural origin. In the case of the former, an unleashed demon takes over and/or obliterates the visitors to and directors of a medieval church, while the latter film details a series of gruesome murders that prove to be the precipitating force behind the near resurrection of a malign deity. Increasingly, Soavi’s work draws upon a dream-like sensibility that connects images less on the basis of narrative logic and more as the result of an associative fusion of sound and image. Soavi has, like his predecessors in the popular Italian cinema, taken resources of any number of filone to create works that increasingly display a sensibility uniquely his own, and it is a shame that none of his films have appeared on commercial screens in America, but are accessible only on video tape.

Finally, it must be stressed that while most, if not nearly all, of the Krimis resolve their narratives without any residual disquietude, such is not the case most commonly in the Gialli. The final sequences of Argento’s work in particular are fraught with irresolution, leaving the audience to feel no sense of closure even if the criminal has been apprehended and punished or killed. In Profondo rosso, the killer is accidentally decapitated, yet the final shot indicates the pianist/detective’s features reflected in the pool of blood left in the wake of the killer’s death—arguably an indication of some identity now shared by the two characters. This mood of irresolution receives its most heightened expression in Sotto gli occhi dell’assassino. Here, the investigative figure, a writer of detective fiction, not only finds and then kills the film’s initial murderer (who is himself driven to his crimes in part by the writer’s work), but subsequently takes on the murderer’s identity in order to kill several more characters (including the chief investigator of the crimes), only to fake his own suicide and be accidentally killed in the final moments of this most distressing of all of Argento’s films. As a chilling commentary on the narration, the final shot of Sotto gli occhi dell’assassino shows the female protagonist screaming, her agony echoing over the final credits.

In conclusion, if film noir has attracted its share of critical attention, it is now time for the Krimi and the Giallo to receive their due share of study. All three genres offer rich material for narrative, visual, ideological, and psychological analysis. In part, the critical avoidance of the Krimi and the Giallo might be, particularly in the latter’s case, a function of the extremity of the violence they contain and the degree of misogyny and sadism they depict. However, it must be admitted that it is the “raw pathology” they represent that constitutes a significant portion of their fascination. The need to satisfy the easily jaded tastes of the terza visione constituency leads readily to an instinctive abandonment of the rules of good taste or ideologically correct behavior. At times, the Giallo film in particular comes across as boorish and intellectually retrograde; more often, it circumvents the requirements of coherent narrative to construct a logic all its own. Whatever the case, resist all we wish, like the characters in a number of these films, we find ourselves, much against our wishes and better principles, compelled to follow the Krimi and Giallo narratives through to their resolution, no matter what ambiguous or unsettling revelations they might contain.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

Special thanks to Tim Lucas for his invaluable suggestions and to Marshall Christ, R. Galluci, Louis Paul, and Rick Sullivan for assistance in locating certain films discussed in this essay.

It needs to be added that many if not most of the films contained in the Krimi and Giallo
genres never came to these shores during their original period of release. Some later found their way to television, and many more first came to light during the early years of the video cassette explosion. Currently, however, the situation is much grayer and more complicated. Access to popular European cinema has become both easier and more difficult; furthermore, court decisions threaten to erode access altogether.

Most of the Krimi features discussed in this essay, as well as the 1930s British adaptations, are available from Sinister Cinema (P.O. Box 4369 Medford, Oregon 97501-0168). Few if any of the 1960s British adaptations have appeared anywhere: in theaters, on television, or on videotape. Most of the Giallo films are even more difficult to locate either through legal or extra-legal sources. Several of Argento’s films have never been released, in any format, in the United States, while others can be purchased or rented on tape only in incomplete, at times radically edited, versions. Bava’s and Soavi’s films, on the other hand, prove to be more accessible. However, virtually any other Giallo feature can only be purchased from the invaluable Video Search of Miami (P.O. Box 16-1917 Miami, Florida 33116). This company offers a staggering range of non-American commercial features on tape; their service offers duplication of commercial films protected under the “Harris Act” that permits any films unreleased in their original version in this country to be considered public domain.

In addition to the undependable availability of foreign commercial cinema in the United States, current copyright legislation under consideration in Washington could destroy this system altogether, for it proposes to renew copyright protection for any artifact regardless of whether someone applies for that protection or not. Under prior legislation, a work not submitted for protection at the end of its initial twenty-eighth year of existence would enter the public domain; under the law presently considered, it would receive another forty-seven years of protection. The concern, on the part of Sinister Cinema’s owner, Greg Luce and others, is that potentially all films, regardless of their present registration, would continue to be protected by this proposed law. If passed, it could mean that even films that lack owners, or anyone aggressively acting upon ownership, could languish and, in many cases, rot in vaults inaccessible to any user. Independent and exploitation films, particularly those imported from Europe, are clearly at risk. While the proposal aims to protect owners of works, it could, as a result, take many, many more works out of circulation for now and perhaps forever. It might also and most cruelly lead to their destruction through languishing in vaults on aging and untransferred film stock.

For more information on this issue, contact the Ad Hoc Committee for a Reasonable Copyright Term. Its directors are David Pierce, P.O. Box 2748 Laurel, Md. 20709 (FAX 301-604-6827) or Greg Luce, 2747 Shannesy Drive Medford, Or. 97504 (FAX 503-779-8650).

Finally, the available scholarship on popular European cinema is scant to say the least. Most of it is being conducted by aficionados in fanzines. Some of the best are:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>European Trash Cinema</th>
<th>Spaghetti Cinema</th>
<th>Westerns All’Italiana</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P.O. Box 5367</td>
<td>6635 DeLongpre #4</td>
<td>P.O. Box 25042</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kingwood, Texas 77325</td>
<td>Hollywood, Ca. 90028</td>
<td>Anaheim, Ca. 92825</td>
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For further information on genre-related fanzines, see my article “Fans’ Notes: The Horror Film Fanzine,” Literature/Film Quarterly 18.3 1990: 150-59.

4 Dyer and Vincendeau 10.
7 Robert Murphy, Sixties British Cinema (London: British Film Institute, 1992) 109.
9 Norbert Grob in Gottler 43.
10 Grob 48.
11 Grob 48.
13 Grob 51.
15 Frayling 213.
18 Wagstaff 253.
19 Wagstaff 254.
21 The most complete annotated filmography of Giallo films can be found in Craig Ledbetter’s index included in European Trash Cinema 2.6 (1992): 1-42. Unfortunately, the zine is produced in Florida, and all copies of this issue were destroyed in the recent hurricane. However, a printed copy can be purchased from the zine for ten dollars.
23 McDonagh 12.