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MiraMag 10

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All proposals are discussed at
our editorial meetings on
Fridays at Villa Mirafiori
16.30-18.00, in room 4. If you
would like to attend, please get
in touch with one of the eds.

COVER: Spring has arrived at Villa
Mirafiori too. ©Aurora Mazzoni,
2011.

Hello readers!

*Since life is sad without MM, here we are with a
brand new juicy issue.*

*This month's menu is so rich! Hot topics, such as the
silent life of L'Aquila or international women's day,
fresh articles about cinema and a spicy piece about
Burlesque and, of course, much more.*

*Enjoy the meal...ehm the mag and, if you like it,
contact us! You could be one of the eds for the next
issue!*

Chiara Guida, senior ed.

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International Women's Day

Origins

by Valentina Orabona

Do you know the origins of 8 March? In Europe, two different events are seen as possible origins. In France, many people refer to 8 March 1857 in memory of a strike organised by textile workers in New York, whereas in Italy, many believe that the date stems from a factory fire that broke out in the US in 1908 and in which many women died.

In reality, International Women's Day emerged from the activities of labour movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe. On March 19 1911, inspired by the Socialist Party of America's declaration of National Women's Day (February 28, 1909), women and men together in Copenhagen showed their support for women's rights. In Russia, on the last Sunday in February, 1917 (8 March in the Gregorian calendar), women went on strike for "Bread and Peace". In 1945, the United Nations Charter was the first international agreement to affirm equality between men and women.

And do you know how the mimosa custom came about? When the Union of Italian Women (UDI) was organizing the first Women's Day in Italy after WWII, they wanted to find a flower to represent that day. Mimosa was chosen because it blossoms around this time of year, and also because yellow symbolises vitality and joy.

In Russia, every woman is celebrated, from young children to grandmothers, as a symbol of rebirth. The atmosphere is very special, and it strikes me as rather different from the commercial atmosphere in Italy on this day.

Unfortunately, in many countries the only role of women is motherhood and they can't hold other positions in society but must stay at home and look after their children. On the other hand, there are countries where women are empowered to show their abilities, and demonstrate their organizing skills and ability to take on important responsibilities. It is these countries that provide a model for a new world.

International Women's Day should be a way to encourage all women everywhere to fight for their rights by providing a kind of mirror that enables us to look back on all the successes that women have achieved.

Women Rule: Believe it!

by Fabrizia Mancini, Irene Pellecchia,
Veronica Saputo and Ilaria Vitali

Introduction

What country would ever waste a resource such as educated, brilliant, motivated and responsible women?

As Emanuela Ghignoni notes, in Italy the number of women with a university degree has exceeded that of men (1). But do you really believe that this means that women are empowered nowadays?

Back to the Past

Who doesn't know Shakespeare? In the Bard's works, especially in the comedies, the roles of men and women are turned upside down: women rule. They are able to cope with problems, they are more capable, more virtuous and smarter than men. You sceptics had better believe it: we have the proof.

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is a clear example of a woman of power. Through her sheer cleverness, she manages to save the men in the story from death and loss of personality.

Forward to the present

We don't want to confuse you but here's another question: Do Catwoman and The Bride really exist, or are they just fairy tales? (2)

Although women themselves have everything it takes to achieve their goals and make their dreams come true, society doesn't give them the respect they deserve. According to research cited by Ghignoni, women are often unemployed, always underpaid and undervalued.

Conclusions

The last question, we promise. After all these amazing, amusing, interesting and witty words, what do **you** think? Are the modest authors of this article women or men? Oh sorry, that's two questions, not one! But... if you're a man, maybe you didn't notice!

Notes and references

- (1) Emanuela Ghignoni, *Il grande sorpasso delle laureate* in online magazine **InGenere** (<http://www.ingenere.it>).
- (2) Don't know who **The Bride** is? Even Tarantino knows that. See **Kill Bill!**

Women, is it worth fighting for?

by Fabrizia Mancini

Fabrizia Mancini discusses attitudes and reactions towards International Women's Day, with reference also to a discussion that took place recently among a group of 3rd year Modern Language students.

The famous Oasis song, "The importance of being idle", turned upside down, indeed, in this case completely changed: I would call it "The importance of being women".

Why? Nowadays, everyone talks about the famous 8th March, the day chosen to celebrate women around the world, even though that day turned out to be a very sad one in 1908, in Chicago, when some women died tragically after a fire broke out in the cotton factory where they worked.

At this point, some of you may claim: "Hey, why shouldn't we go partying to celebrate this commemorative day?!", but many of you may say in retort that it has actually become day of consumerism since not everybody seems to value the role of women. Why? Let me get to the point.



For many people, celebrating International Women's Day is a sort of hypocrisy: their slogan seems to be protesting that "Women don't need this! It's pointless to celebrate!"

How come, you may be asking. According to Marco Lorusso's group (in my English language class), this is because International Women's Day limits the importance of women only to the 8th March.

On the other hand, some others in the class are fans of the legendary Wonderwoman, and they believe that "We, women, are special! We have everything we need to achieve our goals, so we



should trust ourselves! We can make it!". This was the prevailing view in Martina Meloni's group.

So far so good, everything is right. But let me come to the point. Women have changed a lot over the centuries. We have become accustomed to the idea that women are finally empowered in contemporary society, whereas in the past they were seen only as subservient mothers and housewives, economically and politically dependent on men. For so long, as Marcella Leo's group pointed out, women's sole duty was to clean the entire house, cook for the family, set everything in order and bring up children.

And now? Is the situation the same or has it taken a turn for the better?

Unfortunately, the social and economic situations of women differ from place to place around the world, and many women don't have the rights we have here in Europe, such as the right to vote and the freedom to dress the way they want. In extreme cases, women are not even allowed to express their own opinions.

Did you know that among graduates in 67 countries out of 120 in the world the majority are women? This interesting point, as Emanuela Ghignoni illustrates in "Il grande sorpasso delle laureate" (also mentioned in the article above), has to do basically with women's "non-cognitive abilities", which means their ability to cope with problems and tasks more responsibly than men and their tendency to be both organized and motivated, a point emphasised also by Valentina Speranza's group in class.

Despite their efforts, nowadays women still find more obstacles than men in asserting themselves, for example, in the world of work.

What a waste, don't you think?

Photos on this page © Fabrizia Mancini, 2011

332: A Journey through Silence and Darkness

by Salvo La Ferla

It happened on 6 April, 3:32, almost two years ago; you might have noticed the ground shaking if you were in Rome. The epicentre was L'Aquila in Abruzzo: 308 people died, and many lost their homes. How have people's lives changed after such a catastrophic event? To find out, a couple of weeks ago me and some of my friends in Rome decided to go and visit the town of L'Aquila, which is only a one-and-a-half hour drive away.

As soon as we got out of the car we saw a huge castle (the Spanish Fortress, commonly called *Il Castello* by the local inhabitants): even though it dated from the 16th century, it seemed like the earthquake had had no sort of effect on it. We didn't know how to get to the centre of the town, so we asked an old man; he gave us directions and said "You'll find that no miracles have been performed since the earthquake."

We headed towards the historic centre and without even realising it found ourselves inside the so called Red Zone: empty streets with empty houses, scaffolding and trucks everywhere. Those streets that had once been the heart of the town were destroyed; restaurants, hotels, schools, all unfit for use. It's really strange when you're in the

centre of a city and you don't hear any sort of noise, it's almost unreal. We kept walking and saw a few people on the other side of the barriers. The main street, Corso Vittorio Emanuele, is one of the few streets in the old part of town

that's still open, but almost everything on this street is closed except for a bank, a hotel and some shops and bars. On the barriers there are posters where people have written all sort of things: the names of the streets that are closed, streets where they used to live; then we saw a road barrier with keys hanging from it, keys that those people will probably never use again.

We wanted to see the *Casa dello studente* (the university residence for students from all over

Italy) before it got dark, so we asked two women how to get there. They were really pleased to hear that we had come from Rome to visit their town, and asked us to go and tell people about their situation:

although after two years they are hardly ever mentioned on TV anymore, this doesn't mean that their lives have returned to normal; unfortunately it looks like their lives will never be the same again. After seeing what remains of the student residence (almost nothing, except for the photos of the 8 students that died), we went back into the Red Zone. As one of my friends noted, we are just not used to total darkness inside a city, it's not like walking in remote countryside: it was a bit scary to walk through those silent streets devoid of any street lighting.

By the time we'd had dinner, it was almost midnight and I realised that the words that the old man had told us eight hours earlier were true. The government has built houses outside the city for

all the displaced people, but that isn't enough. According to some locals we spoke to, the government has no idea how long it will take to repair the historic centre and the people's former homes; one girl told us that local politicians are prompting people to sell them! Maybe because if you sell a house that's destroyed, when it's repaired it's going to be worth much more. This girl belonged to a local organisation that was set up after the earthquake and had organised a benefit concert on that day: it's called *Comitato 332*, a number that Aquilans will never forget.



Photos on this page © Salvo La Ferla, 2011



Are Traineeships Useful?

by Salvo La Ferla

Salvo La Ferla reports on Brain At Work, an event at which students have the opportunity to meet Italy's major companies of the main business companies of Italy. This year's event was held at the Acquario Romano, Casa dell'Architettura in Rome on 15 March 2011.

The traineeship project

This is the eleventh annual Brain At Work event, a very interesting opportunity for students to understand what traineeships are all about, and to meet representatives of many important companies such as Google, Fendi, Ina Assitalia and many others, and give them their CVs. At this year's event, each company had its own stand.

At the opening talk, a member of Brain At Work, a member of SOUL (Sistema Orientamento Università Lavoro - System for University and Work Counselling) and a member of Servizio Dell'Impiego della Provincia di Roma (Employment service for the Province of Rome) explained the main purpose of this event.

In Italy, the traineeship system doesn't appear to be very useful, since only one out of 10 traineeships usually ends up becoming a real job.

Moreover, since the law doesn't oblige companies to pay trainees, there is also the risk that many companies might just make people work for free, and this is why many students don't trust the traineeship system.

Is it worth trying?

Unfortunately, there's a job market crisis, and although it may seem incredible, there are more traineeship offers than actual job offers!

Nonetheless, SOUL is trying to relaunch the traineeship project by working together with over 2930 companies who offer both traineeships and jobs. They don't only help students to get in touch with the companies concerned, but they also check that the workers don't get exploited. If both the workers and the companies handle their traineeship properly, they can turn out to be a very useful experience. SOUL suggests that all students give it a try.

The personal touch

According to an Economics student at La Sapienza who left his CV with 10 different companies, events such as Brain At Work give students the chance to meet the representatives of the companies in person. These reps can then tell them their impressions straight away. It's just not the same as sending an email: if you talk to a representative you might make a good impression on him/her, no matter what you've written in your CV.



What's in it for me?

So you might ask yourself the question "Can Brain At Work offer something to Modern Language students?".

Well, the answer is definitely **yes**, if you think that almost all companies nowadays would prefer someone who speaks several languages to someone that only speaks Italian.

When you meet the company representatives, they might even test your ability to speak English, Spanish or whatever language you study on the spot. So don't be afraid to go out there and show them what you can do!

Photos on this page © Salvo La Ferla, 2011

My Life as a Trainee

by Marcella Leo



Marcella (2nd left) with her Press Office colleagues

One of the best things about being young is that you can still believe in your dreams. Mine is to continue doing the kind of work I did during my fantastic experience at the Sapienza Press Office.

I also think that if you really love your job then you can help society through it.

Last year, I had the opportunity to attend a six-month traineeship at the Sapienza Press Office, from November to April. I had seen the advertisement for this traineeship on the internet and just went along to the Sapienza Press Office for more information about it. I knew I wouldn't receive any payment for my work but I received six credits (cfu) in return for fifteen hours per week, either mornings or afternoons, depending on my availability.

Over these six months, my attitude changed. At the start, I was very excited but also very nervous because I really didn't know if I was up to the task.

There was so much to do and sometimes I didn't have enough time to do it all: writing articles for the Sapienza website, arranging interviews between journalists and teaching staff, organizing the monthly list of events and sending it to the papers. The most exciting but stressful public event I remember was the visit of President Napolitano to Sapienza. On this occasion, our skills were really put to the test.

The pressure in the office was often very high, and the staff so busy that they couldn't help us trainees. Fortunately we were a great group and got on well, so we managed to help each other.

As the months went by, I became better at my job and at working in a team. We were a nice group and still meet socially.

Juggling university studies and my training was very difficult, especially when exams were on. Fortunately the editor in chief gave us days off to study.

What did this experience teach me? Above all, it taught me not to give up when things get complicated but to face up to problems and to try to solve them as best I can.

Working Students

Some students obtain traineeships, but others have paid jobs while they are students. What's it like to work and study at the same time? Raffaella Sardella asked some third year students of English about their working experiences. Here is what they said:

Andrea Romanzi

I work for a translation agency, translating from English to Italian. I deal with technical translation, which generally involves shorter texts than literary translation, and the amount of work varies a lot. There are weeks in which I work every day and weeks when I'm at the office only once or twice. The payment too depends on the amount of work done, the number of words translated, and on the texts I deal with. Of course this job is closely linked to my studies because I am always learning new and useful things, but I can do that only by putting into practice the skills obtained through my previous studies.

Vincenzo Iantorno

I usually work as a model in fashion shows or at big events. The time I spend working depends on the fashion show or the event in question and can take between two to five hours, including fitting (trying on clothes before the show) and make-up. This job is not very closely related to my studies, but I enjoy it and it allows me to experience a different world. If you are tall and good looking you could do this job too!

Valentina Orabona

Working and studying at the same time is really difficult! In this period, I'm working at a clothes shop in the city centre and I spend thirty hours per week there. I can't complain about my salary since it enables me to do what I want. Thanks to this job, I can also improve my English and Spanish language skills, as well as other languages I know, since I also work with tourists. But it's a big sacrifice to work and study at the same time, and I would advise other students to avoid it if possible.

Working in Tourism

by Matteo Troiani

The past nine years of my life have been an amazing experience as I have had the opportunity to use my language skills in one of the fields that requires them the most: tourism.

Everything started in 2002 when I applied for a job with a small Italian Incoming Tour Operator: I was an assistant for people travelling on cruise ships who were taking one-day excursions to Rome. That is a perfect way to begin as you only spend one day with people and generally everything runs smoothly during the day (delays due to traffic is the problem you encounter the most). On the other hand, you have terrible working hours as you start at 5am and end at around 5:30/6:00pm. The hardest part for me was understanding people speaking.

A little bit exhausting, but the best way to learn and get experience. After a couple of years, I was working for all the companies operating in the port of Civitavecchia. This enabled me to meet a number of people and through them I had the chance to apply for another job: Tour Director for groups travelling across Europe.

A new world opened up to me, and despite my experience with the cruises I had to face a bigger problem this time: people's culture. My first job barely made me notice the differences between Italian culture and that of the tourists I worked with, but now I was spending many days with the people in my groups and I had to learn how to match their expectations. This is my seventh season as a Tour Director and I still learn something new every time I travel with a different group.

More than vacations these tours are educational, so our goal is to enable people to see and learn as much as possible in the short time they spend here; excellent language skills will of course help in this, but knowing more about people's culture is the key if we want to help them to understand our culture and history: associating and comparing our world with theirs will help them see things in the same light they are used to seeing things at home.

Did you know that when Americans order Margherita they never expect to get a whole pizza, but a slice? Or that if you do not tell them to do otherwise they will add a 20% tip for the waiter onto restaurant bills (making the waiter happy and them look stupid in other people's eyes). Or, and this is even harder to deal with, that they try to divide our cities into blocks, like NYC: can you imagine explaining to them how to get around in a town like Assisi (where the streets are very irregular) if they refer to blocks rather than "the first alley on the left" or "follow the main path" as you would do with an Italian person? And I could go on for pages with examples like this!

This whole experience has been great in itself but it didn't allow me the time I needed to finish my studies. Now that I would like to get a better working position, I realise that I have to graduate as soon as possible. Working as a Tour Director is an amazing chance to learn how to deal with people, become a quick problem-solver and learn how to adapt to all kinds of situations, but instead of taking it as a final achievement we should

consider it as an experience "in the field", useful as a way of embarking a career in the tourism business. to get in higher working ranks.

So, to all people who want to work in tourism I suggest trying to get experience of this sort for a few years, but to remember that this is just a glance at the great variety of opportunities that the major companies can offer.



Me and a group of students from Philadelphia in Syntagma Square (aka Platia Syntagmatos) in Athens, with the Greek Parliament in the background. July 2010

We Love Ireland!

by 2nd year students at the U. Sorace Maresca, Catanzaro

Going abroad when you are at high school broadens your mind: it's a way of learning something about yourself and about other cultures. It's also a good way of improving your English and having fun at the same time. In this issue of MiraMag, we have the privilege of hosting an article sent to us by a group of high school students who describe their experience of a school trip to Ireland. Who knows if there are some future language students among them!



The group at Powerscourt House, with its famous Gardens.

13 October 2010 was the day we had long been waiting for! There we were, thirty students from the second and third years at U.Sorace Maresca, a vocational school in Catanzaro, all ready to have our first adventure abroad with three teachers and three group leaders.

We'll never forget that day: At 5am we said goodbye to our parents and friends. Everyone was both excited and nervous, and when we left Catanzaro early that morning for our flight from Catania to Dublin we couldn't help feeling excited. We landed in Dublin, the capital of the Republic of Ireland at 3.30pm, tired but happy!

We stayed for three weeks at a Hotel in Bray, a small seaside town 19 km from Dublin city. Bray is a beautiful town and has a fantastic landscape. We could see the coast from our hotel - the view was breathtaking!

We had a well organized schedule there, thanks to our teachers and group leaders. We took part in fun activities such as treasure hunting, visited lots of interesting places and had great nights full of fun, all the schoolmates together. Every morning we went to school to study and improve our English. On our first day we had an entry test, and on the basis of the test results, the Irish teachers

placed us in the level they decided was suitable for each of us.

Some of the most interesting places we visited in Ireland were the National Gallery, where we could admire paintings by Caravaggio and Goya; the Guinness Storehouse where the famous beer is made and where we received lots of nice gadgets from the Guinness staff; St. Patrick's Cathedral, which is one of the most important protestant churches in the city; Dublinia, a historically important location at the heart of Dublin City, where Viking ruins are still visible. We also visited Kilkenny Castle, an imposing medieval manor.

One of the most unforgettable activities we took part in was cliff-walking, a walk of two hours on the hills, to a village near Bray called Greystone. That was definitely the most exhausting Sunday we spent in Ireland! We also went to Belfast, the Capital City of Northern Ireland and the place where the famous ship the Titanic was built. But the most frequently visited place, and also our favourite place, was Grafton Street, the pedestrian street in Dublin which is known for being a great shopping area. We really enjoyed ourselves there spending our money on cool Irish clothes.

In Ireland we had the opportunity to experience Halloween too. It was really fun to celebrate it with our Irish teachers. We bought some hats and funny masks and we went to a party dressed up as witches and zombies.. and our teachers were in fancy dress too! It was such fun!



The students had a fancy dress party at Halloween in the hall of their hotel.

During this trip, we also learned many useful things such as how to be more independent and sociable. Spending three weeks away from our parents made us more responsible and we realized how hard life can be without our parents' support.

One of the most unforgettable things we learnt in Dublin was the Molly Malone song, which is a very important part of Dubliners' culture. According to the legend, Molly was a pretty promiscuous girl who was a fish-seller during the day and a prostitute by night. Now the song about her is the unofficial Irish Anthem.

On our last day, sadness was visible on our faces. The three weeks spent in Ireland had passed too quickly and most of us would have liked to extend the vacation but it just wasn't possible. We had to go back to our ordinary lives in our home town!

Here is the famous song, which we also sang at school! You can find several versions of it on YouTube, both traditional and contemporary.

*In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty
I first set my eyes on sweet Molly Malone
As she wheeled her wheelbarrow through streets broad
and narrow*

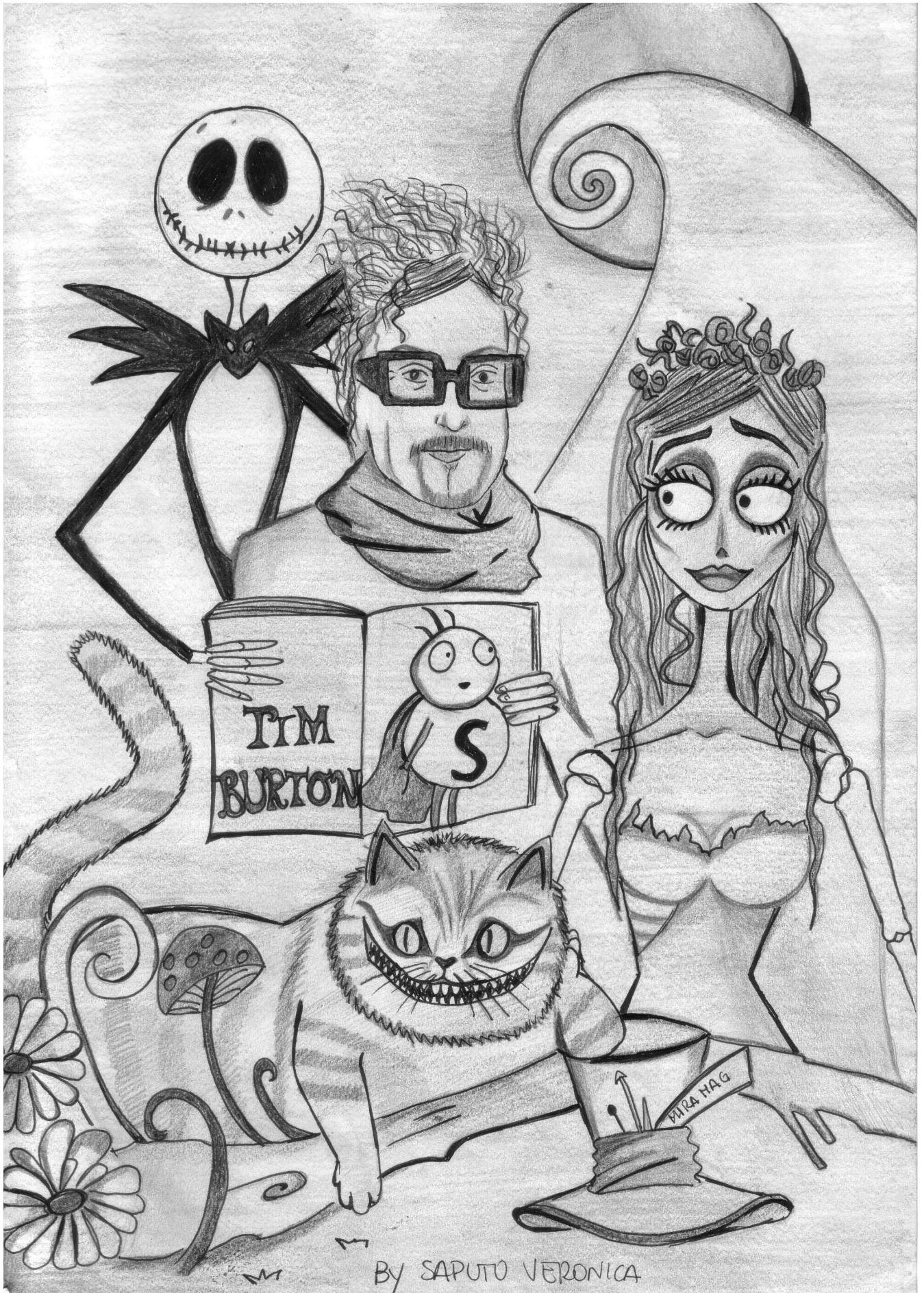
*Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!
A-live a-live O! A-live a-live O!
Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!*

*She was a fishmonger and sure it was no wonder
For so were her father and mother before
And they both wheeled their barrows through streets
broad and narrow*

*Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!
A-live a-live O! A-live a-live O!
Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!*

*She died of a fever and no one could save her
And that was the end of sweet Molly Malone
Now her ghost wheels her barrow through streets
broad and narrow*

*Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!
A-live a-live O! A-live a-live O!
Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!
A-live a-live O! A-live a-live O!
Crying cockles and mussels alive a-live O!"*





Less than Perfect: Tim Burton's World

by Irene Pellecchia

If you've ever had that feeling of loneliness, of being an outsider, it never quite leaves you. You can be happy or successful or whatever, but that thing still stays within you.
(from an interview with Tim Burton by Gill Pringle, February 2010)

Once upon a time there was a boy, a common boy with a common family. He lived in a common house in Burbank (Los Angeles) and went to school with other boys and girls. But he was lonely, he hadn't got many friends and the only thing his favourite playground was the cemetery. He spent almost all his time watching horror films with stories of monsters, monsters he believed to be more sincere than all the people around him. His name was Timothy William Burton.

Could you ever imagine that this boy would have been chosen as president of the jury of the Cannes Film Festival in 2010? Tim Burton, now almost 53 years old, has gone through a long career which started when he was 14 when he won first prize for an anti-litter campaign with his drawings. He spent his life fighting to represent his own inner voice in a world where all you have to do is to conform to others and where people are constantly trying to teach you what is right and what not, what is strange and what not. It wasn't easy for him to be an outsider.

As French critic Aurélien Ferenczi illustrates in his monograph on Tim Burton*, the filmmaker's first troubles began when he started to work for the Walt Disney Company. He was involved in the production of *The Fox and the Hound* (1981), a tender story of friendship between a fox and a dog. He was loathe to work for this project, as he hated the corny atmosphere of the film. And he also detested the overall spirit of the company: he claimed to be just a piece of the production line, without any personality. Although he continued working for Disney, often the team didn't take account of his ideas or was against the dark atmosphere of his works, until they almost censored his short film *Frankenweenie* (1982). Success arrived a few years later with *Pee-wee Big Adventure* (shown in Italy only in 2008!) produced by Warner Bros Company. Now Tim Burton is the much appreciated director of films such as *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005),

Corpse Bride (2005), *Sweeney Todd* (2007) and others.

Tim Burton is not just a director. He is also an artist who exhibits his works (drawings and puppets) all over the world and the author of a book of poetries, *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy*. His success is obviously linked to his odd personality and to his own life experience, which he transposes to all his characters: they often reflect him, are often outsiders, misunderstood or lonely. But they also reflect common human feelings. In a biography written for [mymovies.it](http://www.mymovies.it), Fabio Secchi Frau suggests that the incompleteness of the handless Edward Scissorhands is a clear example of a feeling that everyone has felt at least once (<http://www.mymovies.it/biografia/?r=1951>).

Burton's characters inhabit a dark world, and in most of his works, attention is focused on showing the difference between death and life. Death is represented through bright colours and it is associated with happiness, in contrast with black and white and sadness, which is associated with life. This juxtaposition is easy to notice in *Corpse Bride* where the human world is totally grey and everyone is serious, while the world of the dead is extremely joyful. As Tim Burton himself said, the fact that the dead are more alive than living people is a thing he strongly believes in.

Nowadays Tim Burton has a lot of fans all over the world. Despite the troubles he has met with during his career, he has managed to create a little world where everybody can find himself or herself. Despite the opposition he has found, he has created a curious way of representing himself and his characters, showing that reality is often different from what people think. He has been able to prove that nobody should be taken in by appearances: it doesn't matter how strange you appear to the others, you are perfect the way you are.

**Tim Burton*, Italian and English texts published in 2010 by Cahiers Du Cinéma/Phaidon Press. Both texts are translated from the French. Translators' names unknown.



Show Me How You Burlesque!

by Raffaella Sardella

Burlesque is a 2010 film by Steve Antin starring Christina Aguilera and Cher.

In the film, Christina Aguilera is Ali, a young girl who leaves her home town to become famous in Los Angeles. While returning home after a rough day she happens to pass by a burlesque club owned by Tess (Cher).

Ali thinks she has bumped into a strip club, but as soon as the show begins she realizes that burlesque is more than striptease. The burlesque performances are funny, even comical. The girls on stage sing, dance and act. They tease the public by taking off some clothes but they do it in an entertaining and tasteful way and are never vulgar or offensive.

Ali is fascinated by the show and starts to work as a waitress in the club, waiting for her moment under the spotlight.

How this article began...

I saw the film hoping for 119 minutes of dreams-that-come-true and triumphant-love, all seasoned with catchy tunes and spectacular dance routines and I was not disappointed. In fact I quite enjoyed it and it left me curious to discover what burlesque is exactly.

When I googled the term *burlesque*, I found many interesting web sites with plenty of information. When I started to read them, I discovered that burlesque has a long history.

A Bit of History...

In nineteenth century England, burlesque was a show, aimed at the rising middle classes, which parodied the life of the aristocrats. Beautiful women entertained the audience, made up mainly of men, but they were not the centre of the show. During the Victorian era, in London's theatres burlesque shows became more and more popular and the women on stage less dressed.

By the end of the nineteenth century, burlesque was going out of fashion in England but rising in popularity in America also thanks to the belly dancers who added an exotic touch to shows.



Poster of the film *Burlesque*.

The early decades of the twentieth century brought a wave of criticism of these shows: they were considered immoral because of the performers' nudity (striptease was now included). During the 60s and 70s, sexual liberation brought with it more explicit striptease and burlesque was just a reminiscence of the old times doomed to extinction.

Neo-Burlesque...

Something started to change by the 90': the vogue for retro styles and vintage clothes spread, pin ups and their style started to be admired and imitated. Burlesque gained popularity as a more refined form of striptease for nostalgic of the elegance of the past.

Some things stay the same...

Today's neo-burlesque performances are not so different from those of the late nineteenth century: the performer dances and takes off her clothes but she never becomes completely naked. Everything is characterized by humour and entertaining sketches, and the background music evokes the atmosphere of old smoky theaters.

Some things change...

What I think is interesting about neo-burlesque is that it is not considered as a show only for men. This is perhaps because the beautiful vintage dresses, make-up and hairstyles are more appealing to women than to men! Via the internet, many opportunities to learn the secrets of burlesque are offered in workshops and courses also here in Italy and directed at women who just want to learn how to be sexy in an entertaining way, not necessarily to become professional performers.

Style...

Corsets, suspender belts with silk thigh-high stockings, evening gloves and pasties constitute the



Dita Von Teese on the cover of fashion magazines : Elle (Sweden), March 2007; Marie Claire (Hungary), February 2008; Harper's Bazaar (Russia), December 2009.

essential wardrobe of a burlesque performer. Pasties are adhesive coverings for the nipples. They were first used as a form of censure, today they are used as a fun accessory and come in every possible form and colour!

Glitter and feathers are also very popular components of burlesque costumes. Huge ostrich feather fans are the most popular tool used by burlesque dancers to cover the body.

A number of famous performers have done a lot to bring burlesque to the attention of a wider audience. Dita Von Teese's personality and look have made her not only the queen of burlesque but also a fashion icon.

Burlesque in Italy...

Burlesque has never been so popular: Dita Von Teese performed her famous Martini glass dance on the 2010 Sanremo Festival stage and now many clubs throughout Italy hold burlesque performances.

Online magazine magsky.it informs us that Sky Uno is preparing a new reality show, *Lady Burlesque*, in which ordinary women will learn how to burlesque and will compete with each other. Eve La Plum, Italy's most famous burlesque performer, will collaborate on the show, together with the Italian Burlesque school of Milan and Rome's Micca Club.

After doing this fun piece of research, I will now go as soon as possible with my girl friends to the Micca Club, where a live burlesque performance takes place every Friday.

For more information, see www.burlesque.it

LEFT: Poster for *Tournée*, a 2011 film by Mathieu Amalric. The film tell the story of the French tour of an American team of burlesque performers. One of the actresses is burlesque performer Miss Dirty Martini.





Imaginary interview with Shaun (from This is England)

by Ilaria Vitali

Do you remember the review of *This is England* by Martina Meloni in MM8? This time we have an imaginary interview with the main character from that film, Shaun, Why did I chose him? Well, 19 March was Father's day, and all the children I know buy presents for their fathers and spend the day with their families. I thought how hard it must be for a fatherless child on a day like this.

INTERVIEWER: Shaun, I know that your father died fighting in the Falklands War, and I was sorry to hear that. What has changed since then? I mean, has the relationship with your mother changed in any way? Do you spend a lot of time alone?

SHAUN: Yes, my father was a serviceman and he was killed. It hurts so much but I try not to show my feelings. I have a picture of him in my room, it's my mum's favourite. We both miss him so much! But... no drama! *[his eyes are brimming with tears]*. My mum is really overprotective towards me now. I love her and we are very close, but I need a father. I need somebody strong who will take care of me...I feel lonely.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I can understand how important it was for you to join Woody's gang! Can you tell me about the moment you met them?

SHAUN: Oh yes! I was on my way home from school, after a standard day of humiliation because of my father's death and my flared jeans, when I came across a group of skinheads. Instead of mocking me and laughing at me they invited me to join the gang. They suddenly accepted me as a member, showing me sympathy and understanding. They became the only true friends I have ever had.

INTERVIEWER: You seem to be very proud of your new friends! You are not the lonely and sad boy you used to be, are you?

SHAUN: No, I'm not. I used to be quiet and shy, and tight-lipped, but now I think I have found the courage that I have never had. I have a new identity: I wear the clothes they wear - you know, flannel shirts, braces, jeans, Doc Martens, and I have my head shaved like them too. I also have a girlfriend who's four years older than me, Smell. Oh, obviously that's her nickname - it rhymes with Michelle, her real name. One day I just asked if

she'd like to be my girlfriend. I told her I thought she was lovely... and I won her heart! Yes, I think our romance is so cool!

INTERVIEWER: You really did that? Well, I'd never have thought that a shy boy like you could be so brave with a girl! So... You have found romance and also true friends in this gang, but I think that Woody and Combo are your closest friends, aren't they?

SHAUN: Course they are!

INTERVIEWER: But which of them is your role model, your rock?

SHAUN: Woody is the first person who accepted and understood me. He immediately inspired trust. I'll give you an example: when I was on my way home from school and I met the gang under the bridge, I sat down near Woody, but it was not my place! When Gadget returned and wanted his place back, Woody defended me! He took me under his wing. He just wanted to be my friend, that's all... giving me affection and love. Yes, I think I have found a big brother in my mate, Woody! Combo is different from me. He is older than Woody, he is stronger and bossier. He saw immediately how passionate I can be when I express my opinion, and he tried to open my eyes to what is going on these days, you know, tried to turn me into a man. He is a mentor, a father figure for me. I'm sure he saw in me the child he used to be. Did you know he spent three years in prison? I think he came out full of hate.

What more can I say about Shaun? He is just a boy who is striving not to be the victim of bullies' jokes at school He is just looking for a bit of acceptance from someone other than his mother. His father's death must have caused him so much pain that he can't really speak about it. On the other hand, he tries to open his heart when I ask him about his new friends, his new family. My choice to speak with him a few days before Father's Day was perhaps appropriate, although as I discovered, Father's Day in the UK is not the same as in Italy (this year it's on 20 June!). In any case, maybe Shaun's experience can help others more fortunate than him to understand how lucky they are to have a father to guide them in their lives.



This Boat Will Rock You

by Veronica Saputo

2011, MIRAMAG 10
TWO REVIEWS OF THE FILM
THE BOAT THAT ROCKED,
PLUS AN EXCLUSIVE
IMAGINARY INTERVIEW WITH
THE COUNT (PHILIP
SEYMOUR HOFFMAN)

Welcome aboard *The Boat that Rocked*, where a crew of eccentric DJs play rock and roll 24/7. The writer and director Richard Curtis (*Love Actually*; *Notting Hill*) tries to blend the true story of UK pirate stations and his fondness for rock music into a comedy that could be described as a declaration of love to his childhood's heroes.

The story is set on a clandestine sixties pirate radio ship, anchored in the North sea, just a few miles beyond the edges of Britain.

In the golden years of British music, the BBC broadcast only two hours of rock and roll a week, neglecting the wishes of more than half of the British population, who preferred to listen to pirate stations. Teenagers in particular went wild about the latest hits, treasuring their radios and waiting for their heroes: pirates ready to challenge the Crown and defend rock and roll.

This goal is what gives meaning to these pirates' existence. At the start of the film, the crazy crew heartily welcomes a new member on the board: Carl, a pale adolescent just expelled from school for smoking, and sent into the care of his godfather and the ship's owner, Quentin, in order to undergo a sort of rehabilitation. The newcomer has the opportunity to explore the wonderful microcosm that is the pirates' world: passion and trust in the power of rock music frames a sub-plot made up of friendship and emotional bonds, family relationships such as the discovery of Carl's true father, rivalries, random dancing and encounters with female fans (the only women admitted on the ship except for Felicity, the lesbian cook).

Even if the number of characters is considerable. Each of them manages to stand out with a strong personality and the result is a colourful and appealing crew: an extraordinary Bill Nighy playing the part of Quentin, owner of the ship and radio station; a charismatic Philip Seymour Hoffman as a brilliant American speaker called "the Count" in competition with a DJ who has a big reputation and huge ego, DJ Galvin, played by a talented Rhys Ifans, just to mention a few.

Through these characters, Curtis plants a bomb on the ship, ready to blow up at any moment, giving life to a mix of moods and situations which help to weave the story.

With all due respect to the good acting, the true protagonist of the film is the music, which becomes something sacred. The soundtrack is great: artists of the likes of The Who, The Kinks, The Rolling Stones (what has become of the Beatles?!) - they made an entire generation dream of a better future.

These are the ingredients cleverly mixed by a nostalgic Curtis in his most personal comedy which pays homage to an unforgettable era and to the great unconventional DJs of former times.

The film portrays the desires and anguishes of millions of people for whom switching on a radio hidden under the pillow meant dipping into an ocean of lively music, with no limitations, impositions, barriers or distinctions. Music is seen as a peaceful weapon directed to a conservative Government that tries to prevent the circulation of what it considers evil music. This is why they want to abolish pirate radio stations, which are the clear signs of an imminent cultural revolution and the pirates themselves, with their gestures, discourses and charm, embody the idea of freedom and independence from any kind of authority.

Remember, however, that this film is not a documentary, and, as pointed out by rock critic Simon Frith in *The Guardian* (3/4/2009), the real story was a little different.

A number of reviewers advise against seeing this film if you are interested in finding out about what really happened during the sixties. But if you want to spend two hours immersed in good rock and a lighthearted but catching story, go ahead! As The Who said, "Long live rock".

THE BOAT THAT ROCKED (2009) was written and directed by Richard Curtis. UK.

Runtime: 135 min

Cast: Bill Nighy, Emma Thompson, Gemma Arterton, Jack Davenport, January Jones, Kenneth Branagh, Nick Frost, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Rhys Darby, Rhys Ifans, Tom Wisdom, Tom Sturridge

In the US, this film is known as PIRATE RADIO.



Rock, Actually

by Valentina Speranza

In England in 1966, rock music was allowed to be broadcast for just one or two hours a day on BBC radio. This led to a group of broadcasters setting up pirate radio stations beyond the British coast, in the North Sea, financed mainly through advertising. Millions of people listened to these illegal radio stations, though the British government kept trying to shut them down because of their irreverence towards the strict social mores of the time.

As the title suggests, the film is set on a boat called Radio Rock, which is also the name of the radio station. Life on the boat is seen through the eyes of Carl, a young man who has been kicked out of school for smoking and sent aboard the Radio Rock ship by his mother, maybe so that he can learn to behave properly. However, the boat is not what might be called a school of life. Quentin is Carl's godfather and the leader of a crew of eccentric DJs who are national idols: the Count, the only American on the boat, who wants to be the first to say the F-word on British radio, Gavin Cavanaugh - a legend and also the Count's enemy, the sweet and unlucky Simon, Thick Kevin, the sexy Midnight Mark, the boat's lone girl named Felicity, and Bob, who broadcasts the early morning show and who no-one cares about.

There is a subplot regarding the suspicion that one of the radio station's staff may be Carl's father. This story is introduced in a subtle and non-dramatic way, and the mystery is solved in scene in which Carl's mother confesses to him that his father is... well, watch the film and you'll find out (also why she sent him on the boat)!

The scenes on the boat are often interrupted by representatives of the British government, such as Sir Alistair Dormandy, who the DJs rebel against and who wants to shut Radio Rock down. His assistant and right hand man has a funny name, Twatt. As reviewer Michael O'Sullivan said about the British government representatives, "The movie crackles with a cartoonish malevolence whenever they're on screen." (*The Washington Post*, 13/11/2009)

To find out if they will eventually succeed in sinking Radio Rock you'll have to wait till the end of the film.

The overall soundtrack is terrific. The music is used in a smart and sensible way - the songs go well with the episodes. As reviewer Bill Goodykoontz argues, although "It may be cheating to let the music shape the emotion of the film, [...] it's hard to complain too much." (*The Arizona Republic*, 11/11/2009).

Richard Curtis, who also wrote the screenplays for other much-loved films such as *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill* and my personal favourite *Love, Actually*, succeeded in making the film funny. *The Boat that Rocked* makes you tap your feet to the rhythm of the music while you are

watching, and especially listening.

The director has also given all the characters specific and different traits, so that it's easy to tell them apart. What they have in common is their obsession with music, and the total commitment they have made to setting rock free.

There is a scene in which the Count states: "These are the best days of our lives. It's a terrible thing to know, but I know it." The film itself is surrounded by an air of nostalgia, especially for those who really lived their youth in the exciting years of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.



The pirates - characters in *The Boat that Rocked*



Imaginary Interview with The Count (Philip Seymour Hoffman)

by Andrea Romanzi

INTERVIEWER: *So, here we are Philip, or should I say My Lord, The Count? I see you're biting your nails, do you feel nervous?*

THE COUNT: Well I have to admit that I am. I'm happy that it's you doing the interview, but since you're known for being a truth-seeker then I'm not going to be able to tell lies like I always do in interviews. Gosh, I've already told one! *[whispers]*

INTERVIEWER: *There's no need to worry. This is going to surprise you, but I want you to lie to me. If you ever feel uncomfortable at any point, just make a story up!*

THE COUNT: Are you kidding me?

INTERVIEWER: *Of course I'm not! So, shall we get down to business? Here's my first question: among your dj-colleagues on the Rock Boat who do you appreciate most? And who's the one you really can't stand?*

THE COUNT: We start with the heavy stuff uhu? Well, let's see...who have I worked with? I can't remember! Just kidding! *[laughs]* I'd say that Bill Nighy is the best. He's a great actor, everything he does is perfect and classy! You should see him acting - he's stunning. There's him and there's the camera, it's like they're lovers! And we are great pals too, even beyond the set, we have a really good time when we hang out together.

INTERVIEWER: *And now you should tell who's the one you can't stand. Remember?*

THE COUNT: Dammit! You remembered that! Anyway there is no one I can't stand. I must say that there was a great team on that boat, a great rock-crew! You could feel it in the air while we were filming, we were like a big, strange and freaking stupid family, everyone was doing his bit in order to make everything work. Well yeah... everyone except for that dumbass Nick Frost [Dj Doctor Dave], don't tell him, but he stinks. I've never, ever, met such an annoying man.

INTERVIEWER: *Seriously?*

THE COUNT: Of course not! I love you Nick! I don't want to seem sloppy, but I'd say that the cast of *The Boat That Rocked* is the best cast I've ever worked with. Seriously.

INTERVIEWER: *If Philip Seymour Hoffman was a real dj, would he play the same songs as The Count on the radio?*

THE COUNT: Definitely. But at the moment, Philip would squeeze some contemporary British rock into the playlist. That stuff is good, isn't it? You

know, ever since I was a young boy, I've been into rock music. I can remember my mom yelling at me that my homework was not going to do itself while I had my headphones on, listening to The Who or Otis Redding. I just turned the volume up. In fact I did really badly at school. Sorry mom! *[blows a kiss]*

INTERVIEWER: *I've heard that you suffer from vertigo.*

THE COUNT: Do I?

INTERVIEWER: *C'mon! Everybody knows that. Now tell me, and your fans, the truth. Did you really climb up the mast on the boat, or was there a stand-in? You know, when you challenged your "dj-enemy" Gavin Kavanagh after he had slept with Simple Simon's wife.*

THE COUNT: I'm glad you asked that. I really did. I'm very proud of that, and I couldn't wait to say it out loud. I did it for the fans, I collected all the courage I could find and I grabbed on tight to those metal bars, and I made it to the top, step by step. You know, my foot slipped at one point, and I almost fell. Richard Curtis, the director, was so scared that he started crying because I refused to be tied to those stupid safety cables. He kept whining: "I'm going to lose my best actor. I told you not to go without the safety cables, why are you being so fucking brave?! Please don't die, please..."

INTERVIEWER: *Are you making this stuff up, Philip?*

THE COUNT: Ok, you win. There was a stand-in. Happy now? I can't help that, I can't even look out of the windows of my apartment in New York, and it's only on the 4th floor.

INTERVIEWER: *Let's change topic. In 2005 you won an Oscar. What was your first thought then?*

THE COUNT: My first thought? Uhh...ah yes! It was: "Can anyone tell me how to unwrap this? I wanna eat the chocolate!" *[Laughs]* I was so excited that I probably forgot how to think. I was shaking and my voice was trembling. My main concern was to appear as manly as possible despite my squeaky voice during the speech!

INTERVIEWER: *I guess we're done Mr Count, I would like to thank you for your time and I hope you enjoyed this interview.*

THE COUNT: Of course I did!

INTERVIEWER: *I'm happy about that.*

THE COUNT: Just kidding, I made that up!

Are pirates found only on boats?

by Pablo Sanchez Arias

Pablo Sanchez Arias reports on a discussion on file-sharing that took place recently among a group of 3rd year Modern Language students.

Paradoxical! Perhaps this is a good way to describe the recent widespread availability of materials on the web through file-sharing, and the laws passed by governments in an attempt to stop people from downloading material. But what do Modern Language students at La Sapienza University think of this downloading issue? Read on...

The first country to take steps was France, followed by Britain with its Digital Economy Act. It appears, however, that France and Britain are taking different approaches. As 3rd year students Matteo and Stephanie pointed out in a report they wrote following a classroom discussion on this issue, "Whereas France has planned stricter punishments, such as cutting people's internet connections, the British approach has so far been less aggressive since downloaders will simply receive a notification letter when caught".

It seems likely that many students have illegally downloaded something from the internet at least once. According to Irene and Federica, this is because "it's easier to download a song in two minutes than go out and buy a CD for maybe just one song." As Salvo noted, however, not all downloading is illegal, since you can actually buy music via downloading, such as on iTunes.

The internet has certainly increased the availability of music, books and films, and this is why many governments and authorities such as the British watchdog OFCOM are trying to stop illegal file-sharing. Many people, however, are against government intervention. In Britain, there is even a political party, the Pirate Party, which is determined to fight this battle.

As 3rd year students Ilaria and Veronica note in their report, this clash of perspectives has something in common with the conflict that went on between the British government and the pirate radio station in the 2009 film *The Boat that Rocked*, set in the 1960s, "except that this time the crew is called the Pirate Party and the struggle is against

the Digital Economy Act which aims to close all the websites with illegally downloadable materials."

So, should downloading be legalized or should it be banned? Irene and Federica believe that "perhaps cutting the telephone lines of those downloading files is a rather extreme way of forbidding sharing; it also means limiting the range of music and film culture available to people online."



For pirates nowadays, the computer is mightier than either the pen or the sword!

Cecilia and Marcella summed up the problem in these words: "Governments must deal with this problem by passing legislation to prevent illegal downloading, but artists must also understand people's needs by cutting the price of their works." They add, however, that the problem is far from being solved "because it is really difficult to control a system as huge as the Internet!"

For further info about the Pirate Party in the UK see <http://www.pirateparty.org.uk/>

Our Neighbours

by Martina Papaleo

We study Modern Languages at La Sapienza University and are based at Villa Mirafiori. Villa Mirafiori is not only an annex of Lettere and Filosofia but for those of us that study there, Villa is a little place of residence dipped in a green park. We are completely captivated by its ancient classrooms and by the continuous English conversations that run through it. But it sometimes happens that you forget that Italian is your mother tongue. I mean Philosophy.

When you're having a coffee-break, when you're standing in the queue for the bathroom, or while you're having lunch at the bar-tables, you'll often overhear the "philosophers" talking. Filosofia is the other faculty that shares with us Modern Language students this home-from-home called Villa Mirafiori, although philosophers are something else altogether. Their conversations are based on metaphysics and syllogisms. They debate on a large number of apparently abstract ideas and notions that to us, the "translators", just don't make sense. You can also meet them in the corridors at Villa, and it often looks as though they're avoiding you and your stares. Often I have had the impression they feel above us, maybe even above the whole Sapienza universe. The translators consider them a little bit odd: some of my peers say that philosophers don't do anything but think.

Even though we usually hear them using ideas and words from Socrate and Aristotle, philosophers are like all people who dream and think up projects. They also go out with friends for a beer in the evenings, and love talking about football and videogames too!

I've found out that their interests go beyond aesthetics and rationalism. When I interviewed Francesco about his reasons for studying philosophy, he became defensive and started to confuse me by talking about contorted notions: "I study this... and I talk about that because I want to arrive at the deep-rooted truth of reality." He is what translators mean by "philosopher". But Gabriele, Francesco's fellow-student and friend, distances himself from Francesco's abstractions and says that philosophy isn't only based on medieval postulates: "Philosophy should be modernised, and it is also a form of reasoning that inevitably reaches a conclusion. People (including translators) often



In the library at Villa Mirafiori. Photo © Martina Papaleo, 2011.

ask us ironically about our plans for the future. I for example, would like to become a journalist, and some of my friends are keen on teaching or writing for a living.. We don't study just in order to... think".

To my question "Is philosophy only for an elite? Do you feel a step above others?" their answer is unanimous. "A considerable number of faculties are branches of philosophy, such as medicine, so we can say we are more important, or perhaps that philosophy is their mother. But we aren't Masters of Knowledge by any means, and for us philosophy is above all a strong passion."

Well, I can see how the philosophers aren't so strange after all. I, a translator, entered the philosophers' pack and I had to rethink my cynical position. They see the world just like everyone else sees it, and they study all those abstract notions with the same conviction that we apply to memorising irregular verbs. In the end, it turns out that our neighbours are just like us, and this gives rise to a legitimate doubt: do they maybe think that the weird ones are us?

To Rori who makes me feel she trusts me. I trust her.

To Leo and Nani, my unforgettable companions in this adventure.