

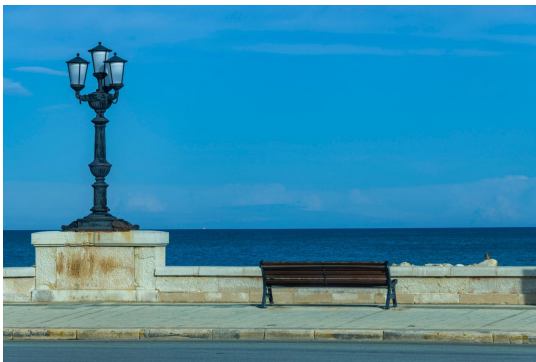
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## Mysteries: 'The Measure of Time' Review

Defending an ex-lover's son takes Guido Guerrieri into a maze of memories.



View of the Adriatic sea and the seashore of Bari, Italy.

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By [Tom Nolan](#)

April 23, 2021 9:46 am ET



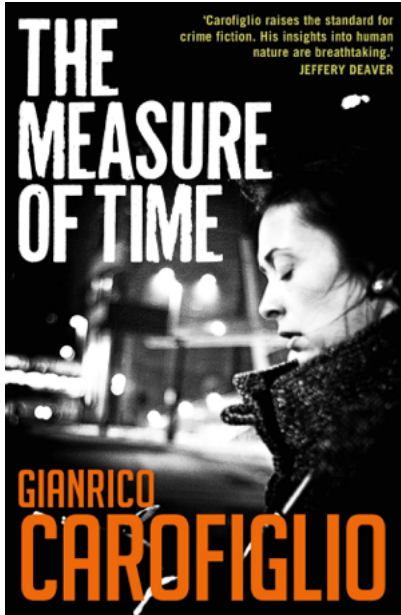
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Crime novelist Gianrico Carofiglio is a former anti-mafia prosecutor from southern Italy. His popular character Guido Guerrieri, based in the port city of Bari on the Adriatic Sea, is a principled and intelligent lawyer who is mad about books. Throughout “**The Measure of Time**” (**Bitter Lemon**, 285 pages, \$15.95), translated by Howard Curtis, the *avvocato* keeps a volume at hand to fill any downtime in court—Kafka’s aphorisms, for instance, or “Tristram Shandy,” which Guido judges “a very great novel of digressions.”

Fittingly, Mr. Carofiglio’s sixth series entry features a number of digressive sidebars, as when Guido implores a group of young magistrates to “take nourishment from good stories. . . . Because it’s the art of the storyteller that reminds us that there is not just one single answer to human dilemmas.”

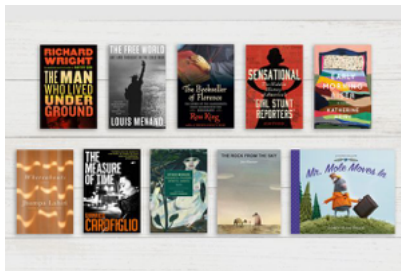
Guido himself is faced with a vexing problem when Lorenza, a woman he last saw three decades ago, asks him to represent her 25-year-old son, Iacopo, in the imminent appeal of his conviction for the murder of a drug dealer. Guido judges the young man’s previous counsel, who has recently died, to have been “an excellent professional, until disease had eaten his brain,” and there are signs the deceased gave Iacopo an inadequate defense. On the other hand, the evidence against the accused was strong, even if the police never considered the possibility of another culprit.



Guido accepts the case. As he and his team explore the evidence from every angle, the lawyer-narrator also reconstructs his faded memories of his affair with Lorenza, a time he sees in retrospect as “a mosaic of elusiveness,” a collection of meetings “shrouded in mystery.” Guido, given his past involvement with his client’s mother, strives for an emotionally unambiguous verdict: “I wanted [Iacopo] to be acquitted, and I wanted to know he was innocent. Both these things.”

Mr. Carofiglio, drawing on his own professional background, excels at describing everyday legal proceedings in ways that transfix the reader. Avvocato Guerrieri is merciless in his critiques of associates. Of a supercilious judge: “In all that he said, did and wrote—including his rulings—there was a hint of condescension.” Of an inferior advocate: “A person for whom the definition of idiot was needlessly charitable. I wouldn’t even have given him the role of a lawyer in a school play.” To his anxious client who asks, “But is there any hope?,” a sympathetic Guido answers: “We aren’t the favorite team in this championship, but we have a shot.”

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# #RivetingReviews: Max Easterman reviews THE MEASURE OF TIME

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## Gianrico Carofiglio

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This is Gianrico Carofiglio's latest outing for his campaigning lawyer, Guido Guerrieri from Puglia (his name implies 'warrior'). We left him in *A Fine Line* ([reviewed here](#) in May 2016) musing ruefully and bitterly on the ethics of the legal profession; now we find him world-weary and alienated even further from the routine of the courtroom and the processes of the law: just reading the paperwork fills him with 'a sense of nausea ... getting slowly but inexorably worse.' One should, he thinks, be able to die young, 'not in the sense of really dying, but ... stopping what we're doing when we realise we've exhausted our desire to do it ... Anything just to escape the grip of time.'

Into this maelstrom of self-doubt and ennui steps Lorenza Delle Foglie, a former lover, an older woman who initiated Guerrieri into great sex and great literature many years earlier, only to toss him aside and vanish from his life. Her reappearance disturbs him, and not only for the less-than-happy memories it awakens. She wants him to take on an appeal against her son's conviction for murdering a small-time drug dealer. The son's original lawyer – supposedly the best – has since died of an unspecified illness that affected his handling of the case.

Lorenza is convinced, indeed 'knows', her son is innocent; Guerrieri is not convinced: 'if we always believed the nearest and dearest, the crime of homicide...would vanish from the statistics.' And it's more than just a personal dilemma. A conference with his legal team convinces him that the case is going to be one of the most difficult of his career.

This double dilemma provokes some of Carofiglio's most profound reflections on the roles of judges, prosecutors, and especially defence counsel in the Italian system. In the guise of a lecture by Guerrieri to trainee magistrates, his philosophising, in which he quotes from Hobbes, Bentham and Norberto Bobbio, among many, suggest his arguments are just as relevant to any socio-legal system anywhere, including our own here in Britain. How is it, he wonders, that we give jurists the power to decide the 'freedom and destiny of another man'? Do they treat this power with circumspection? Or do people 'become files and papers, and in this there's an element of terrible brutality'. Jurists, he argues, have to spend much of their time doing things that seem to have little to do with the law, like 'reading good novels, watching good films ... because it's the art of the storyteller that reminds us that there is not just one single answer to human dilemmas. [They] are inevitably ambiguous.'

So legal conflicts often reflect moral dilemmas, and Guerrieri asks his audience if they've ever asked themselves which of our present-day beliefs will be rejected by future generations.

The relationship of these powerful arguments to the case at the centre of this story becomes clear: those who sit in judgement have to find solutions, 'but we need to be aware that the ability to find answers and solutions to conflicts is based on our ability to live with uncertainty, with the opaqueness of reality.'

So much, then, for the solemn pronouncement of 'guilty' or 'not guilty', whether by an Italian magistrate or a British jury! The problem is, according to Guerrieri, that all people tend to reject

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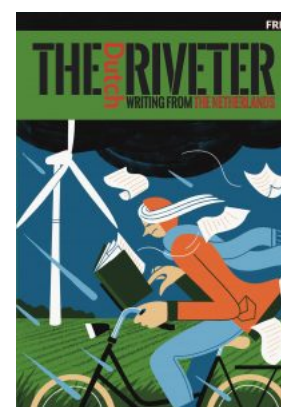
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the positions and opinions of others in situations of contention ... and none more so than Lorenza Delle Foglie. So he has to argue from her and her son's point of view, even though he knows it's as likely or not to be the wrong one.

This debate, like others in the earlier Carofiglio novels, makes up a significant part of the story – as always superbly translated by Howard Curtis; but it is no way a rambling monologue: without it, this book would not be the great read that it is. Carofiglio has a fine mind and a gift for storytelling, and this debate has a depth and relevance that underpins the narrative and leads in hindsight, inexorably, to the devastating conclusion.

Gianrico Carofiglio has of late, in addition to fiction, turned to political analysis in a series of published conversations with the journalist Jacopo Rosatelli. Their theme is based on George Orwell's division of political thinkers into 'the Utopian with his head in the clouds and the Realist with his feet in the mud'. It's manifest from Guerrieri's musings which of the two most corresponds to where Carofiglio stands. There is a feeling of finality in *The Measure of Time*, a sense that Guerrieri has reached a point of no return, which makes me wonder if he is about to take his final bow – or maybe he already has?

*Reviewed by Max Easterman*

### THE MEASURE OF TIME

by **Gianrico Carofiglio**

Translated by **Howard Curtis**

Published by **Bitter Lemon Press** (2021)

*Max Easterman is a journalist – he spent 35 years as a senior broadcaster with the BBC – university lecturer, translator, media trainer with 'Sounds Right', jazz musician and writer.*


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## An Italian feast

You'll want to savor every last morsel of this courtroom drama



[Jeffrey Mannix - 05/06/2021](#)

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Carofiglio had previously been a member of the Italian Senate and an anti-Mafia prosecutor in Bari, a port town on the coast of Puglia, where he prosecuted organized crime, corruption and the trafficking of people. *The Measure of Time*, which topped the best-selling list in Italy for three months and sold 350,000 copies, is the sixth in his Guido Guerrieri series that has sold, along with two stand-alone novels, over 5 million copies in Italy and an excess of 70,000 copies in English language editions. Carofiglio is of a special breed of suspense writer, in league with luminaries of a generation ago who didn't write for the film contract.

*The Measure of Time* is a courtroom drama, let's get that out of the way. But courtrooms and legal drama in Southern Italy are as different from the decorum of solicitors and the political correctness of English-speaking trials as Italian food differs from American fast food and chain restaurants. Passion is served up here, and while reading *The Measure of Time* you'll want to pace yourself and know when to stop to think over what you just devoured. This is high-calorie consumption you'll snarf up.

Carofiglio is a wordsmith, a maker of scenes stinking of important consequences, with subtle invitations to predict or judge. It really makes no sense to even briefly describe the legal foundations of investigation and courtroom drama, or even the characters in *The Measure of Time*. This is a book of words shaped so precisely you'll be able to guess the number of heartbeats the players thrum anytime they appear. Some writers take you where you've never been through the fabrication of crime and chase; some through the veil of mystery or the noise of adventure. Carofiglio orchestrates, or maybe the better word is choreographs. What better venue to whisper a challenge not to feel the passion of words demanding your attention than the oily engine room of criminal defense?

As mornings begin, Avvocato Guido Guerrieri, smartly dressed and groomed, arrives suitably late at the office of his law practice, checks with his wingman, Pasquale, about any breaking news, and is handed a note and an explanation that "... at seven there's a new client, a woman.

"Who is she? – with his usual slight aloofness, Pasquale leafed through the spiral notepad he always carries with him. Each one of

us has something that identifies us and with which, assuming we're aware of it, we identify. For Pasquale it's his notepad."

Delle Foglie, a surname, is all Guido is told, and of course he had time at 7 in the evening to meet with the woman in distress. And something rings familiar about that name.

Lorenza was her first name and indeed she was familiar, from 27 years ago, when she left his pad and his bed and his life, never to appear again until this night at seven o'clock. She returns to ask for help reversing the conviction of her 25-year-old son, Lacopo, sentenced to 24 years in prison for the murder of his putative drug dealer.

Guido is no longer attracted to this woman, but she is a revenant of his past affections, and he feels a hint of obligation. He interviews her son, Lacopo, in the prison attorney's room and finds an indolent lout he immediately dislikes. He takes the case without good reason. And why does he take this case with conviction already adjudicated? Because Guido is Italian, and Italian men save desperate women. And to do that, he must rehabilitate the punk kid by having him retried on the merits of inconsistencies in his original trial that he has no idea exist.

So where to start, salted with why start and how? Carofiglio has elected to describe an investigation, manage and clean up a career criminal who's the son of a former mistress who dumped him without notice almost three decades ago, and discover illegitimate law enforcement, unethical prosecution and wholly inadequate legal defense. And as an act of chivalry, do all this sans fee.

I could drone on with a spoiler or two to whet your appetite and illustrate Carofiglio's acrobatic maneuvers. But *The Measure of Time* is such handsomely made theater that the spoilers won't give anything away as much as deprive you from being enraptured by the warm and perfectly fitted encasement this story wraps ever so wonderfully around your reason to read.

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