

"La Bella Lingua": Diane Hales Confesses her Love Affair With the Italian Language

Simona Zecchi (October 25, 2009)



This time the passion for Italy and the Italian language comes from the West Coast: the famous American writer Diane Hales meets the students of IACE to share with them her knowledge and love for our country

“Learning a new language is like growing a new head”. Quoting the beginning of the book “La Bella Lingua” (Broadway Book, New York, 2009 – Random House Division), Diane Hales’ work on the beauty and importance of the Italian language, already gives us a hint of the message the author wants to hand down through her writing.



Diane Hales presented her "La Bella Lingua" at the Italian Cultural Institute on September 28 during an event organized in collaboration with the Italian American Committee on Education ([IACE](#) [2]).

The writer, one of the most published freelance journalists in the country, decided to write a book on the Italian language after having spent an enormous amount of spare time studying and researching on it. In fact, as she explained during the presentation, Diane started to fall in love with the country, its history, food, people, and language no later than 1983 when she first went to Italy and could hardly say "Buongiorno" (Good Morning) or "Non parlo italiano" (I don't speak Italian).

Before Diane started talking with the students accompanied by their parents and teachers of the IACE,

the Italian Consul Francesco Maria Talò said relevant words regarding the importance of learning a new language in order to achieve through it a consistent knowledge of a country's culture.

He also stressed the importance of learning a language in specialized institutions such as schools or language institutes, since, if approached in another, more "unofficial" way, the language learning process could become counterproductive and give the students an inaccurate perception of the culture it expresses

Teaching Italian as well as other cultures and languages that we can find in this amazing city", the consul continued, "is a very delicate task, filled with responsibilities for the future of the upcoming generations".

The fact that a writer from the West Coast was going to launch in the East Coast a book on the Italian language, which the consul also defined as a "love story", could imply a new starting trend. "Italian from now on will be seen as a cultural language too, and not only as an extra mean to enhance one's professional career."

The book focuses on the history of Italian through thematic chapters that cover every important aspect and step of the Country's history: from Dante who invented the modern Italian language, to art history, opera and the neo-realist film directors and actors such as Federico Fellini and Marcello Mastroianni. The chapter "How Italian Civilized the West" touches the most relevant moments of the Renaissance period and recounts about its more important exponents: Castiglione, Machiavelli, in fact, are described as the "manufacturers" of the most famous and commonly used Italian words, as for example the term galateo (etiquette) or, Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (The Prince) that "served as a primer for those hungry for power and a survival manual for those trying to hold onto it".

Her research led her to travel and visit the symbols of the Italian language cited in LA BELLA LINGUA such as L'Accademia della Crusca and the Società Dante Alighieri. She met and became friend with many Italians working in the field during her trips and through them her love for the language was furtherly enhanced.

During our brief but interesting talk, Diane said that she never stopped loving the Italian language since she first bumped into it in 1983. Italian history and the richness of its dialects are the aspects that always enchanted her. "Every side of Italian gives another dimension to life!" She also thinks that the book might be of some interest to Italian readers too, as she received many letters from readers of Italian nationality. The Italian public has started seeing Italy and its idioms from a new point of view, in addition to the fact that by reading in English they learn new idiomatic expressions as well as the American jargon. It's a cultural and linguistic exchange in which I truly believe".

As even Berardo Paradiso, president of IACE, commented, the book is able to lead the readers to a "passeggiata della memoria" a walk through old memories and the culture of Italy. He thanked the writer for having translated into words her love for the country.

The children took part to the debate asking her questions on how much she enjoyed writing the book



or on her favorite places in Italy. Finally they performed a song together with the teachers. The lyrics were written by the Italian actress and singer Simona Rodano who was also present at the IIC.

An Italian American student of IACE, Alessandro, told us how much he enjoys learning Italian, while professor Josephine Maietta, one of the Officers of the Executive Board in IACE, talked with us about the reason why she took the children at the Italian Cultural institute: "I wished the children to be the protagonists of this event and I wanted to accompany them in a wonderful 'passeggiata' throughout the centuries. "It is really important to insist on teaching Italian to children, even to those who are not of Italian descent, because that is the only way they have to understand Italy's outstanding culture. I have been teaching Italian since 15 years now, and I can say that no one better than little children can assimilate language at an high level. It is a real satisfaction."

LA BELLA LINGUA, therefore, is paving the way for a practical use of the Italian language which has always been studied with passion and interest in the United States.

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