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MiraMag 11

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If you would like to contribute articles, photographs, drawings or your English language editing/revising skills for the next issue of MiraMag, get in touch with the eds as soon as possible, via email or on Facebook.

COVER: Giardini di Ninfa. Aurora Mazzoni, 2011

Maybe because of the toxic air we have been breathing since 11 March, this issue of MiraMag seems to be a very serious one: nuclear energy, priests and scandals, abortion and genetic screening are the first topics you are going to read about.

But don't worry, we've made room for trips, cinema and art, just to give you some suggestions for this late spring/early summer period.

This month we are also hosting two interesting pieces about language and, to finish, something lighthearted...let's call it a gossip piece.

Just enjoy!

Your MiraMag eds

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Mother Nature, can you help us?

By Veronica Saputo, Raffaella Sardella

and Ilaria Vitali

The recent tragedy of the radiation leak at the Fukushima nuclear plant sounds like a sad flashback: how can we forget the Chernobyl disaster? It is well-known what happened: on 26 April 1986, a nuclear accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant (Ukraine) caused considerable damage.

Prompted by the news about Fukushima, a class of 3rd Modern Language students discussed in groups a selection of related articles from the British and Italian press. In this article we sum up the main points made by our fellow students in their written reports of their discussion.

Focusing on the consequences of nuclear accidents, Group A asked: "What about nature?". As they pointed out, nature provides us with renewable resources, but it is also the first victim of human foolhardiness. "Radioactivity has damaged plants, animals and consequently food".

Most groups mentioned Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, who has spoken out against the use of Nuclear energy. Group C reminded us that Merkel has announced the temporary closure of Germany's seven oldest reactors (although the decision was largely criticised by the opposition).

Italy, on the other hand, doesn't seem to consider renewable resources as viable alternatives to nuclear energy. As Group A explained in their report, "while the majority of people are against nuclear energy, those who are supposed to represent citizens have a different opinion. Supported by two biased scientists, Veronesi and Boncinelli, our politicians seem to be unaware of the imminent danger".

Group D argued that the large demonstration in Rome on 26 March proved the Italian people's disagreement with the introduction of nuclear plants in their country. Also Mauro Mocci, leader of the Italian Anti-Nuclear Association, showed his aversion, as noted by Group C, who also agreed with him that "The nuclear era has come to an end, so we should start to think seriously about the need to resort to alternative solutions such as renewable sources for our energy needs".

Group B believes "It's necessary to follow the German example, by investigating solar, wind and water energies, for a future without fear."

Similarly, the students in Group D "strongly believe that it is necessary to find different solutions, in order to prevent the re-occurrence of disasters like Chernobyl and Fukushima".

Returning to the theme of nature, Group A wondered if The Beatles had perhaps written "Help" thinking of Mother Nature and her need to be protected.

Renewable Energy Sources, For and Against

WIND. For: the wind is free and always blows, especially on mountaintops, and it can reach very high speeds. The use of wind turbines enables us to produce energy without any chemical waste or environmental pollution. **Against:** there is no legislation to help identify places where such plants can be built. The lawless proliferation of wind turbines is a serious threat to tourism since they spoil landscapes. Moreover, the noise produced can be really annoying to people and may frighten animals, forcing them to leave their habitats.

HYDROPOWER. For: artificial lakes ensure water for irrigation, and, during rainy periods, dams can prevent floods. Moreover, once built, hydropower stations require little maintenance, producing energy without human intervention. **Against:** the creation of artificial lakes profoundly alters the wildlife of the river since the water temperature tends to rise. Furthermore, this energy is only available if there is sufficient river flow, so it depends on the rains.

SOLAR POWER. For: solar cells directly convert the energy of the sun into electricity. The energy produced is entirely clean and these cells need little maintenance: they only have to be cleaned periodically. **Against:** solar cells are quite expensive and their average life is of about thirty years. Moreover, they require sunlight, so during the night and in winter the production of electricity is very limited. Finally, this technology also has a significant impact on the landscape.

Photo: Wind turbines on Frosolone mountain. Angelo Sardella (2011)

Talking with Priests

by Salvo La Ferla

This seems to be a very difficult moment for the Catholic Church, and for all those priests that believe in what they do. In the last few years, the Church has been involved in a number of scandals, above all, perhaps, in cases of pedophilia. What happened last month in several Jesuit schools in the north-western US is an example: an order of Catholic priests has agreed to pay an amount of money to former students who were sexually abused at school. Almost daily the news reports similar cases around the world. To find out about the views of those who work within the Church, I decided to interview two priests: one Italian and one Scottish. Below are their views on their chosen profession and on some of the issues that have been associated with the Church in recent times.



Interview with Father GC Priest in the province of Syracuse, Sicily.

SLF: *How long have you been a priest and what led you to make this choice?*

Fr GC: I've done this job for 45 years. I decided to give a sense to my life by sharing it with others and with God.

SLF: *Many young people seem to be turning away from the Church. Do you agree that this is happening? If so, can you explain some of the causes?*

Fr GC: It's true that young people aren't very interested in the Church, but I think that they are very distant from other institutions too because they've been abandoned by everyone. I think that the Church should try to get in touch with them, maybe by using a less complicated language.

SLF: *Would you ever advise a young man to become a priest?*

Fr GC: I would suggest it only in the case of someone who is prepared to make sacrifices in order to bring joy and happiness to others.

SLF: *Don't you think that the general opinion people had of the Church changed after the pedophilia scandals? About 10 years ago not many people would have criticized the Church, but now it looks like everybody's doing it.*

Fr GC: These kinds of scandals don't help the Church, they dishonour its image. Because of them, people have forgotten what the Church is really

about: love for others and for God. Those involved in these scandals shouldn't be part of this institution.

SLF: *In your view, does the Church punish adequately the priests involved?*

Fr GC: In the past, the Church tried to hide these deeds, hoping that the person would change and thinking that these cases were only limited to a few occasions. Recently, however, things have changed: the Pope has been really firm about this recently, saying that whoever commits these deeds must be laicised immediately.

SLF: *We know that the Church is against abortion, but don't you think that in some extreme cases it can be justified?*

Fr GC: Abortion can never be justified, since it's the interruption of a life, even though to many people this doesn't seem to be very important. In some extreme cases, for example if a girl gets pregnant because she got raped, it is understandable that she might wish to have a termination, but this doesn't mean that abortion is a good thing. It's still murder.

SLF: *If you could turn back time, would you still choose to be a priest?*

Fr GC: I definitely would. The only thing I regret is that I have not helped as many people as I would have liked. But as Saint Peter says: "Thank God, I am what I am".



Interview with Father Hugh Purcell Parish priest at St. Ninian's in Edinburgh

SLF: How long have you been a priest and what led you to make this choice?

Fr HP: I was ordained a priest, aged 42 in the year 2000. The thoughts about priesthood or marriage were a fairly constant dichotomy throughout my life. I was planning to be married 3 times over the years!

SLF: Many young people seem to be turning away from the Church. Do you agree that this is happening? If so, can you explain some of the causes?

Fr HP: Personally Salvo, I think that in most cases, it is merely a symptom of growing up and striving for independence. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the way we do liturgy also has a big effect i.e. The music should be more modern and lively, with young people participating by playing instruments. Sermons should not be lectures, but should address real life issues for young people. In fact, I would like to see Youth Groups formed who set their own agenda on topics which they wish to debate. Give young people a voice in the Church, and LISTEN to that voice.

SLF: Would you ever advise a young man to become a priest?

Fr HP: That is a difficult one. It would depend on the person and their life experience. With rigorous honesty, until formation programmes were changed to meet modern day needs, I would tell a young person to get some real life experience first. I would ask them to wait until they were in their mid-20's at least. But if formation programmes were not modernised, I would probably advise against it, unless they were a strong personality, not afraid to speak their minds in seminary.

SLF: Don't you think that the general opinion people had of the Church changed after the paedophilia scandals? About 10 years ago not many people would have criticized the Church, but now it looks like everybody's doing it.

Fr HP: The endemic, worldwide sexual abuse of people, not only children and adolescents, has definitely had a major detrimental effect on the Institutional church. Celibacy is too easy an answer

as to why this happens. Human Formation in seminaries is woeful, especially in the whole area of sexuality, affective maturity, and psychology. If you treat people like children during formation, especially sexual and affective maturity subjects, then when they get ordained, they will generally be sexually immature in terms of how they think about sexuality in general. This is very dangerous. Junior seminaries should be banned immediately.

SLF: In your view, does the Church punish adequately the priests involved?

Fr HP: The policy should be **zero tolerance**. They should be laicised immediately if they are guilty, sent to prison, but they should also receive psychological treatment, because the formation process has probably played a part in their sexual deviancy. Bishops who have deliberately and knowingly hidden paedophile priests should be laicised and sent to prison too.

SLF: We know that the Church is against abortion, but don't you think that in some extreme cases it can be justified?

Fr HP: I certainly do believe there are extreme cases where abortion is morally justifiable. I ask myself a simple question. Was the child conceived through God's love? If not, in extreme cases, then I would definitely allow abortion. Abortion is **never** morally justifiable simply as a 'matter of convenience'!

SLF: If you could turn back time, would you still choose to be a priest?

Fr HP: In my case, I would choose to remain a priest because I had a long career as a Medical Laboratory Scientist before I became a priest in 2000. I am very happy in my priesthood, but do have major issues with the Institutional Church. I have no major issues with God!!!

Eds' note: As Fr Hugh Purcell pointed out at the time of the above interview, the views he expresses here are entirely his own and he does not speak for the Catholic Church in any capacity.

ST NINIAN'S IS A PARISH OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF ST ANDREW'S AND EDINBURGH, A CHARITY REGISTERED IN SCOTLAND NUMBER SC0088540

A Hard Decision

By Cecilia Pesci and Irene Pellecchia

Abortion has been a hotly debated topic in Italy for many years, and Italy's approval in 2009 of RU486 led to further discussion. This pill, first introduced in France over 20 years ago, enables women to have a chemically induced abortion within the first seven weeks of pregnancy instead of undergoing a surgical procedure.

While this pill met with a lot of opposition in Italy, the fact is that abortion was legalized in Italy in May 1978, enabling women to end an unwanted pregnancy within the first 90 days for health, economic, social or family reasons.

According to Abortionfacts.com*, however, having an abortion entails negative psychological aftereffects. This website reports research that points to only one positive feeling (relief), and claims that this feeling of relief may be followed by emotional paralysis, a kind of numbness in which women are unable to express their emotions or feel anything. Among other possible consequences is the loss of sexual pleasure.

Abortionfacts.com also claims that up to 33% of women who have terminations develop an intense longing to become pregnant again in order to make up for the lost pregnancy.

Opinions in Italy

To find out what students in Rome think, a small survey was carried out among those attending a 3rd year English language course at Sapienza. The survey focused on three main questions: What do you know about the abortion situation here in Italy? Is abortion justifiable, and if so, when? What reasons or situations may lead young women to seek an abortion?

The first clear point that emerged from this survey is that all the students interviewed know that abortion is legal in Italy, and some of them also mentioned the existence of RU486.

When asked about the reasons why women had terminations, most of the respondents stated that young women opting to terminate a pregnancy did so mainly because they felt they were too young to have a child, because they had financial difficulties, because they had no support from their partners or because they had become pregnant after being raped. As one student pointed out, they would not want to be reminded of the violence they had

suffered. She added that some women also decide to terminate their pregnancy when they learn that their baby may be disabled, since not everyone has the courage or ability to raise a disabled child.

Genetic screening

A recent article in the BBC News magazine (18/04/2011) reports a young couple's agonising decision about whether or not to have a baby in view of the 50% likelihood of a genetic disorder passed on by the father. This couple may opt for IVF with pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, but even this genetic screening procedure is not without its critics.

One opponent is Ian Macrae, editor of *Disability Now* (cited in the BBC News article), who argues that the genetic screening of embryos reinforces the idea that disability in itself is bad, and that the lives of people with disabilities "are intrinsically less valuable" than the lives of the non-disabled. As he puts it: "For me, disabled people are part of the rich mix of a diverse society."

While some might not agree with Macrae's argument, the students interviewed in our survey showed a certain understanding of the predicament of people in situation like that of the young couple.

Contradictions

All of our respondents appear to believe that abortion is not justifiable from a religious or moral perspective. They also point out that the important thing is to take precautions rather than have a termination later.

To sum up, it would appear that young people often have contradictory opinions about abortion, tending to justify some cases but not others.

It's important to highlight, however, that in modern societies everybody is free and has the right to choose. Making decisions in an informed way, obviously, and respecting the law.

* Abortionfacts.com is a US website run by the Elliot Institute, whose founder and director David Reardon believes that abortion is bad for women and would like to see strict barriers to abortion in the US. Wikipedia notes that Reardon's research findings conflict with the view of the American Psychological Association as well as those of many other scientists and researchers.

I <3 Prague

by Eleonora Pizzi

Why did I visit Prague for the second time in five years? Well, the only way for you to find out is to pack your luggage, take a plane and go for a wander around the little streets of the city, or perhaps watch the sunset from the Castle!

Prague, Tuesday 29 March

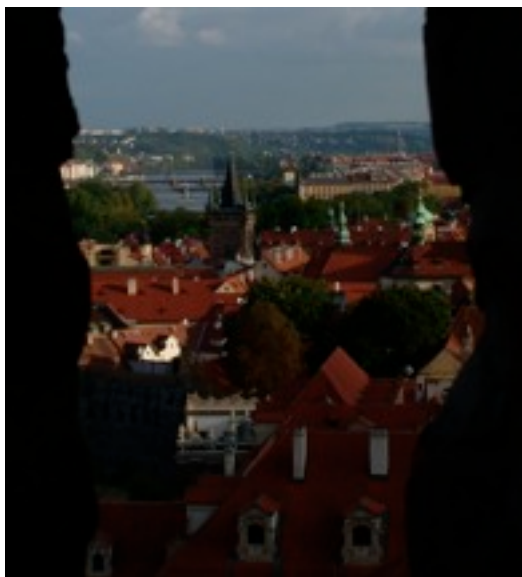
My first day in Prague since my school trip five years ago. I had forgotten how beautiful everything was! It made up for the dreadful flight with all those noisy chattering children!

Staying at the U Kocku hotel. The atmosphere is magic! A real pianist playing classical music in the middle of the hotel lobby. Soft lighting and art nouveau decorations everywhere!

After a short rest my boyfriend and I went exploring. We saw the Old Town Square and the famous clock tower. This medieval astronomic clock showing the positions of the sun and of the moon is one of the city's major attractions. Dinner by candlelight in a traditional Czech pub - soup, meat and Pilsner, Prague's famous beer.

Prague, Wednesday 30 March

Visited the Museum of Decorative Arts today, and saw a beautiful collection of historical craftwork, including old clocks, jewellery and furniture. Also explored the Jewish quarter with its remarkable cemetery and the six beautiful synagogues.



Went to an evening concert at the Municipal House where the orchestra played Schumann and other classical masterpieces for two hours. Definitely been one of the best concerts ever!

Prague, Thursday 31 March

Woke up late! Went for a walk in the Stare Mesto district. Decided not to follow the map but just walk randomly, exploring the city as it took our fancy. Saw the famous Wenceslas Square, where Jan Palach, a student who fought against Soviet oppression, set himself alight in protest. The square is called "the little Champs Elysées", because of its resemblance to the Parisian boulevard.

Prague, Friday 1 April

Breakfasted on a Trdelnik, a traditional sweet pastry made from rolled dough, wrapped around a stick then grilled and topped with sugar and walnut mix...delicious! Visited the Kafka Museum and saw David Cerny's provocative sculpture of two men urinating. Cerny's sculptures are all over Prague, also where you least expect them to be! He seems mainly to want to provoke and disturb the public, especially as regards politics.

Prague, Saturday 2 April

Last day in Prague, unfortunately! Spent the morning watching the marionettes of the Clock Tower announce eleven o'clock and having a sandwich in the Old Town Square, before heading off to the airport in the afternoon. This lovely city and its special atmosphere and charm just stole my heart! This was my second time in Prague, but I hope to visit it many more times!

Photos (clockwise) 1. Eleonora Pizzi (2011), 2 and 3 Chiara Venturi (2010)



Black Swan: when feathers dye black

By Carolina Guadagnoli

I was only eight years old when I took my first steps in a dance hall. I remember the first time I saw my teacher, the enormous mirror and the bar where dancers were doing warming-up exercises; everything was so fascinating.

At the time, I never really thought that ballet would become my passion. But now, when I dance I forget all my problems; I feel free and I can express my sensations through simple movements. I also know that the world of dance is not all roses; the audience that attends a ballet sees only a wonderful world in which fantastic characters seem to fly effortlessly.

Most people can't imagine that behind this perfect world there is hard work, exertion and suffering. I know that when I prepare a show, I spend a lot of time rehearsing, but it's a sacrifice I make gladly since dance is my life. I'm committed to what I do and everything must be perfect.

Black Swan is a film about this perfection, and I thoroughly identify with Nina, the perfectionist dancer played by Natalie Portman.

Nina Sayers is a ballerina with the New York City Ballet. She dreams of becoming the perfect lead dancer. The opportunity arrives when she is chosen by choreographer Thomas Leroy (Vincent Cassel) to play the role of a lifetime, the dual roles of the Black and White Swan in a production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

This is the story of Odette, victim of an evil magician's spell. By day she's a swan and by night she is allowed to be a human again. The spell can be broken if a prince swears eternal fidelity to her. One night Prince Sigfried encounters Odette and falls in love with her. But again because of the evil magician, the Prince swears the oath to another woman, Odile, who looks like Odette. Usually both roles are performed by a single dancer. The White Swan must be acted with purity, and the Black Swan with sensuality.

In the movie, Nina interprets the innocence of the White Swan perfectly. She's still a child, living with an obsessive mother who has shut up her in a bell glass. She is imprisoned in her adolescence.

Nina finds the interpretation of the Black Swan difficult because it must be mysterious and sensual, characteristics which don't belong to her. Nina starts a process in order to make her dark side

emerge, but this process turns into a real physical and psychological transformation, becoming a descent into paranoia and madness. At the end of the film she succeeds in the role of the Black Swan but pays a high price for this success.

So the plot seems simple: a ballerina wants to achieve her dream. But director Darren Aronofsky creates a film with a strange heroine, a victim of her own insanity. It's definitely an unconventional film about dance, not at all the usual film about dancers in search of glory. It's difficult to set this film in a genre because it starts in an ordinary way like *Fame* but then becomes a thriller.

Reviewer Manohla Dargis appreciates the film's "lack of reverence towards the rarefied world of ballet". The director shows the sacrifices and the hard work involved. As Dargis puts it, "Nina doesn't just pirouette prettily, she also cracks her damaged toes and sticks her fingers down her throat to vomit her food" (*New York Times*, 2/12/10).

Black Swan has had an impact also on Italian viewers. Luigi Locatelli, an Italian journalist, reviews the film in his blog, saying we should forget the usual affectedness of the ballet and all the unbearable clichés since this film reveals the tensions behind the scenes. He notes too that Aronofsky doesn't care about the beauty of the ballet, doesn't care about pirouettes and pas-de-deux, but only wants to show the exertion, the sweat and Nina's psychological suffering. For the first time, the cinema is dealing with the world of ballet without glamorizing it, but by treating it as a pure and brutal struggle for survival.

David Denby considers this film "a luridly beautiful farrago, a violent fantasia" with "sex, blood and horror" (*New Yorker*, 6/12/10), while Joe Morgenstern says that "as Nina dances on the border between sanity and madness, the director blurs the line between reality and fantasy, turning the film into a gothic horror show that is fascinating and disappointing in equal measure" (*Wall Street Journal*, 12/3/10).

I'd say that *Black Swan* is a love-it or hate-it movie. I love this film because it says something new and different about the world of dance. I know that some will find it bleak and harsh, but in my view it's a movie that should be seen by all. So go and see *Black Swan* now!!!



The King's Speech

by Virginia Maliziola, Valentina Speranza and Ilaria Vitali

The way politicians use words as a vehicle for their messages and to persuade people is the focus of a 3rd year English language course taught by Donatella Montini at Sapienza University. With the aim of broadening our understanding of the importance of linguistic power, she suggested that we watch *The King's Speech*, also considered by many to be the best film of the year.

Speech and speeches

Let's start with the title: *The King's Speech* in English actually has two possible meanings: it may refer to the spoken language (**speech**, the uncountable noun) or to the linguistic product itself, (**a speech**, the countable noun).

While this title is no doubt deliberately ambivalent, it's interesting to note that in the Italian version of the film, *Il Discorso del Re*, this wordplay is absent.

The story

Briefly, the plot is as follows. The situation becomes difficult for Albert (Bertie) when his brother King Edward, appointed by George V as his successor to the throne, abdicates to marry Wallis Simpson, a divorcee. This means that Albert is obliged to become the new King of England, George VI. This role is rather frightening for him since it obliges him to speak in public, and he has a stammer.

But he isn't alone: his wife, Elizabeth is supportive, and an Australian speech therapist called Lionel Logue helps the King to control his stammer. George and Lionel have a lot of misunderstandings, but they manage to become friends nevertheless.

Logue pushes him to understand that his problem is not simply physical, but psychological as well. As Lionel says: "No one is born with a stutter,"

The two men work on Bertie's problem with some very funny, sad, terrifying and dramatic moments. The King really wants to say something, but he can't get it out without his friend Lionel.

Issues dealt with in *The King's Speech*

This film doesn't simply tell us that governing is difficult for a member of the English Monarchy, but it shows us why it's so difficult.

Amy Biancolli sums up the film in this way: "[It] begins with the fear of a prince and ends with the courage of a king" (timesunion.com, 24/12/2010).

The dialogue reveals the initial drama:

King George VI: *If I'm King, where's my power? Can I form a government? Can I levy a tax, declare a war? No! And yet I am the seat of all authority. Why? Because the nation believes that when I speak, I speak for them. But I can't speak.*

Life may be tough for a monarch, but Lionel Logue's quips often come across as attempts to debunk the aura that surrounds public speaking and monarchy. Here is one example:

Lionel Logue: *How do you feel?*

King George VI: *Full of hot air.*

Lionel Logue: *Isn't that what public speaking is all about?*

What the reviewers say

The King's Speech has received both public and critical acclaim. Reviewer David Cox suggests that its success is due to "magnificent acting, a fine script, classy production design and, for that matter, impressive cinematography, costumes, editing, score and sound-mix." (*The Guardian*, 22/2/2011).

Moreover, the movie is considered as suited to all ages: adults can enjoy the story of George VI portrayed realistically and in an entertaining way, while young viewers will learn that a stutter is not a weakness but just something to fight against boldly like the King in the film. Hence, as Roger Ebert notes in his review, "This is an excellent film for teenagers" (*Chicago Sun-Times*, 15/12/2010).

As *Observer* reviewer Philip French notes, *The King's Speech* is also an example of friendship. It shows how two men from different social classes can become friends. He also notes the film's stunning settings, with famous buildings such as this film has beautiful scenes, such as Westminster Abbey, which represents British nobility and culture (9/01/2011).

Reviewer Bruce Bennett in madaboutmovie.org also praises the excellent performance by Colin Firth. In an interview with writer Mali Elfman (on screenrave.com), Firth discusses the issue of stammering, stating that he has met many people with a stammer. A stammer, it seems, is something you can't overcome, but must learn to live with.

When asked if he met any members of the Royal Family in order to obtain useful information about George VI for his role in the film, Firth replied that this wasn't possible because they are always busy.

Mind your language

What about the linguistic aspects of the film?

Reviewer Bruce Bennett believes that the language is used in a suitable way and is full of royalty.

In the US, however, the reaction of critics was not as positive as in the UK, and the main problem was precisely the language. Given the coarse language used in one particular scene in the film, the R rating initially given by the MPAA* meant that children under the age of 17 had to be accompanied by an adult.

For this reason, the original version of the film was withdrawn from the American market and replaced with an alternative version that contains fewer f-words (four letter words, the kind that start with F, and rhyme with Luck!). As can be seen on US website filmratings.com, the film's language was edited for re-rating purposes and now has a slightly less restrictive rating of PG-13.

The scene that caused the trouble is the one that shows the future King George VI swearing repeatedly as part of a therapeutic exercise with his eccentric speech therapist Lionel Logue, played by Geoffrey Rush.

Here is an extract from the dialogue of that scene:

Lionel Logue: Do you know the "f" word?

King George VI: Ffff... fornication?

Logue: Oh, Bertie, (and here it comes the f-word)

As so many critics argue, however, f-words can't really be compared with violent or sex scenes, and *King's Speech* director Tim Hooper certainly agrees.

As he told *L.A. Times* columnist Patrick Goldstein, he believes that the initial R rating given by the MPAA to the film in the US means that: "violence and torture are okay, but bad language isn't", and goes on to say that he cannot think of any film "where the swear words had haunted [him] forever, the way a scene of violence or

torture has, yet the ratings board only worries about the bad language" (cited on opposingviews.com, 3/11/2010).

The dubbing question

The King's Speech has of course been dubbed into Italian, but not everyone is happy with this choice. In her blog entry on L'Espresso Blog, Alessandra Mammi is clear about her disapproval: "dubbing this movie should be banned also in Italy, since it takes away the voices of three amazing actors who have succeeded, with their voices, in creating a masterpiece." She believes that in this case, subtitles would have been a more appropriate choice. (25/1/2011. Ed's translation).

When dubbing is done well, it can add something to the film, and it is also needed because many people don't have the language skills necessary to watch films in the original language.

In this film, however, the Italian dubber of Colin Firth, Luca Biagini, clearly does not match the English actor's skill in stuttering or in the delivery of his lines.

As reported in the media, Colin Firth worked for months to get into his character, whose every stammer and lexical uncertainty are essential ingredients of the film.

Interestingly, the swearing scene has not been censored in the dubbed Italian version, but many would say that it is just not as funny as the original version of the scene. Try watching it in the two languages and you will see for yourself what the difference is!

Worth seeing?

Definitely yes. We also believe, however, that *The King's Speech* should be watched in the original (UK) English version, also to understand something more about English culture.

The DVD will soon be released, but if you live in Rome and you want to watch films in their original version, we suggest you try The Space Cinema, in Piazza della Repubblica, or the Nuova Olimpia, in Via in Lucina, both in the city centre.

***Eds' note:** the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) is the US board that decides how a film should be rated. PG-13 means that "parents are strongly cautioned", and that "some material may be inappropriate to children under 13". An R ("restricted") rating means that "Children Under 17 require accompanying parent or adult guardian".

Imaginary interview with Briony Tallis

By Fabrizia Mancini

Briony Tallis is a key character in Ian McEwan's best-selling novel, *Atonement*. In this interview, she comes clean with MiraMag on the mistake that changed her life.

London is very cold this morning. I didn't even bring my hat. I'm wondering what questions would be appropriate for this interview, standing at the lift, pen in hand. And here she is. Briony Tallis is a great natural beauty, even at the age of 60: her short blonde straight hair, shaped into a bob, gives her a childish air; her makeup is gentle with a little sparkling eye shadow and blush. Her smile is pure and spontaneous and her eyes sincere. Her hat is dark just like her elegant gloves, but her dress is very colorful.

BT:What a perfect day! [*she glances out of the window*].

Briony clearly loves the rain. She breaks the ice by offering me a glass of white wine.

FM: *If you don't mind, I'd like to start with the basics. You are quite a phenomenon in this novel. One might even say that you're its spirit since the drama develops from a lie that you tell. The word "lie" is so loaded, don't you think?*

BT:Absolutely. My life was ruined because when I was 13, I was unable to interact normally with people. I always seemed to create strange...beliefs."

FM: *Atonement is famous for its passionate and dramatic story. What do you think? Is love the predominant theme in this novel?*

BT: [*Smiling*] Of course it's predominant! But it's not the only theme! [*laughs*]. Basically, everything's made up of love, which is the greatest feeling a human being could ever experience. The relationship between Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Turner is portrayed throughout the book as a loving one. They grew up together, their love was pure, so when I accused Robbie of raping our cousin Lola, Cecilia didn't believe me; she still believed in true love. Her love for Robbie was destroyed by my terrible lie because I had a crush on Robbie! But then I wanted to make things better."

FM: *What about your last words in the novel? I found them amazingly sincere and valuable. I'm referring to the sentence "I gave them happiness, but I was not so self-serving as to let them forgive me."*

BT: I was so aware of the consequences of my actions that I tried in every possible way to find

peace. I recognized my sin of wrongfully accusing Robbie of rape and thereby ruining his and Cecilia's chances of a life together. I attempted to atone for it in my final novel, *Atonement*. I didn't grant myself forgiveness, I blamed myself.

I'll bet!

FM: *Final?*

BT: Oh, I shouldn't have said that, right? Is it a kind of spoiler? [*laughing*]

FM: *Allow me to say that you are quite a controversial character because of your behaviour in the whole story. First, you make a terrible mistake, you lie about Robbie because you're jealous of Cecilia, then you grow up, hoping to make things better. You're very different from Cecilia: it's like you actually lived in the fictional world you created - drenched in it, and constructing it through immaturity and misunderstanding.*

BT:Yes. I will make this atonement even if neither Robbie or Cecilia will ever speak to me, even if it takes the rest of my life. At the age of 18 I demonstrate my determination when I finally decide to tell the truth. [*She looks out at the rain again.*]

FM: *The theme of death seems so real that I had the impression that it was hovering above me!*

BT [*laughing*]: Throughout the second half of the novel, the theme of death is juxtaposed with theme of life shown at the beginning of the novel. The theme of death arose while I was working as a nurse at the hospital, where I witnessed the death of many soldiers. Death is also portrayed through Robbie's participation in the retreat at Dunkirk during WWII, when he witnessed the deaths of many soldiers and innocent bystanders.

FM: *So true love can survive anything?*

BT: I'm an optimist, so...what do you think?!

I've learnt at least two things from this interview: the first is that a lie may have terrible consequences. And the second? Briony Tallis loves smiling!

Ed's note: In 2007, McEwan's novel was adapted into a film, starring James McAvoy and Keira Knightley, and directed by Joe Wright. Briony's character is played by the amazing 17 year-old Saoirse Ronan.

True colours, true stories

by Chiara Guida

I colori del mondo
12 February - 1 May 2011
@ Spazio 'fontana', via Milano 13
Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome

Let's start from the beginning: Guglielmo Pepe, curator of the exhibition, says: "This exhibition emerges from a desire to show how National Geographic photographers have succeeded in interpreting life on our planet through the power of colour. Colours show us women, children and men living in countries near and far; what life is like for people who have to combat hunger, poverty, war and disease; how animals manage to survive upheavals in their habitats; and the effects of climate change on the environment. Colour also portrays the Earth at unique moments: people in moments of intense happiness, the fantastic diversity of other species, and the extraordinary beauty of nature"

So the purpose of the exhibition seemed to me very clear: all those great photographers wanted to tell the story of life on earth through the use of colours, four in particular.

Red, the colour of the earth, of fire and communities, the colour of the heart, of blood.

Green, the colour of the green world in all of its manifestations, the colour of hope and nature, of life itself.

White, the colour of ice melting because of the effect of global warming, of the animals whose survival is at risk, of innocence and purity.

Blue, the colour of water and the sky, of the seas, of the joy of living and peace.

But what about my impressions? Pictures are a mere stylistic exercise if they have no effect on the observer.

Actually some, such as *The Diner Dancer* by B. Lanker (see left), were fun at first, but then I found myself wondering how happy the woman in Lanker's

photo must be if she dances for money at her age.

A couple of pics in the red section really caught my eye: *A Bride Unveiled* by M. S. Yamashita (China)

and *Bride Saying Goodbye to her Mother* by J. Cobb (India). In this second one I could see how much sorrow a bride might experience in the case of what I imagine is an arranged marriage.

The green section was more raw than the others. While looking at images of the jungle from South America and Africa, I could see doctors operating, scars (see *Scars* by R. Olson, right) and eviscerated animals.

Of course there were also amazing images, such as *The Cure* by L. Johnson (right), whose contrasting colours I really liked. But I'm not telling you any more - go and have a look!

In the white section I've found a lot of snow... More interesting to me were the images of people praying on the Himalayan mountains or the images representing rites in Japan and South Africa. Last but not least, a picture we should be proud of, since it was taken in Italy: *Vendors Running From The Police* (Milan) by J. Cobb, in which you'll no doubt recognize our famous fake bags.

Blue was the colour of seas and fish or fishermen, but also of poverty. There are also images from India, South America, Africa, Afghanistan and Gaza, but most of all it's hunger that's on display.

But then suddenly I saw *Starry Night* by P. Essick (the description on the panel says "Milky Way above Oulanka National Park, Finland"), which renewed my hope but also made me realize that while some people can look up at a sky that stretches far and wide, others cannot.



MiraMag Gallery

edited by Veronica Saputo

Okiana Mikeli

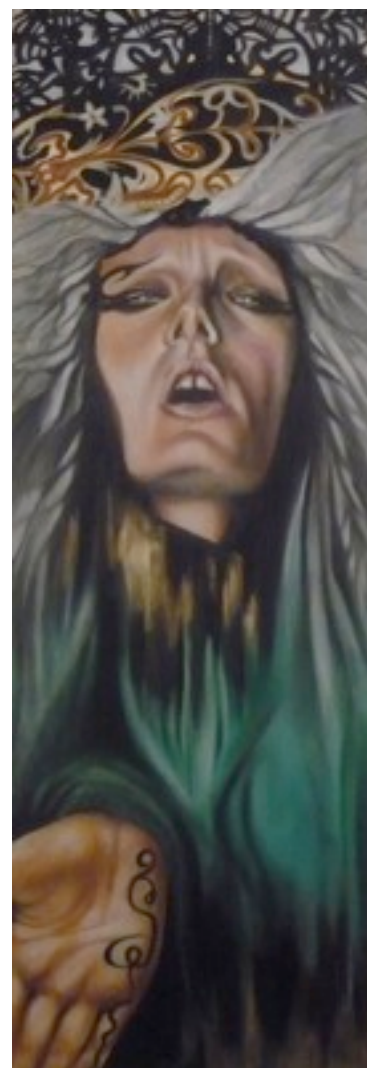
Okiana is a young artist who was born in Tirana (Albania) and arrived in Italy with her family in November 1998. At the moment she is studying Modern Languages and Cultures at La Sapienza University, Rome.

In her artworks Okiana uses mainly oil on canvas, wood and cardboard canvas. Other techniques she uses regularly include acrylic on canvas, water colours, pastels, charcoal, ink and pencil. Here we show just three of her paintings.

Top left: **L'accidia** (2010, oil on canvas, 60x80). Sloth - an idleness that causes forms to deteriorate, making them less attractive. The idleness of living.

Bottom left: **Solidarietà, no indifferenza** (2010, oil on canvas, 100x70). The indifference shown by luxury and wealth towards poverty: two worlds in close contact but never touching.

Bottom right: **La veggente** (2011, oil on canvas 30x90). Woman seen as an entity from an unknown reality who hypnotizes with her aura and envelops with her eclecticism.



Make no mistake, English is difficult

by **Alessandra Masi, Irene Pellicchia and Aurora Mazzoni**

Have you ever watched the hilarious video on YouTube about the Italian man who went to Malta? No? Ok then, here's the link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mITnzCiUSI0.

Funny, isn't it? It shows clearly what can happen when misunderstandings arise because of language.

But people learning and using English as a foreign language will inevitably make a few mistakes. Some of these occur because of influence from the mother tongue. For native speakers of Italian, for example, the pronunciation of English may be particularly difficult to learn, simply because, unlike in Italian, many letters are silent. More about this later.

False friends

Again in the case of Italian (and other languages whose vocabulary stems from Latin), problems can crop up regarding so-called false friends, known by linguists as false cognates. This is a frequent source of trouble for Italian learners of English.

False friends are pairs of words or phrases that look or sound similar between two different languages, but that differ in meaning. There are many potential sources of misunderstanding. For example **lurid** doesn't mean *lurido*; a pillow can't be **morbid** since **morbid** means *morbo*, **fame** doesn't mean *essere affamato*, and a **portfolio** definitely isn't a *portafoglio*.

False friends can be a tricky problem for students, but maybe thanks to them, anglophone native speakers can also have a good laugh at us!

Pronunciation complications

But probably the most difficult thing is pronunciation. The biggest problem is that English doesn't appear to have precise pronunciation rules to guide learners, and sometimes people have to spell out a word to let you know how it's written. For a beginner, it's a nightmare: the letter *a* can be pronounced in so many different ways. For example, in **tall** and **squad** the sound of the letter *a* is different, at least according to the RP pronunciation you find in dictionaries (in this case, /tɔ:l/ and /skwɒd/ respectively). If you add to this the differences between stressed and unstressed vowels, the difficulties multiply.

As if these problems weren't enough, there's also the issue of the wide range of anglophone

accents, both native speaker accents in places such as Britain, Ireland, Australian, the US, etc, but also the many users of English as a second language.

The complicated situation of English pronunciation seems to have been created just to discourage people from learning English!

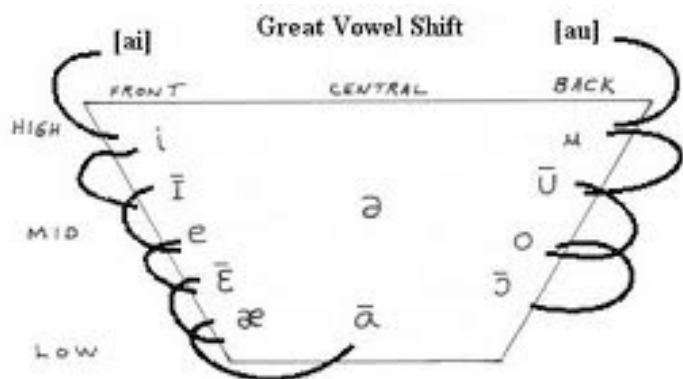
Just a week ago, during a Sky TV programme about Tom Cruise, some Italians might have realized that they pronounce his name wrongly. It isn't Tom Cruu-eez but Tom Cruuz, the *i* is silent. If you used to make this mistake too, you're certainly not the only one to get his name wrong, however, since you can hear many journalists making the same mistake. It also seems also that Tom Cruise is a bit annoyed about this.

English may be complicated in terms of pronunciation, but you'll probably agree that it's a fascinating language to study. It's likely also that even if a person thinks or claims that they speak English perfectly (as a foreign language), they probably make pronunciation mistakes sometimes. You can even hear these pronunciation monsters as you walk down the street here in Rome, listen to the ads on TV or watch talk shows, or, worst of all, on the TV news.

Spelling vs sound: explaining the gap

It's clear to the eye that English pronunciation does not reflect the spelling. There is of course a historical reason for this. Between the 15th and 18th centuries, the English language underwent great change in the pronunciation of vowels, particularly in the southern parts of England. Danish linguist Otto Jespersen named this process the Great Vowel Shift (GVS), a complex evolution

(1300)	1400	1500	1600	1700	1800	present
<i>driven</i>	/i:/	/i:/	/e:/	/e:/	/ɛ:/	/a:/
<i>house</i>	/u:/	/u:/	/o:/	/o:/	/ɔ:/	/ɑ:/
<i>feet</i>	/e:/	/e:/				
<i>fool</i>	/o:/	/u:/				
<i>beat</i>	/e:/			/e:/	/i:/	
<i>foal</i>	/o:/			/o:/		/ɔ:/
<i>take</i>	/a:/	/e:/	/e:/	/e:/	/e:/	
<i>sail</i>	/a:/	/e:/	/e:/	/e:/	/e:/	
<i>law</i>	/a:/	/o:/	/u:/			/o:/



that marked the distinction between Middle and Modern English.

The GVS affected the long vowels, which moved upwards, becoming higher vowels*. So:

/ɛ:/ became /e:/ and then /i:/

/ɔ:/ became /o:/ and then /u:/

/a:/ became /ɛ:/ and /ɔ:/

Another change was that the vowels already at the top became diphthongs: /i:/ diphthongised into /ei/, while /u:/ diphthongised into /ou/.

While speech underwent changes of this sort (and the changes that took place differed according to area of Britain, which in part accounts for contemporary differences in vowel pronunciation in different parts of Britain), the written language, as usually happens, tended to be more conservative, and English spelling to a great extent became fixed during the 15th and 16th centuries. This, in a nutshell, is why English pronunciation seems so distant from its spelling.

Because of habitual behaviour in their own native language, Italian learners of English tend to pronounce words as they are spelled. This means, for example, that a guide [gaid] can easily become a [gwid]!

But English also has some phonemes that don't exist in Italian. Consonant sounds such as /θ/ or /ð/ aren't much of a problem, since they can be approximated if you affect a slight lisp!

The problem seems to arise mainly with vowels. English has some, such as /ə/ (known as the schwa) or /æ/, which occur in the pronunciation of **water** and **cat** respectively (in the RP variety you find in the Oxford dictionary). As we can see, even such basic and easy words can hide a trap!

Syntactic differences

But don't think that pronunciation is the only problem area for Italian learners of English. Things get even more complicated when learners decide to take a stab at producing a sentence! The main problem here is that often they actually translate

their sentences and apply the syntactic rules of their mother tongue to English. It may work with something simple such as "What's your name?", but it's unlikely to work in more complex cases.

For example, the Italian sentence: *Esiste la possibilità di frequentare l'università all'estero* cannot be "Exists the possibility to attend university abroad" but must be something like **You can attend university abroad**. Similarly, *Essendo una bella giornata, sono andata al mare* must be **Since it was a nice day, I went to the beach**, and *Mi ha detto che mi avrebbe aiutato* would be **She told me she would help** and not "She told me she would have helped".

Easy?

A lot of people seem to think that English is easy. I can't remember how often I've heard claims of this sort: "you just add an -s at the end of the word!" Well, many studies (mostly on children learning English as L2) have shown that this 3rd person singular *-s* is one of the last structures of English to be acquired (and then produced). Some researchers have also suggested that the 3rd person singular *-s* in the simple present verb form may even be on the way out in contexts where English is used as a lingua franca.

Not only beginners

What's frequently misunderstood is that the language problems described above don't only concern beginners. Even a good translator can get caught out by a False Friend. Distraction can turn an **argument** into an *argomento* (rather than a "subject" or "topic"), or a **horse** into an *orso* (a "bear"), going against all Darwin's laws on evolution!



* What happens when a vowel becomes "higher"? Basically this means that the position of the tongue (and chin) changes: it moves upwards to pronounce the vowel. And when your chin/tongue is down, the lowest vowel is produced.



The Royal Wedding

by Elisa Martini and Aurora Mazzoni

British girls can finally set their minds at rest.

Last November, Clarence House announced the engagement of Prince William to Miss Catherine Middleton. The wedding is taking place today (29 April) at Westminster Abbey, thirty years after the wedding of Prince William's parents, Charles and Diana.

Kate and William met in 2001 at St Andrew's University in Scotland while they were students. In 2002, they moved into a shared house with two other friends, and became a couple around Christmas 2003. William proposed while they were on holiday in Kenya last October, giving her his mother's engagement ring: the blue sapphire diamond ring that Charles gave to Diana on February 1981. Perhaps this was his way of feeling close to his mother at such an important moment of his life.

This marriage may be uniting Kate and William, but it seems to be dividing the English. One example of this is the fact that far more street parties are planned in the south of England than in the north. This is probably because the northerners are more left-wing than southerners and are in general less enthusiastic about the monarchy.

Peter McKay of *The Daily Mail* complains that it's "all a bit stiff and joyless", maybe because the privacy that has always surrounded their relationship "has killed any public excitement about the romance."

Criticisms have also arrived from *The Guardian*. On April Fools' Day, *The Guardian* published an Editorial ("The magic of the monarchy: The royal moment has come") which describes William as a "bastion of tradition with a deeply modern sensibility", clearly a satirical attack against an "anti-democratic institution based on privileges", namely the monarchy.

During a period with such a huge pressure on the public finances, "ordinary taxpayers should not be left with a bill fit for a king" said Emma Boon, the campaign director of the lobby Taxpayer Alliance. After all, the royal wedding is a "private matter" and people should not pay for the 5,000 officers who will be on duty to ensure the royal

couple security (which is costing the state about £20m) or for the 1 million flower decorations.

Even the pro-monarchy *Telegraph* seems to have its doubts, with a report by Patrick Jephson that describes divisions within Britain over the very idea of monarchy (15/04/2011).

The anti-monarchists are planning a series of counter-measures for the Big Day, with some opting for a counter-street party. The Republic campaign group, for example has organised the 'Not the royal wedding' street party in London's Red Lion Square. The group's supporters have also organised events in Cardiff, Manchester and Edinburgh, claiming to celebrate "democracy and people-power rather than inherited privilege". (see <http://www.republic.org.uk>)

The social network CitySocialising carried out a survey which suggests that 18% of the 740 people interviewed claim they will leave the country on that date. Others are indifferent, and will just ignore the event.

Those not taking part in the royal wedding celebration have been called **refuseniks** by the British press, currently meaning those who refuse the idea of monarchy, but the term derives from the Russian **отказник**, which referred to a person denied the right to emigrate from the Eastern bloc during Cold War times. Later on, the term was used to indicate people who refused to take part in obligatory activities, i.e. compulsory military service.

In spite of media criticisms and refuseniks, however, this wedding is expected to be The Event of the year, with countless people from all over the world overflowing into the streets of the capital.

Supporters can follow the behind-the-scene preparations on the official website (<http://www.officialroyalwedding2011.org>), which provides up-to-date news on the event, a live stream of the celebration, the guests list and a link to the Charitable Royal Gift Fund.

Ed's note: Street parties are events where people meet in their own street to eat and celebrate all together. Generally they are held to celebrate the jubilee of a monarchy and on other major national days of celebration.