

THE OPINIONATED GENTLEMAN

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Telos: You've been involved with Parliament first as advisor for the Antimafia Committee and then as a member of the Senate Justice Committee. Based on your experience, can Parliament still hope to *decide* national policies or does it have to resign itself to simply *ratifying* decisions taken elsewhere?

Gianrico Carofiglio: Undoubtedly Parliament's current role is much less effective; often, but not always, it seems to be little more than a notary certifying decisions taken elsewhere. This is just one aspect of the much more widespread crisis of representative institutions and, even more in general, the notion of democracy we are familiar with. It should be a key issue in the political debate, but very few people appear to really care.

Today you're a writer. Your debut novel book, *"Testimone Inconsapevole"* (Involuntary Witness) was published fifteen years ago. How has your career as a writer evolved since then?

That's a difficult question to answer. Probably because, apart from several obvious and perhaps predictable considerations, I don't have a proper answer. Let's say that as time went by I realised how fragile the mechanisms of writing, and those of the stories, are and were. I realised how inadequate I was. Like any other artistic medium, writing forces you to constantly face your own inability to succeed.

Your video-lessons about "How to avoid becoming a writer", published in *"I fiori del male"* website, are pitiless, direct but also very amusing. What inspired you??

It was a game. There are so many courses that teach you how to become a writer and, quite apart from the quality of the lessons (which in some cases are very good), I truly doubt they are actually very helpful. So I said to myself: why not develop a short, semi-serious, pill-size course to discourage people from aspiring to become a writer. I repeat. It's a game where I mix puns, quips, anecdotes and, obviously, some real advice about writing. But well hidden.

Your twelfth novel *"L'Estate fredda"* (The Cold Summer) is much more than a legal thriller. It takes place during a very controversial period in Italy's recent history and tackles some of the thorniest issues of the nineties. The book tells several stories using interrogation reports; it is a high-impact and also emotional form of narration. What prompted your choice?

I wanted to see whether it was possible to take the objectively ugly language used in judicial reports and turn it into a narrative and perhaps even literary material, but without changing the structure or the lexical features of the language used in those reports.

As the author of *"Manumitting Words"* I have to ask you one question. In today's political jargon the meaning of which words has been distorted the most? Is *Left* one of them?

Like many others, Left has been rather incorrectly used in the past few years. Especially in the surreal debate within the Democratic Party. More in general, in our so-called public debates people do nothing but use – and abuse – worn out and often toxic expressions and metaphors. Just think of how the noun *shame* and the reflexive verb *to be ashamed* are used only to refer to rivals; this indirectly reveals an incredible inability to admit one's mistakes and learn from them.

Speaking of *abused words*: based on your experience as a Senator, what's your opinion about the current relationship between public decision-makers and *lobbyists* in Italy? Is *lobbying* still an *ugly word*?

This country needs to find a modern way of regulating the work and role of lobbyists in order to eliminate the numerous opaque areas that exist in the relationship between lobbyists and political and administrative decision-makers. When this happens, the word will lose its negative aura.

Matteo Renzi's mandate as Party Secretary has come to an end; it's time to assess the work of his Secretariat. Of course, the triumphalist tones used before the referendum was defeated have been replaced by a bleak, gloomy outlook. We feel that neither are sensible. What do you think?

I think Renzi has great political talent, but often his style is disrespectful of his rivals. Although I don't like to use this expression, Renzi's style of command is *divisive*. Instead I like a leadership that is inclusive, capable of accepting and enhancing diversity. The Renzi government did many good things, but also made many serious mistakes. This isn't the time or place to list them. So I'll just give you two examples: the approval of the civil unions law was an excellent exercise in democracy and Renzi can rightfully take credit for it. Instead the abolition of the property ownership tax (IMU) on a person's

first house, even for the rich and very rich, was not only wrong, but also extremely unjust.

Magistrate, MP, and writer: would you like to also be considered a *committed intellectual*? Is there still space for this kind of figure in the political arena?

I dislike the label intellectual, much less committed intellectual. It's an expression that runs the risk of conjuring up self-satisfaction rather than civil and political commitment. I believe in the virtues of a frank public discussion considerate of the ideas of those who think differently. To take part in this discussion - which is actually the essence of democracy - you don't have to be an intellectual. All you need, so to speak, is to be a citizen in the full and, I'd say, noble meaning of the word.

Editorial

Gianrico Carofiglio immediately said: "I have the habit of giving very brief answers". And in fact the answers he gave during our interview are anything but long. They are as short as the answers we were given by **Giulio Andreotti** (about *politics*) or **Andrea Camilleri** (about *writing*). Nevertheless they are crystal-clear. Obviously it's impossible for a person to express himself in such a *Spartan* manner if he hasn't got very clear, well-thought out ideas. As Italians we are past masters at tortuous, arabesque expressions used to smokescreen lack of thought and reflection.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we put into practice the warning issued by Bernardine of Siena when he used to preach in the vulgate?: "*Speak clearly, so that whoever hears you is enlightened*". The reason why Gianrico Carofiglio uses words sparingly is because he loves them deeply. In this issue we touch on several topics we could divide into two, parallel, convergent and sometimes superimposable topics: politics and writing. *Is Parliament useful anymore? What does Left mean today? An assessment of Renzi's work as party secretary? Lobbying and Institutions. Your writing career. Choosing a very precise language for your novels.*

Carofiglio's answers clearly reveal what he thinks about the language used in the political arena. And he appreciates, when we speak about the *Left*, our reference to the title of his incredible book "*Manumitting word*," those words he hates to see abused, as they so often are in our political debates. As lobbyists we welcome his reference to the need for a modern regulation of our profession as a way to eliminate the negative aura that still surrounds the word lobbying. We're trying to do our part by participating in the debate on this issue (within the limits of our sphere of action).

But don't think that Carofiglio is just strictness and severity. His column, which we also discussed, is published in the magazine *I fiori del male*; it is a "must-read" and its title speaks for itself: *Come non diventare scrittori* (How to avoid becoming a writer). The description is even more priceless: "*Do you feel that you are destined to write an unforgettable novel? The bad news is that you will almost certainly fail to do so. Drop the idea*". When we try to pigeonhole him into a category of committed intellectuals Carofiglio becomes somewhat annoyed with us. He doesn't like either epithet. How can we blame him?



Gianrico Carofiglio, author, has worked for many years as a prosecutor specialised in organised crime. He was appointed advisor to the Antimafia Committee in the Italian Parliament in 2007 and served as Senator from 2008 to 2013. He was a member of the Senate Justice Committee and, amongst other things, a member of the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on the mafia phenomenon, putting his experience as a magistrate at the service of his Country. When his political commitments ended, he left the magistracy. He has this to say about his courageous decision: "It was a difficult but necessary decision because I felt I could no longer do my job with the necessary dignity and commitment, as I felt I had always done". He became a full-time writer. The list of his publications (not just novels) is endless. As is the list of his literary awards which you will find [here](#).

All we need to do is recall that his books have been translated into 27 languages and have sold five million copies in Italy.

His column *Come non diventare scrittori* (How to avoid becoming a writer) is extremely amusing. It's published in *I fiori del male*. His idea of earthly happiness? Many books (to read and write), many journeys and many meetings, good food and above all good wine, music, sports (*he practices karate*, Ed.) and lots of laughter (make other people laugh and laugh oneself). Born in Bari in 1961, he lives in the city with his wife and two children. Over 10,000 people follow him on @GianricoCarof. It's well worth it.