

An Interview with Nicky Persico

Traci Andrighetti (April 16, 2014)



Author of the intriguing and informative "smart thriller," *Spaghetti Paradiso*



Nick Persico (b. 1964, Bari) is an attorney, journalist and author. At the urging of writer Lara Cardella, Persico published his first short story, "Stellina (Starlet)," in 2010. His latest work is an intriguing "smart-thriller" about stalking entitled [Spaghetti paradiso](#) [2] (Spaghetti Paradise) (Aliante, 2011; Baldini & Castoldi, 2013).

This month I had the pleasure of interviewing Persico about some of the interesting linguistic and artistic aspects of *Spaghetti paradiso* and his future plans for his charming protagonist, Alessandro Flachi.

What was the inspiration for *Spaghetti paradiso*? Was it motivated by your work as an attorney with victims of domestic abuse, or was it something else?

I've run into cases like this since I started in the profession. Many years ago, there was much less awareness of this phenomenon with respect to today. Over the years I began to supply myself with instruments of knowledge, or rather with texts from specialized authors. In the book, in fact, I cite those who contributed most usefully to my perception of the mechanisms of the phenomenon, and in the latter pages I reference those who, in my opinion, can provide an effective study to those who wish to explore the topic. Through the years, therefore, I've become increasingly familiar with the topic of psychological violence, which represents the real 'invisible enemy' to defeat and which constitutes a substratum in the majority of the stalking cases, trying to take a focused approach to the practical utility of knowledge. In some ways, I took the same path as the protagonist of the novel, the practicing attorney Alessandro Flachi. One day, then, I tried to recount this phenomenon from the perspective of one who is, unconsciously, ignorant of the subject. The formula, from what is seems, has been effective. At the same time, a narrative vein revealed itself that not even I knew I possessed, and the rest happened on its own.

On the subject of domestic violence, Alessandro says he prefers the term "manipolazione (manipulation)" to stalking. Why this distinction?

When people speak of stalking, they tend to imagine only the most visible part of this hateful phenomenon: persistent texts, for example, or following or obsessive telephone calls. I think this distances us from the real problem, which is actually much more obscure and devious. Using the term 'manipulation' helps the interlocutor to position himself or herself in a more critical manner and thereby consider the things that he or she doesn't know and therefore needs to better observe. It's not easy, for example, to understand why the victims complain about a hellish life and then, maybe, they're reluctant to press charges. So, if people don't take into consideration that the victim is in an altered psychological state, then they'll also tend to think that things aren't like the victim says, in as much as a normal person would react with determination. The reason for the psychological fragility of the victim lies precisely in an intentional destruction of his or her equilibrium, consciously induced through manipulation. I think that calling it by its real name better conveys the idea of what the problem is that we have before us.

There is a lot of interesting regional language in *Spaghetti paradiso*, some of which you define in the text: "quattrofacce (literally, fourfaces, as in a two-faced person)," "vilacchione (coward)," "sparamimpetto (a person who acts as a sacrificial lamb)," and "fafueco (troublemaker)." What does the language of your native Bari mean to you?

I use it often when I'm with friends and in informal contexts because it has a very effective descriptive power, as I state in the book for some of the terms. Dialect in general is a true and



proper language, in some passages, and barese is no exception. Some words or a certain phraseology are a precious patrimony that should be valued and, in some cases, reclaimed. And besides, for every one of us, certain expressions are part not only of our language but also of our thought. Some dialectal words have an energy all their own, much more powerful than the corresponding term in the language. And also the sound, the pronunciation and sometimes a typical gesture that accompanies certain phrases are a true value added to the communication. I adore all of this.

Speaking of regional terms, a character in the book calls Alessandro “un frecamidolce.” What does this mean?

The ‘frecamidolce’ is generally a persuasive person who is capable of leading you wherever he or she wants without being impetuous, or intrusive. In the end, you’re able to perceive that he or she has done it, but you don’t mind because at bottom it was done gracefully, and very often it induces you to reflect on something that was in your best interest. I think the closest equivalent to this concept is ‘diplomatic.’ The ‘frecamidolce,’ however, has sweetness of style, and what’s more, he or she leaves a smile on your face even when you understand what he or she was up to. In other words, a truly beautiful aspect of human relationships enclosed in a single word: the power of dialect.

There is an entertaining scene in the chapter entitled “Customer Care” that takes place between Alessandro and a reluctant barista. You describe the exchange as one of “customer sfatigation.” Can you explain the origin of the term “sfatigation” and why you chose English?

It’s the opposite of the expression ‘customer satisfaction,’ which is much more common. But, as often happens, apathy, indolence and sometimes bad manners push people who work with the public to be impolite. ‘Sfaticato (slacker)’ is a slang term that describes a person who is disinclined to ameliorative effort, to obligation. So, in antithesis to the processes of ‘customer satisfaction,’ which aim for the satisfaction of the client, I outlined an adverse behavioral scheme, the scope of which is to irritate the person one finds on the other side of the desk. ‘Customer sfatigation’ renders the idea, in my opinion, of ‘apathy’ toward the client, rather than ‘attention.’ Everyone has entered a store at some time or other and felt like they were almost bothering the employee. If we feel that sensation, there’s no doubt: it’s a matter of ‘customer sfatigation.’

In the same chapter, you state that Bari has undergone “una progressiva milanizzazione (a progressive Milanization)” with respect to daily life. Can you elaborate?

Milan is, in the collective imagination, the symbol of efficiency and of the acceleration of time. Bari used to have the ‘controra (siesta),’ which was absolutely respected like a mantra. Calling someone at around two o’clock in July, for example, in the 70s was a very rare thing. Today everything has changed, obviously, and ‘milanizzare (Milanize)’ conveys the idea of generalized efficiency. Sincerely, however, I have a great nostalgia for the ‘controra.’ It was a re-appropriation of civic spaces on the side of silence, of quiet. A pause for reflection.

In the book, Alessandro’s private and rather unusual recipe for a dish called “Spaghetti Paradiso” is accidentally shared with his friends and colleagues. Do you ever make this recipe?

Well, exactly as it’s described, no. But in some ways, like all of us, I’ve lived it in similar forms. All the times I’ve repaired a relationship after an argument, maybe, or a big explanation. I wanted to incarnate the possibility of re-establishing harmony with someone important to you, and who,



because of the daily routine, had distanced themselves a bit because of certain mechanisms that often create useless walls. We need to force ourselves, every once in a while, to note them and break them down again. The important relationships have always been our true patrimony, and they need to be maintained: even with a healthy and overwhelming 'spaghetтата', if it's warranted...

Alessandro is a terrific character and a great guy. Can your fans hope for any more Alessandro adventures?

There will be another two books, by contract, with Alessandro Flachi as protagonist. The exceptionality, in him, consists in his profound normality and his joy for life. A simple person, in other words, common like many good people who comprise the majority of us human beings. His being awkward, bungling and distracted, but at the same time willing and motivated by good intentions has conquered everyone to some extent. Even the publisher. And the smart-thriller will continue, at least two more times.

Note: If you'd like to know more about Nicky Persico and his work, please see [my post](#) [3] on Spaghetti paradiso. This is a book you can't afford to miss!

Photo: The above picture of Nicky Persico was taken by the great Jeffery Deaver.

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