

MiraMag

MIRIAM PUGNISI 2010

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A magazine by Modern Language
students, Lettere e Filosofia
La Sapienza, Rome



Demonstration in Rome 16/10/2010. Photo by Stella Bardani

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The University Reloaded

by Marina Brunetti



Demonstration in Rome 16/10/2010. Photo by Stella Bardani

As widely reported in the Italian media, a lack of funds has led to a deferment of draft law 1905. This proposed reform of Italian universities has been described by Education Minister MariaStella Gelmini as "historical", in spite of the criticisms of students, researchers and teaching staff. An outline of its main points is provided below.

University funding will be cut by €860m over the next few years. Moreover, state universities will be able to change into private institutions. While this is a way of financing universities, it also means that the academic governing body will include an external financing and decision-making administrator.

A "tenure track" for researchers is to be introduced. The concept has been borrowed from the US university system, where researchers are on a tenure track position for about five years. If confirmed, they become associate professors. The Italian version of the tenure track position offers researchers fixed-term contracts for a maximum of six years. After this, if they pass the qualifying examination, and if funds are available,

they will become associate professors. However, it is not clear what happens if there are no funds to finance the new tenured positions.

Moreover, introducing fixed-term research contracts will make it harder for the twenty-five thousand researchers currently working in Italy's universities to become associate professors. Minister Gelmini has promised nine thousand research posts, but Economy Minister Giulio Tremonti has said there is no money to implement her project.

Restructuring is already under way. In order to save money, our university system is also facing a process of internal reorganization. The number of departments has been substantially reduced. Consequently, departments have more members than before. The number of faculties has also been reduced.

Going back on the split which took place in 2001, our own Faculty - Lettere e Filosofia - is merging with Scienze Umanistiche, Studi Orientali, Filosofia and the Scuola Speciale per Archivisti e Bibliotecari. It remains to be seen how the degree courses will be organized in this reunified system.

Readers' comments on the education spending cuts:

Reducing the number of faculties is a good thing, and so is getting Modern Languages back together, but losing teaching staff is unacceptable. It's also disgraceful that some languages risk having no foreign language lecturers. It's clear that the government is trying to cut public education in favour of private institutions. I'm wondering why such large demonstrations seem to have little effect on politicians...

MARTINA, 3rd year LCMM (Lettere e Filosofia).

The consequences of these spending cuts we are facing are appalling, especially since Sapienza is Rome's oldest and most prestigious University. Cutting research funds is really unacceptable: I mean, what progress can a country make if research is penalized? I'd like to become a teacher, but in these circumstances, how can I hope to achieve my goal?

LEONORA, 3rd year Mediazione Linguistica (Scienze Umanistiche).

A country that cuts funds for universities and research is a country which places no value on its own evolution and future. It's a good thing to avoid 'copycat' courses: for example, one degree course for languages is enough. As regards 'privatization', although it would probably be easier to maintain a better level of education in private schools, the state must ensure that people who can't afford private schools also have access to education.

JESSICA, 2nd year Magistrale SLLT (Lettere e Filosofia).

The cuts in university funding, together with the associated strikes and delays in the start of classes have caused a lot of problems for students. But that is not the main problem. The government seems to have forgotten that the main role of universities and school in general is to educate students, providing them with a technical and cultural background. Today's students are tomorrow's politicians, doctors, engineers. It looks like the government has forgotten this.

MARIANGELA, 3rd year LCMM (Lettere e Filosofia).

The Adventurous Life of a *lettrice*

Wanda Gasperowicz interviewed by Chiara Guida

Her father was an army major during WWII, and later a colonel; her mother a nurse. They met at the front in 1941. She came to Italy in a Cinquecento with someone she'd met in a hostel. Love, travels, troubles... no, this is not a film, it's real life.

WG: My family history reflects the political situation of the time. Even going to a Russian school affected me: I'm more involved in Russian culture than Polish culture. At the beginning of the 20th century, my grandfather, a chemist, left Vilnius, now the capital of Lithuania, and moved to St Petersburg with my grandmother, who was half German, half Polish. After retiring, he became the Keeper of the Constantine Palace Gardens in Strelna, near St Petersburg. In those days, the Palace, former home of the Konstantinovich branch of the Romanov family, lay empty and in ruins, but now the Russian president lives there.

CG: What and where did you study?

WG: I studied at the Russian school, then I decided to attend the Interpreters' School at Warsaw University, but because of my Soviet citizenship and the fact that there was a limited number of places in Poland's free university system, I was not allowed to take the entrance exams for the Modern Languages Faculty. I had to wait a whole year to get Polish citizenship and take the entrance test. There were six people for only one place and I won without having the extra points reserved for farm and industrial workers. Most of the language lessons took place in labs, where we practised while wearing headphones. I remember there was wood flooring in the lab and we had to wear slippers. A fellow student, now working at Roma Tre University, refused to wear them, so the teachers called his parents!

CG: Why did you decide to move to Italy?

WG: Latin was compulsory but I hated it; like all dead things, it is not real. I decided to take that exam in October because I already knew I was going to Rome in the summer and I hoped that a friend of mine who had invited me knew Latin. I was wrong: he had not studied Latin at his school. So I found out about the documents I needed to study at La Sapienza both because I loved Italy and because I couldn't go back to Warsaw without knowing a word of Latin. Fortunately I had my Polish passport. Before Perestroika nobody could travel alone. During the summer of '68, a friend of mine who worked in a hostel asked me to take two hitchhikers to the Warsaw police station, for they needed a special exit permit issued by the police in order to leave the country. One of them was from Rome, and we exchanged addresses and phone numbers and promised each other we would meet in Rome. He always complained about Polish youngsters because they didn't know who Che Guevara was. Some days later, in the same hostel, I met a young biologist from Siena: Paola. She was travelling around Eastern Europe in her Cinquecento and she had to leave the hostel that day, but she didn't know where to stay. So I offered her a bed in my house in exchange for a lift to Italy... and she agreed. We decided to travel through Germany and Austria, but the DDR police told us we couldn't stop anywhere, since in divided Germany, Eastern and Western bloc citizens couldn't be in the same place. Once past the Czechoslovakian frontier we stopped and slept in the car. When we woke up at 5am we heard on the radio that the Soviets had occupied Prague. We couldn't believe it! A few hours beforehand we were there buying fuel on



the black market. After this first trip to Italy, I went back to Poland and returned to Italy again in 1970, thanks to my boyfriend's invitation. In the autumn of that year, my documents arrived at La Sapienza and I was able to enrol for my studies.

CG: Were you a working student?

WG: Of course. I worked in an office on the Tuscolana, and lived in San Lorenzo. I earned sixty thousand Lire a month, using half to pay the rent and the rest to live on. Not like today... I couldn't attend classes often because of my job, except for Angelo Maria Ripellino's literature lessons, which I loved. In summer I worked as a guide for Italtourist. I also worked on cruise ships. I earned six thousand Lire (the Italians got ten thousand) but I was happy because I was able to visit many Mediterranean cities and islands. This was my life until I graduated in 1976.

CG: How did you become a language lecturer?

WG: In 1976 I went back to Poland to visit my son, whom I had left with my mother. My intention was to stay, but my degree wasn't recognized in Poland, so although I was sad about it, I came back to Rome and talked to my teacher (A. M. Ripellino) who offered me a volunteer job as a Russian language lecturer. I accepted, knowing I also had to find some other work in order to earn a living. I worked on the main campus (*Città Universitaria*) for three years, then in 1979 La Sapienza bought Villa Mirafiori and I was finally given the opportunity to teach Russian in a new way, thanks to the language labs there. I used to bring my records of Russian poems and literature read by Soviet actors. My students were enthusiastic. Now I can't use this method, since students don't attend much. A year later my colleagues and I received a new kind of *lettore* contract based on hours, with a monthly salary of two hundred and sixty thousand Lire, so I was able to bring my son Robert to Rome. The University didn't start paying my contributions until 1981. We *lettori* started a protest, and eventually obtained a contract that stated however that we could only work in the same faculty for six years, after which we were supposed to return to our country of origin to "refresh our language". In practice this meant that we had to look for work in other Italian cities, which turned us into commuters. Half of our salary was spent on train tickets to our now distant workplaces. (I worked in L'Aquila from 1986 to 1988, and then in Perugia for four years). The fact that I was frequently far from home really affected my relationship with my son. He became very independent but also withdrawn

and I'm still trying to find a way to communicate with him. In 1991 I came back to Villa Mirafiori and from November 1994, the University administration started to apply the National Contract, which provided us with a sort of stability (until then, we had to reapply each year for our job). The contract has not changed since then, almost twenty years ago. There just isn't the political will to make the necessary improvements. The authorities seem unaware of the fact that mother tongue language lecturers are fundamental for language students, because we provide direct contact with the language. Moreover we work more and earn less than language lecturers in France or Germany. Yet in some respects we are more fortunate than new language teaching staff who are on short-term contracts here.



CG: Why do some students seem unaware of the importance of the language lecturers?

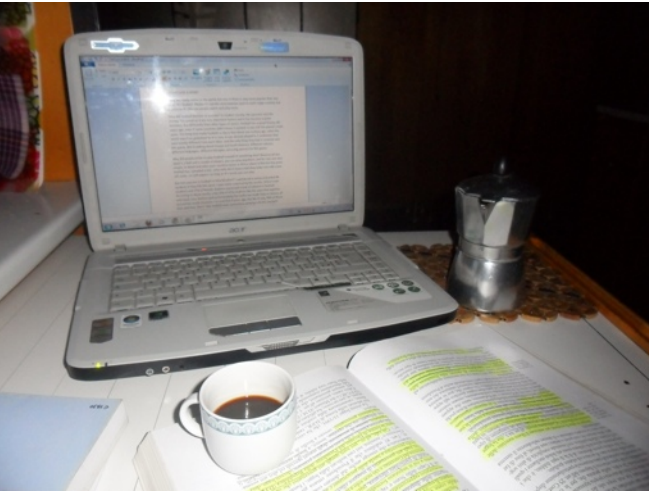
WG: Some don't really understand that they're missing the chance to learn more and consequently to have more opportunities in the future. They are not interested in culture.

CG: What are you going to do when you retire?

WG: I'll dedicate my time to the Russian Cultural Centre (www.centrorusroma.org). I've been its President since 2003. Putin encouraged Russian people throughout the world to set up associations and I found this a good idea. During these past few years, we have organised more than eighty events (book and poem presentations, concerts and so on) without a cent from either the Italian or Russian governments. Why do I do this? Probably to fill up my days, and to avoid thinking about the troubles I'm having in my private life.

Coffee and pc

by Martina Papaleo



Every course comes to an end eventually. When it starts, the end seems so far away. All those hours spent reading up on linguistics and literature in the languages studied. Exams, exams, and more exams: everything seems so confusing. Then the end draws near, and you're just one step away from your goal: the graduation thesis.

When I reached that stage, I had only one picture in my mind: Seville. The Seville I'd got to know during my Erasmus period there: its streets, the staunchest Catholics in the world, its history soaked in adventures and travels. Sailors who left Andalusia for the New World.

As the pile of books on my desk grew, the only certainty was the novel I had decided to translate. Its subtitle had caught my attention while I was in an international bookstore: *Sevilla, Abril de 1646*. I suddenly lifted the book from its shelf, and as I flicked through it, I had the impression it was speaking to me. I bought it.

I now had a novel to translate, but I also had to write up a suitable technical commentary as advised by Bruno Osimo. My thesis wasn't to stop at that, however, for I had a slightly bigger project in mind: to deal also with linguistic, historical and phonetic issues related to the text I was translating. I was embarking on something I knew nothing about. I had no idea what I was supposed to read or write, and my first meeting with my thesis supervisor didn't solve my doubts either.

I sat in front of my computer: "Just write!" my supervisor had said. I tried this and started to translate into words what my mind was telling me. A few pages appeared: the Preface, the biographical sketch of the author and my critique of the novel. Wow! The first chapter was done! From that point on, my work got under way and gradually took shape.

I spent many hours photocopying Spanish books and searching for in-depth articles on the Internet.

The place I like best and where I usually produce more easily is the Spanish Library. It is very important to find a place where you can feel like a character in your text.

I believe that the most important thing is to be ready at all times to write down what comes to you, your "inspiration". Your thesis is something that takes you by surprise: while you're watching television, while you're washing your hands, or even when you're out with your friends having a beer. I suggest you carry a notebook around with you at all times: often the best ideas come to you when you least expect them.

You also find yourself up against a blank sheet of paper at times, frightened by your inability to fill it, suffering from the anxiety known as writer's block. Then you find yourself starting to read and write, feeling happy and proud that you're giving life to something of your own (with a little bit of help from linguists and literature experts).

You inevitably start circling in red the dates for your weekly talks with your thesis supervisor. You have a few sleepless nights correcting what doesn't work and typing up each source text on your computer since you're not allowed to use a scanner. You start drinking seven coffees a day, but forget to eat. You start to find people annoying (especially your parents) and people will find you equally irritating: if they start avoiding your questions it's because you've exasperated them.

Working towards your graduation day is hard. You dream of getting that piece of paper, and you almost go crazy in the process. Then it's there: the laurel crown. After that, another journey beckons. Sorry if I forgot to mention it sooner, but during those sleepless nights when you're working on your thesis, you start thinking about the future. The effects of this are... well, you'll find out soon enough for yourself.

Seeds of Violence

by Aurora Mazzoni

In 1948 Italy abolished the death penalty. Now, after six decades during which the bloodthirsty side of humanity appears to have intensified, some people have started to wonder whether it should be brought back.

In early October, the body of Sarah Scazzi, a young girl who had disappeared during the summer, was found by the police at the bottom of a well on a land belonging to her uncle. First he confessed to strangling and abusing her, but as the investigations continue, the reality is appearing increasingly complex. Sabrina, Sarah's cousin, and daughter of the self-confessed killer, has also been arrested in connection with the murder.

In order to understand more about the sources of violence, I contacted Raffaella Sette, a researcher in the sociology of crime and victimology, who provided the following explanation:

Experience shows that in every civil society only a relatively small number of individuals is capable of openly or consciously desiring and then committing murder. It has also become clear that the social representation of this particularly violent and abnormal crime contributes to considerable scaremongering among the population, which inevitably affects its wellbeing.

"Violence" has certainly become one of the main topics in social debates in Western society. Blood crimes are reported daily in the news, and the mass media seem to have appropriated the discussion that surrounds homicides, passing their filtered and cliché-ridden versions of the discussion on to the public.

Concepts such as crime of passion, crime of honour, and acting out of revenge or madness are applied almost automatically to any murderous behaviour with discernible features assumed to be typical of one or other of these categories. Nonetheless, from a scientific standpoint, we know that the genesis and dynamics of such crimes are complex, often difficult to grasp, and therefore cannot be subjected to such simplifications.

While having some features in common, murders all carry the imprint of the environment in which they are committed. Each society has developed its own set of "practices" of violence forged by specific

codes and value systems that set out what is acceptable and what is not, thereby constraining violence within culturally legitimized forms.

Violence within the family is an international phenomenon, but every society establishes in its own way the boundaries and meanings of conflict between partners and other relatives and of the discipline to be observed by children.

I believe that we should be asking ourselves why the number of aberrant behaviours is constantly rising on the part of people who, exploiting a favourable environmental determinant (namely, bombardment by the mass media), watch TV programmes that do not always respect human dignity.

Do people simply become accustomed to such news and images? Why do people decide to watch certain kinds of TV programmes, becoming onlookers of somebody else's pain? Are we not running the serious risk that, in the process of acquiring a tele-reality habit, many viewers will become increasingly insensitive and indifferent towards the suffering of their fellow human beings?

**Raffaella Sette (confirmed researcher),
Political Science Faculty, University of Bologna**

Many people may indeed have felt indifference at the news of Sarah Scazzi's murder. Nonetheless, crimes like this conveyed, at least in my case, a real sense of angst when I thought about how the victim must have felt, how sad she must have been to discover that the very people who were supposed to love her had turned against her. And while the tears of pain and anger flowed (because a lot of people shed at least a few), a thought also went through the minds of many: the culprit(s) must pay for this.

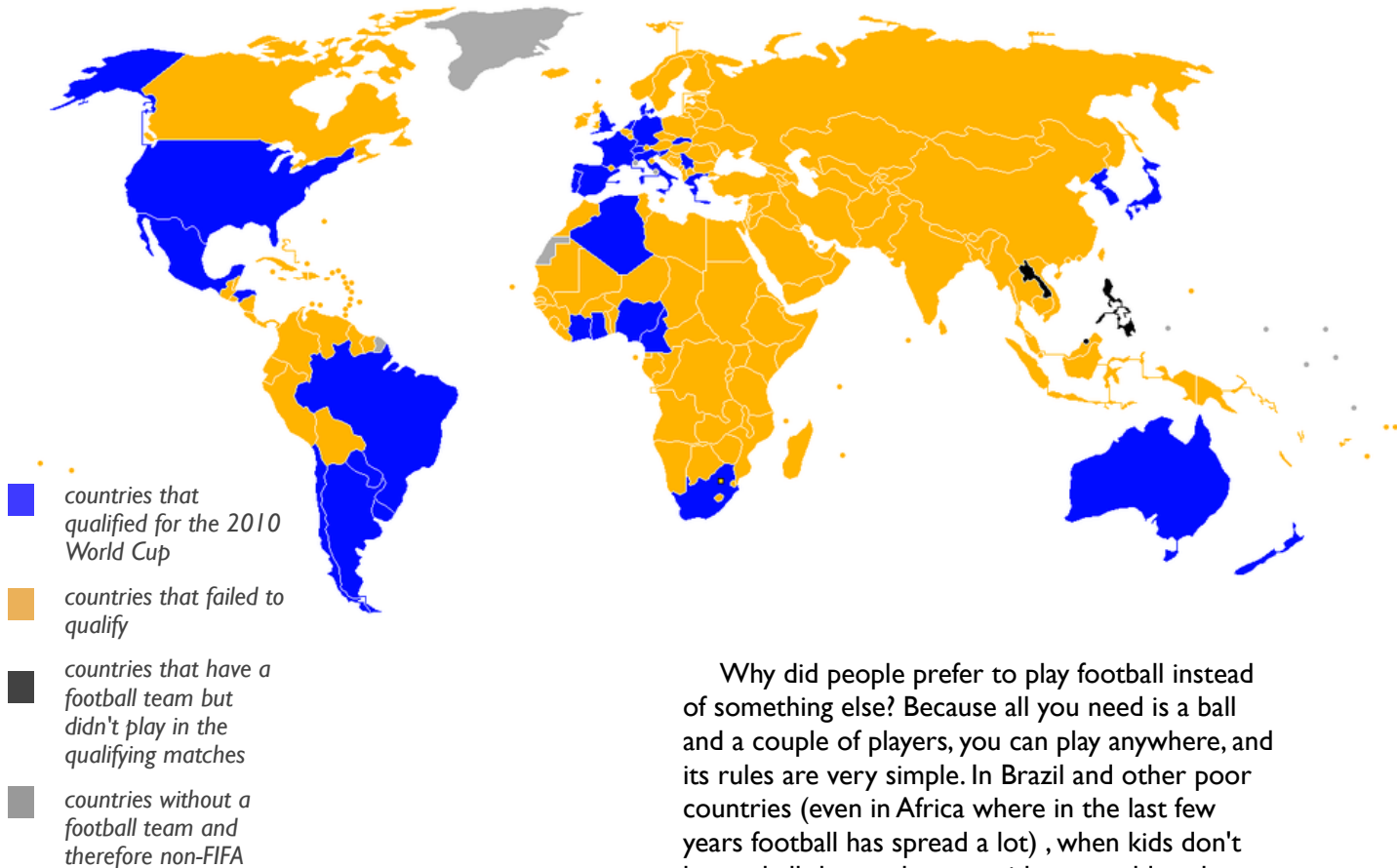
Pay how? I don't know the answer to this. Neither do all the people who left a comment on Sarah's facebook page. Some just send their love, while others ask for justice, or revenge.

Some people argue that we are not allowed to end anyone's life, including those of murderers, pedophiles and rapists; that this is not how a civilised society works. Others (myself included) are convinced that killing a murderer would be doing them a favour. It would unburden their conscience from guilt, assuming of course that they actually have a conscience.



Not Just a Sport

by Salvo La Ferla



There are many sports in the world, but one of them is way more popular than any other: it's football. Maybe it's not the most popular sport in each single country, but in general it's the one people watch and play the most.

How did football become so popular? In modern society, the sponsors and the money that TVs spend on it are very important factors and it has become a big business. But differently from other types of sports, football has a great history. 80 years ago, even if some countries didn't know it existed, it was already the planet's main sport.

The thing that made football so big is that about one century ago, when the world wasn't as globalized as it is now, it was already played in 2 continents that were totally different from each other, and the only thing they had in common was this game. I'm talking about Europe and South America. Different cultures, different languages, different lifestyles, but a great passion for the same game.

Why did people prefer to play football instead of something else? Because all you need is a ball and a couple of players, you can play anywhere, and its rules are very simple. In Brazil and other poor countries (even in Africa where in the last few years football has spread a lot), when kids don't have a ball they make one with some old socks, or with papers: as long as it's round, you can play.

But how popular is football among Villa Mirafiori students? In a small-scale survey, I asked forty students if they like this sport. I was really surprised by the results: 55% of the male students and 75% of the female students I interviewed expressed a lack of interest in football. According to my findings, only 35% of Villa students actually like this sport, which together with food, cars, fashion and (unfortunately) the mafia, Italy is famed for around the world. However, I'm sure that on 9 July four years ago, 99% of those that said they "don't like football" were out partying till daylight!

It's very interesting to see that now even though the entire world plays football, Europe and South America are the continents that still have the best teams and players; since 1930, nineteen World Cups have been played, and only European and South American teams have won the competition (Brazil, Italy and Germany at the top). In a way, we can say that the tradition continues. Football is not just a sport, it's history.

Go and Find the Invader!

by Chiara Guida



Has anyone seen these coloured aliens here and there around Rome?

If you haven't, then maybe you should get out more... they've been showing up all over the place since the summer.

The first one I saw was light blue, made of small squares (like all the others), and stuck on an old Roman wall.

These aliens are called Space Invaders, from an old Japanese arcade game.

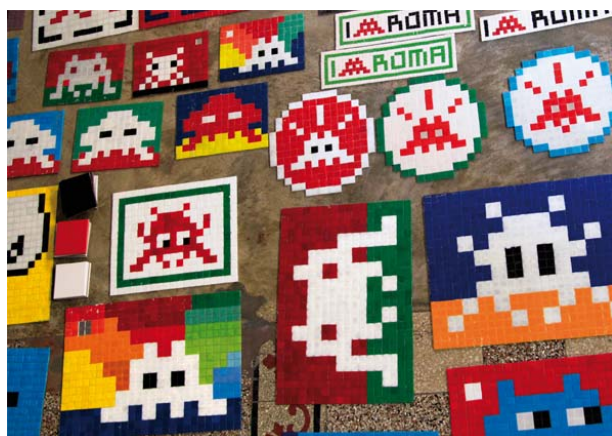
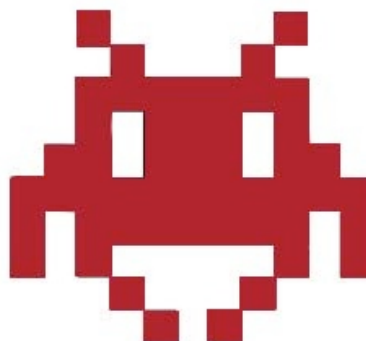
The artist responsible for this peculiar urban invasion is called Invader and wants to remain anonymous. All that's known is that he is male and French, was born in Paris in 1969, and is considered one of the most important street artists today.

Museums around the world have hosted his exhibitions and he invaded

more than forty cities, including Bangkok, New York, Hong Kong and Los Angeles, before coming to Rome.

Wunderkammern is showing Invader's works from 23 October to 21 December. At the inauguration, a map of the invasion tour was distributed.

If you've seen the invaders in the streets (in Rome or elsewhere) or are interested in this unusual art form, don't miss this exhibition!



press release clipping

EXHIBITION

Roma 2010 and other curiosities

**Wunderkammern
via Gabrio Serbelloni 124, Rome**

**23 October - 21 December 2010
Monday - Thursday 5 - 8 pm.**

INFO: www.wunderkammern.net

Credits & Contacts

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Would you like more opportunities to say it in English?

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You can reach us by email, on Facebook, and on the *MiraMag* moodle here: <http://elearning.uniroma.it> >LETTERE > MiraMag.

All proposals for articles are discussed at our meetings on Fridays at Villa Mirafiori (room 14, 16.30-18.00).

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Special thanks to Wanda Gasperowicz and Raffaella Sette for dedicating their time to our questions.

MIRAMAG - a magazine by Modern Language students, Lettere e Filosofia, La Sapienza, Rome