





Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

PROGETTO "PASSIONS: INTERVISTE A PERSONALITA'
DI RILIEVO INTERNAZIONALE"

Referente del progetto: Prof. F. MITRANO

SCRIVERE A VENEZIA

INTERVISTA A PHILIP JONES

DI LETIZIA PIVA

NEL MONDO DI PHILIP JONES



Philip Gwynne Jones nasce nel Galles meridionale nel 1966. È uno scrittore, insegnante e traduttore. Arriva per la prima volta in Italia, a Frascati, nel 1994

dove lavora per l’Agenzia Spaziale Europea.

Diversamente da quello che sperava, questo lavoro non lo entusiasma molto.

Si innamora presto dell’Italia e ci torna più volte.

Insieme alla moglie decide di trovare residenza fissa a Venezia, città che avevano precedentemente visitato per la Biennale. Venezia diventa il cuore pulsante delle sue opere, un punto di partenza per riscrivere la sua vita.

Grazie al suo lavoro di insegnante viene in contatto con diverse figure che gli permetteranno di scrivere il suo primo romanzo giallo, *The Venetian Game*, edito in Italia da Newton Compton come *Il Ponte dei Delitti*. Pubblicato nel 2017, diventa presto un successo, il *Times* lo posiziona nella top 5 dei bestsellers, e la prestigiosa libreria inglese “Waterstones” lo nomina “Thriller del mese” nel marzo del 2018. Un risultato straordinario per Jones, che non aveva mai pubblicato nulla prima del suo arrivo nel capoluogo veneto.

Il suo amore per l’Italia, e in particolare per Venezia, lo spingono a scoprire sempre di più questa meravigliosa città. Le conoscenze apprese si riflettono nei suoi libri e nei suoi personaggi. Jones mette in luce le bellezze di Venezia: la sua architettura, la sua arte, la cultura e il cibo. Compie una descrizione a 360 gradi dell’ambiente veneziano tramite gli occhi di un personaggio inglese. Nathan Sutherland è il

protagonista delle avventure di *The Venetian Game*. Un personaggio che a tratti rispecchia l'autore stesso. Entrambi lavorano come traduttori, e si innamorano dello stile di vita veneziano.

Philip Jones è abile nel far immergere il lettore nell'atmosfera di Venezia. Ispirato dai film degli anni '60 e '70, e in particolare dai capolavori quali "Profondo Rosso" di Dario Argento e da "A Venezia...un dicembre rosso shocking" di Nicolas Roeg, crea quello che è il perfetto ambiente per sviluppare i suoi romanzi gialli. Mistero, *suspense*, e intrigo sono solo alcuni degli elementi centrali di questo thriller.

Il successo di questo primo volume lo incoraggerà a puntare, ancora una volta, sulle vicende di Nathan Sutherland, nei tre libri successivi: *Vengeance in Venice*, *The Venetian Masquerade* e *Venetian Gothic*.

THE VENETIAN GAME

*“I liked the feeling of solitude and had taken to
walking for hours late at night,
when I would hardly see another soul”*

The Venetian Game è il libro d’esordio di Philip Jones. Il protagonista inglese, Nathan Sutherland, è il console onorario di Venezia. Ha il compito di assistere i turisti in difficoltà.

Il suo lavoro si complica quando il misterioso signor Montgomery, gli offre un’importante somma di denaro per custodire un pacchetto. Presto Nathan verrà a conoscenza del suo contenuto: il libro di preghiere illustrato da Giovanni Bellini. Sutherland si troverà nel mezzo di un pericoloso gioco portato avanti dai gemelli Domenico e Arcangelo Moro, entrambi ladri di opere d’arte.

Volete saperne di più su Philip Jones?

Sito personale: <https://philipgwynnejones.com/about->



2/

Biografia: To Venice With Love, A Midlife Adventure (editore: Constable, 7 marzo 2019)

Twitter: PGJonesVenice

Facebook: philipgwynnejones

IN CONVERSATION WITH PHILIP JONES

Q: Why did you choose to live in Venice instead of any other city?

A: I first came to work in Italy in 1994 and I spent six months working outside Rome for the European Space agency. So, I always wanted to come back to Italy at some point. Then, I met my wife and she similarly wanted, at some point in the future, to try living in Italy. Venice was simply the city we loved the most in Italy. We came here every two years for the Biennale and then we started coming every year and spending a bit more time. We thought if it is possible to live anywhere, we'll try in Venice first. There is nowhere like it, really.

Q: Since Venice is the center of your books, what inspires you the most about this city?

A: It's the city itself. I hadn't written anything before I came to Venice. It's strange, I write crime novels set in a city where there isn't any serious

crime. But, walking around has a feeling to the city, that around every corner might be something amazing or frightening or strange happening. When I first moved here, I would go for a walk at night and maybe I would get a little bit lost. I would find myself in a *calle* where the only exit is to a canal, and I'll start thinking <<What would happen if I heard a few steps behind me?>> [...] *Don't Look Now* by Daphne du Maurier was adapted by Nicolas Roeg in the 1970s, translated in Italian as <<A Venezia... un dicembre rosso shocking>>. The idea was that around any corner would be something dangerous. I still get that feeling when I walk around. [...] And the other thing is the name of the streets such as Calle degli Assassini. That is an inspiration itself.

I loved your description of Venice

I'm glad that the description worked because it was so important that people bought into the description. If I'm buying a novel which is set in a foreign city, I want to get some ideas of the city.

Q: In your first book, *The Venetian Game*, you mentioned other cities such as Milan and Florence. Your main character Nathan says that he doesn't like Florence as much as Venice.

Do you feel the same? What makes Venice different from other cities?

A: I do like Florence. I probably like it more than Nathan does. I like it because there is so much great stuff such as architecture and art especially. Possibly, more than any other city in the world. But there are things I don't like about it. It gets so crowded, and I know Venice is as well, but it feels a bit different. I live in *Dorsoduro* and it's easy to go for a walk even in summer. In Florence I always find that wherever I want to go is so busy.

Q: In the book, there seem to be a lot of similarities between you and Nathan.

How much does real-life count in your creation of Nathan?

A: When I started writing *The Venetian Game*, I made three or four attempts at the first chapter, writing in the third person, writing in the present tense, writing in the first person. It was only when I started writing in the first person that it clicked. Some people think that because I wrote it in the first person, he's [Nathan] like me. Well, I think that the main similarities are that we like the same things. We have the same taste in music, the same taste in old films and we enjoy having a spritz on some occasions. I don't smoke any more, but I used to. I also love cooking. All of those fed into Nathan. If I'm going to spend nine months of every year in his head, I want him to be somebody I like. Book number five comes out in two months and I think he moved away from me, just a little. He's much braver than I am.

Q: In your first book Nathan is offered a sum of money to look after a package containing a prayer book illustrated by Bellini. Art is another main theme of your story; you mention a lot of brilliant Italian artists. And Nathan seems to be an expert of Italian art.

Before writing this book, did you know everything about Italian art and especially Venetian artists?

A: Ever since I first came to Italy, I always had this love of Italian art, especially Venetian art. Bellini. I do remember going around the church described in the book. So, I always had an interest in art. The prayer book that I mentioned [in *The Venetian Game*] actually exists in the archive of the *Cassa di Risparmio di Venezia* in *Campo Manin*. I used to teach English and I had some incredibly good luck. When I was teaching somebody from the *Guardia di Finanza*, I met someone who turned out to work in the art crime department. So, every lesson I could talk to him about art theft and how it worked, who would investigate, would it be the *Guardia* or the *Carabinieri*. I got so much information about how it works, it was useful.

Q: What I liked the most about *The Venetian Game* is how you portrayed Venice and the feeling of mystery around it.

Is there any book or movie that helped you to create this atmosphere?

A: I always liked Raymond Chandler and his classic American hardboiled atmosphere. In term of films, I always liked Dario Argento's 1970s work, <<Profondo Rosso>> is one of them. The idea of the narrow streets, the fog, and the killer with the black gloves. I think that works in a city like Venice. I think all the Italian films from the the 60s and 70s were an inspiration.

Venice is the right city to set a novel like yours. I don't think Rome and Milan could inspire the same feelings.

Rome and Milan are such renowned cities, huge cities while there is an intimacy to Venice. But also, the fact that you can't drive, you have to get a boat and you can't set a car chase in Venice.

Q: Nathan is a real Venetian: he is always drinking spritz and eating.

My Italian teacher, when I arrived in Italy, said it is because you can't drive so you don't have to worry about that. People do say to me that Nathan drinks a lot. But he has stopped smoking by book four, he's not young anymore, he has to look after himself.

Q: What do you like the most about Italian culture that you decided to incorporate in the book?

A: Certainly, food had to be there. Using food in fiction is a really good way to get some local color and some local atmosphere into the book. So, that was something I was very keen to introduce. People do seem to like that.

That's true. We [Italians] are very protective of our food culture.

Well, that's why I made him [Nathan] a British guy. I thought if I write him as Italian I'd risk getting to much wrong. But if I make him British and he makes a mistake [...] well, he's British, he doesn't know, he's not perfect. So, it gave me a bit of an excuse.

Q: I saw on your website that you created a series of cooking, drinking, and listening with Nathan. Where did the idea come from?

I keep the website updated. [...] A lot of people ask me about food and sometimes I thought <<there's a recipe I cooked, and I'll put it on the website as a little bonus for readers>>. Similarly, about some of the locations <<drinking with Nathan, walking with Nathan>>. And, there's an article I wrote about Italian music, the music that Nathan listens to. For each of my books I do a Spotify playlist.

I listened to your playlists. I think they are the perfect way to better understand your characters and your story.

I think, it's becoming more important for writers to do that. Now you can reach people via the internet. There is a pressure on writers to add value in that way. Similarly, to use Twitter or something like that. Not all writers like it. I do. I think it's a worthy exercise to expand that world a little bit. And, maybe just to write about things which don't fit into the books.

Q: How much is Nathan's behavior influenced by other characters perception of him? How do the Italian characters perceive his British background?

A: In the first book where Magri says to him <<So, be honest with me. Do you like this country?>> And he says <<Yes, I do. I know it's got problems, but I do like this country>>. I think sometimes he would be aware that if he tries to be very British that would work well for him. Certainly, in future books. If he's having trouble bureaucracy or people who don't want to help him, he might try to be excessively British. But it could work well because people might think <<Oh, he's only a foreigner>>. And, sometimes people underestimate him because he's not Venetian, not even Italian. He's been in the city longer than me, longer than ten years. But, there's still things where he's not quite sure how they work.