

“Beloved, but dying out”: The Economist goes in search of the Milanese dialect

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The screenshot shows the top of a web page. At the top is a navigation bar for 'Economist' with links to World politics, Business & finance, Economics, Science & technology, Culture, Blogs, Debate, Multimedia, and Print edition. Below this is the 'Prospero' blog header, which includes the text 'Books, arts and culture' and an illustration of a statue, an open book, and a cello. To the right of the header are links for 'Comment (5)', 'Timekeeper', 'Reprints & permissions', and 'Print'. Below the header is a navigation bar with 'Previous', 'Next', 'Latest Prospero', and 'All latest updates'. The main article title is 'Losing language: Milan's beloved but endangered dialect' by 'BY A.V.' dated 'Dec 12th 2016, 17:12'. Below the title is a photo of a man (Enzo Jannacci) playing an acoustic guitar and singing into a microphone. To the right of the photo is a sidebar with 'About Prospero' (describing it as a literary and cultural commentary blog), a 'Follow @EconCulture' button (57.9K followers), and an 'RSS feed' link. At the bottom right is an advertisement for 'For enlightenment look within' with a 'Try a subscription' button.

There is a picture of Enzo **Jannacci**, and several references to Nanni **Svampa**. There is even a verse of “**El ridicol matrimoni**,” the song that lists the traditional Lombard toasts used during a wedding.

But **it is all written in a perfect English**, and in a publication that generally speaks of something quite different. “**The Economist**,” one of the most authoritative newspapers on economics and finance, has unexpectedly dedicated **an article to the Milanese dialect, which is “beloved, but dying out”**, a piece hosted by the blog “Prospero,” written by correspondents of the British newsweekly and dedicated to in-depth, literary and cultural analyses from the rest of the world.

The analysis is linear, clear, and anything but dry. The Economist remembers **the Roaring Sixties and Seventies**, when artists like the above-mentioned Svampa and Jannacci were on the crest of the wave, even with songs in the dialect, and when a group like “**I Gufi**” (in which Svampa was joined by Brivio, Patruno and Magni) were so popular that they appeared on television (national television, that is; there was no other); songs about **the evolution of Milan**, an industrial city with its own criminality, the *Mala*, with romantic overtones, at least in the songs.

However, as the article explains, it is the soul of Milan, **a city open to the arrival** of a multitude of people from the rest of Italy, particularly from the south, that has been the **cause of the almost complete disappearance** of the dialect. It is a language, as the weekly magazine points out, in which

many contributions from nearby nations have blended together, particularly from France (for example *coeur and oeuf*), to the point that they “make **Milanese seem more Parisian** than Italian, and that “Milanese can often be a struggle just to understand for someone from Naples or Rome.”

In this sense, the quote from *Ridicol Matrimoni* highlights that there are **full verses in which every single word**, every preposition and article is different from the translation in Italian.

The Economist also sought the opinion of a Milanese dialect teacher, **Edoardo Bossi**, who said that **only 2%** of the inhabitants of Milan can speak the dialect fluently. It is viewed by the younger generations as a coarse way of expressing yourself, he said. Nevertheless, the dialect **remains in the background of city life**, and continues to have a significant influence, starting with the (non-official) Milanese anthem par excellence, *O Mia Bela Madunina*. And maybe that is why shows by the *Legnanesi* and more modern artists (*Ul Mik Lonogobardeath* are mentioned) are still so popular.

di Damiano Franzetti Translated by Agostino & Iannone (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)