

## THE MONTEGIALLO SCHOOL OF SWEARING

ANDREW HC McDONALD

### ABOUT THE BOOK

When English teacher Brian Chapman accidentally purchases a one-euro mansion after a big night out, it lands him with a headache much bigger than any hangover. Still sore from a recent divorce and armed only with his primary school edition of *Personal Italian Grammar*, Brian sets out to make himself anew, and become a man who is competent both at home renovation and cultural integration. When he stumbles upon an unexpected solution to finance his dream of remaining in Italy, he is faced with a new dilemma: for how long can he keep his new career from the beautiful and disapproving real estate agent, Viviana Messina?

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew HC McDonald is a performing storyteller, comedian, artist and photographer based in Boorloo (Perth) who delights in telling stories about ourselves as Australians, through writing art and performance. He is currently working on a screenplay version of this, his first novel.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kind of man is Brian?
2. Do you see his friendship with Toby as being typical of the relationship that some Australian men have with each other?
3. At what stage do you think he truly decides to commit to his Italian dream?
4. Why do you think Brian decides to actually go to Italy following his accidental purchase?
5. What are some of the cultural differences that Brian discovers in Montegiallo? Why does this little town appeal to him so much?
6. How does Brian's arrival change the town?
7. Why do you think Brian is more open to integrating himself into the culture than the other ex-pats are?
8. What is Viviana's opinion of Brian after their early encounters? Why and how does this change over time?
9. What do the Montegiallo locals feel about having the foreigners in their midst?
10. What is the role of the chaplain in this novel, and of religion in particular?
11. When was the last time you had a good swear? Was it therapeutic?
12. Do you think of Australians, in general, as being tolerant of swearing?
13. What was your favourite Italian swearword in the book?
14. And what is your favourite Australian swear? Do you think Brian left out any good Australian ones?
15. What difference do you think it makes to swear in a language that is not your own?
16. On p.38, Brian wonders if he should tell his fellow passengers that he is 'writing the male version of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *The Joy Luck Club* combined'. Do you think this is a good description for this novel?



## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did this idea come from, and what is your own relationship to swearing?***

I have been learning languages off and on for many years. Anyone who is a language learner knows that the taboo words are almost irresistible. I remember the horror on a Chinese colleague's face when I spoke just two forbidden bare syllables in Mandarin. Like it is for the Sicilians in Montegiallo, it does give a certain freedom – and thrill – to use swear words not already preloaded with the emotion of your own tongue.

It also goes back to when I went to a Catholic school in Perth. We had an exchange student from Mexico who only spoke Spanish. You can probably picture the first two words we taught Huglio and, his loud, enthusiastic and extensive use of them.

### ***How do you research your fictional Italian town – because it feels very real to me!***

Many of the small towns in rural Italy have a kind of 'fungible' charm, the piazza, the church, the old men in suits and hats, the stone and the pockmarked render. Montegiallo is a mixture of some of the innumerable tiny towns of Umbria and Tuscany I have visited. The *interior* of Brian's palazzo partly comes from my brother's house on the Mornington Peninsular in Victoria which is an over-the-top 80s Italian mansion. In that house live the *real* Becky the stove, the original gold bidet, and, yes, six toilets.

### ***And how did you research Italian swearwords?***

My Italian is pretty much exactly on Brian's level. I started out online with the ones I didn't know, but advice on the swear words – and every word uttered by an Italian – was given by Dr Agnese Bresin in Melbourne. There was quite a bit of discussion on the right ones to use between my editor Georgia Richter, myself and Dr Bresin. They had to be just in the right spot between funny and insulting.

### ***Who were your favourite characters to write?***

Oh, absolutely Gianni as my favourite. After he gets a taste for swearing, he just about steals every scene he's in. If the book is ever a movie, I hope there will be a fight for the role between the world's best young comic actors! I enjoyed writing all of them, esp. Viviana, Father Dom and Pola. But I loved writing Brian too. In the beginning he was going to be quite funny, cracking jokes etc, but I soon decided that even as the hilarity rises around him, he would not speak a *single* deliberately funny line in the whole book. As soon as I decided that, he wrote himself.

### ***Do you think that a 'school of swearing' might actually work?***

I genuinely think this could work for real. If I saw an ad for a class for say, 'Learn to swear in German!' I'd be tempted. And second language learning is often a lot of embarrassed mumbling. Belting out swear words could definitely help with confidence and pronunciation.

### ***What's next for Andrew McDonald?***

Well, I already have notes for another book, and I did some research for it when I was recently in Japan. But I have a lot of other creative outlets, live performing, (comedy/true storytelling) Photography and visual arts. Aside from writing, rubber stamp prints are my major artistic activity now. Have a look if you like. <https://www.ahcmcdonald.com/>



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