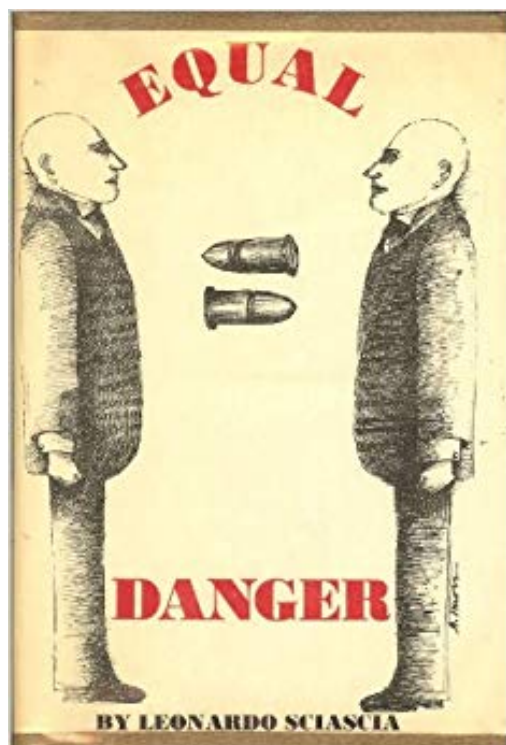


Equal danger *by* Leonardo Sciascia



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District Attorney Varga is shot dead. Then Judge Sanza is killed. Then Judge Azar. Are these random murders, or part of a conspiracy? Inspector Rogas thinks he might know, but as soon as he makes progress he is transferred and encouraged to pin the crimes on the Left. And yet how committed are the cynical, fashionable, comfortable revolutionaries to revolution? Or anything? Who is doing what to whom? *Equal Danger* is set in an imaginary country, one that seems all too real. It is the most extreme and gripping depiction of the politics of paranoia by Leonardo Sciascia, master of the metaphysical detective novel.



Reviews of the *Equal danger* by Leonardo Sciascia

Leceri

Thoughtful meditation on a society in turmoil by the always interesting Italian/Sicilian writer, Leonardo Sciascia. While the story (serial killings of judges in an unnamed European country) is a police procedural on the surface, it is more Sciascia's pessimistic commentary on Italian politics of the 1970s. You have to wonder if he would have written the book any differently in the present. Certainly, most other current writers about crime in Italy (Leon, Lucarelli, Dibdin, and to some extent, Camilleri) are generous with barbs about official corruption and the hopelessness of achieving real justice in a society that is completely cynical about how power is used and abused in the country.

In any event, the previous reviews for "Equal Justice" have pretty well nailed the essence. I would only add that Leonardo Sciascia is a pleasure to read in any format and this book is no exception.

Braswyn

A masterpiece.

Saberdragon

It's ok, PAC

Love Me

At its heart the English/American detective novel is a story about procedure. A crime takes place and the hero methodically advances step by step to unravel the mystery. The pleasure in these stories is observing the hero's clever reasoning as he solves the puzzle. The procedural detective story usually ends with evil being punished and balance returned to a decent world.

Leonardo Sciascia's *Equal Danger* comes from another tradition. The Latin Detective Novel has some procedural elements in it but the focus is a meditation on the nature of society. Sciascia begins his novel by quoting Rousseau, "...Tell me where on earth there exists a country where it is a crime to keep one's given word and to be generous, where the good man is despised and the wicked man is honored."

As a Sicilian, this world of corruption and silent complicity is all too familiar to Sciascia. On the surface, *Equal Danger* is a story about the search for a serial killer of judges and prosecuting attorneys. Below the surface, this is a metaphysical detective novel that tries to give insight into a failed civil society.

Although elegantly written, *Equal Danger* is not light reading. If one is interested in the Latin Detective Novel, read the more accessible Michael Dibdin, Rubem Fonseca or Paco Ignacio Taibo. Sciascia is more difficult to read and understand but he is well worth the effort.

Jockahougu

This slender novella is more of a parable about government power than it is a traditional mystery or thriller (in an afterword, Sciascia himself describes it as a fable about power anywhere in the world). Written in 1971, the story follows a policeman in charge of investigating the murders of two judges. The setting is an unnamed country where the government and the supposed opposition are merely two sides of the same coin, and is clearly based on the author's native Sicily. Inspector Rogas's investigations rapidly lead him into areas his superiors would rather he left alone, and he is repeatedly told to focus on pinning the blame on "revolutionaries". As more and more judges and prosecutors get killed, it becomes clearer and clearer that Rogas is being diverted for political motives. This surface story is merely a vehicle, however, for Sciascia's views on the limits of justice and reason. The Inspector is alone as a man of principles, and the unmistakable message is that only in the movies are principles and reason enough to carry the day. It's not the most gripping story, but for those of a metaphysical bent, it is full of intellectual diversions such as the question as to whether there can be such a thing as a judicial error, and discussions of Voltaire, Pascal, and others. The translation is crisp and lively, but the overall tone is so ponderous that it's not exactly the most engaging work.

Mr.Bean

it's the inside game, cold, sure, undistracted, forever closed off to us." Don Delillo

As the movie Casablanca draws to a close, Capt. Renault witnesses the shooting of a German officer by Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart). Capt. Renault turns to his minions and says "Major Strasser has been shot. Round up the usual suspects."

In Leonardo Sciascia's "Equal Danger" the command to round up the usual suspects comes at the beginning of the story. Local District Attorney Vargas has just been murdered and Inspector Rogas is put in charge of the investigation. Soon after Rogas begins this investigation two judges are murdered. Rogas senses that the victims and the murders are related but he is soon told to forget his investigation and round up the usual revolutionary suspects. Despite this admonition, and while paying lip service to his orders, Rogas' investigation continues. He identifies a suspect and sets out in pursuit.

Although this sounds like a fairly straightforward detective story, in the hands of Leonardo Sciascia it is anything but formulaic. Sciascia, born in Sicily in 1921, sets Equal Danger (as he states in a note to this book) in an imaginary country; "a country where ideas no longer circulate, where principles - still proclaimed, still acclaimed - are made a daily mockery." However, Sciascia also acknowledged that one can think of the story as being set in the Italy or Sicily of the 1970s. For Sciascia, the Italy (and Sicily) of the 1970s was a time when the center fell apart, when political instability proved a wonderful breeding ground for a dysfunctional triad of terror (the Red Brigades), crime (the Mafia) and corruption (the entire political and judicial system). It was a place where those three pillars of dysfunction seemed to share more common interests than differences and where cynical, if short-lived alliances amongst the power elite created the cold inside game that Delillo describes as a grand conspiracy.

Rogas is aware of the existence of the closed inside game and seems determined to beat it. He spots the surveillance placed on him and seems to believe his skeptical nature will keep him out of trouble. Rogas is clever, to be sure. He can cite Rousseau, Diderot, and Montaigne, much to the surprise of erudite witnesses seeking to speak down to a lowly inspector. But, as Sciascia writes of Rogas as the book progresses, "one can be cleverer than another, not cleverer than all others". The result of the investigation stunned me. I sat there reading and asked myself, "did Sciascia really do that?" I won't reveal a key plot element but simply say that this surprise took "Equal Danger" beyond the detective genre and into another realm of fiction altogether.

While "Equal Danger" begins like a straightforward detective story the reader is aware almost immediately that he/she will be taken down a less traveled road during the story. However, the path Sciascia does take truly took me by surprise. "Equal Danger", ultimately, is one of those few books I may enjoy reading again. Recommended. L. Fleisig

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