

L'ANGOLO DELLA LETTURA

I Promessi Sposi

In our class, Lingua, Cultura e Società, Oriana is helping us study an Italian Classic called: “*I Promessi Sposi*” – literally “The Betrothed”. *I Promessi Sposi* is an Italian historical novel written by Alessandro Manzoni and first published in 1827. It has been called the most famous and widely read novel of the Italian language. It was read by all Italian schoolchildren.

The story is set in northern Italy in 1628, during the oppressive years under Spanish rule. It is also noted for its extraordinary description of the plague that struck Milan around 1630.

I Promessi Sposi deals with a variety of themes, from the cowardly, hypocritical nature of one prelate (Don Abbondio) and the heroic sainthood of other priests (Padre Cristoforo, Federico Borromeo), to the unwavering strength of love (the relationship between Renzo and Lucia, and their struggle to finally meet again and be married).

One thing that we learned from this novel, and it fascinated me, was the use of word “bravo”. When used as an adjective, bravo means: good, capable, worthy, kind or well-behaved.

If, however, you are using it as a noun, then it means: scoundrel, rogue or henchman. Fascinating that a word can have such different meanings, depending on whether you are using it as an adjective or a noun!

In the story, Don Rodrigo, is a powerful horrible man who is infatuated with Lucia and is preventing Renzo and Lucia from getting married. He employs “due bravi” to do his dirty work for him.

Recently, there was a very elaborate, extravagant, over-the-top funeral of a Mafioso boss in Rome. It was complete with a band playing the theme from *The Godfather*, an antique black carriage pulled by six black horses and a helicopter that spread red rose petals over the mourners. One commentator described the priest officiating at the ceremony as being like Don Abbondio – the cowardly priest in *I Promessi Sposi*.

Fortunately, the version of *I Promessi Sposi* that we are studying is a simplified version, but certainly still enough to challenge us – particularly the use of passato remoto! Suitable for advanced students. It is a very enjoyable novel, and an important part of Italian culture.

Brian Bell

