

An Interview with Massimo Cassani

Traci Andrihetti (November 12, 2013)



The Distinguished Author of Noir With a Milanese Twist

Massimo Cassani (Cittiglio, 1966) studied journalism in Milan, where he currently works with both



Gruppo 24 Ore and Il Sole 24 Ore. When he's not writing articles and managing periodicals, he's teaching and writing noir. Although he is perhaps best known for his Commissario Sandro Micuzzi series, Cassani has also written a psychological noir entitled [Un po' più lontano](#) [2] (A Bit Further) (Laurana, 2010) that deals with the theme of solitude.

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing Cassani about his work and his fascinating new novel, [Zona franca](#) [3] (Duty-Free Zone) (TEA, 2013), which was just nominated for Italy's prestigious "Premio Giorgio Scerbanenco - La Stampa" for the best Italian noir novel of the year.

Has your work as a journalist influenced your narrative in any way?

No, I don't think so. They're two different types of writing. And they're two different ways of organizing text. Of course, the practice of linking thoughts to words is a good exercise. This might help a bit.

You teach narrative intrigue for a writing workshop offered by one of your publishers, [Laurana Editore](#) [4]. What would you say is the main principle of this style of writing?

I need to clarify that "[la Bottega di narrazione](#) [5] (The Narration Shop)" isn't a course, but a true and proper school of narrative, which lasts for one year. A school in which the participants—who are selected in advance—realize their own narrative project, their own novel, as though they were in a true shop: working with the teachers, but also comparing their work among themselves, giving advice, learning reciprocally. As for the rest, it's hard to respond to the question: A fundamental principle of narrative writing doesn't exist. There do exist criteria for constructing a plot, this yes, but then everything must be reinterpreted by the author based on his or her own sensibility and imagination.

Your latest novel, *Zona franca*, is rich with foreign languages, Latin, varieties of Italian and dialects. What, in your opinion, do these languages add to narrative intrigue?

To the intrigue, little or nothing, to tell you the truth. This mix of languages was useful for representing what Milan, the city where *Zona franca* is set, is today: a place in which different cultures are beginning to cohabitate and in which the past and present coexist, not without difficulties.

In your Author's Note, you state that "Milanese proverbs are by now almost History," and yet you employ them in *Zona franca*. Why?

Because proverbs, as is known, are the most genuine expression of popular culture. In fact, the character in the novel who cites them, Saturnino Sella, is an old Milanese man with an anarchic past.

How did you choose the proverbs? Were you looking for ones that would complement the story? Or were there proverbs that influenced some aspect of the plot?

Some I knew from my family. For others I did research to identify the right ones to support what I was wanting to say. And I found so many that I had only the embarrassment of the choice.

Dialect and regionalisms are prominent features of the Italian regional mystery. In your opinion, are there any dialects that are particularly suited to the genre?

No, I'm convinced there aren't.

Readers will be excited to learn that there will be a fourth novel in the Inspector Micuzzi series. Can you tell us the title?

Yes, there will be a fourth episode. It's in the writing stage. But the title will come as I go along, as often happens. Or maybe even at the end. What I can say is that there will be an Italian-American female character.

Note: Many thanks to Massimo Cassani for so kindly consenting to this interview. If you'd like to vote for *Zona franca* to win the Premio Scerbanenco, you can do so [here](#) [6].



Finally, be sure to read [my post](#) [7] on Zona franca. If you like a little history with your noir, Cassani is your author.

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