

## LEOPOLDO PRIZE AWARD

Essay by: **Carlotta Di Nicola from Rome (Italy)**

I've started writing for the Leopoldo Prize Awards while practicing simultaneous interpreting from an Italian speech of our former President of the Council Paolo Gentiloni. Practicing has become my everyday life in this last year of my master's degree in Interpreting and I would probably lie if I said that this year is going smooth, because it's not true. This is the year we, as students of interpreting, understand what it means to be an interpreter. Moreover, I believe we understand it more now than at the beginning of our studies. Some days we have classes from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and our brains could be described as a ticking bomb, ready to detonate. In that moment we understand that it's time to unwind. If I had to classify all the students of the interpreting classes, perhaps it wouldn't be easy. Some students begin their studies convinced that they will have time to comprehend how to manage all the multitasking exercises we need to do, while some of them already know what to expect. At this precise moment there are only 3 months of class left. Afterwards, we will be *jettisoned* in a world full of challenges. When I look around, I see people fully devoted to this job and students doing their very best. Only time will tell how many of us will make it or how many of us will find another path. Nevertheless, I know for certain that every student will always cherish at least the feeling of being an interpreter.

Those not involved in the interpreting world have difficulties in understanding how this profession is more than fundamental. How could we expect the opposite? As a matter of fact, some people encounter difficulties understanding the difference between an interpreter and a translator, maybe because it's a "new" profession or maybe because there are still misconceptions related to the interpreting world. I don't want to blame them, because I assume that eradicating age-old prejudices requires strong effort. Moreover, sometimes to change your mind you need to closely observe the phenomenon. In this case, how our profession works. I remember watching television years ago and thinking "She didn't translate exactly what the speaker was saying". I thought the interpreter wasn't good enough, but I was wrong. I simply didn't know what being an interpreter meant. I understood it only when I have become one of them. Sometimes you need to experience to understand exactly what something might mean.

When I think about what I feel while interpreting, I find difficult to describe exactly what my brain is experiencing. An interpreter's brain goes from having no information to having information all together. In my mind, I imagine this moment as a supernova explosion. The Italian dictionary *Treccani* defines a Supernova as "a star suddenly increasing in light and burning out" (translation offered by me). This definition could be a metaphor of the profession of the interpreter. The increase in light represents the amount of information the interpreter receives, as for instance the accent of the speaker (which the interpreter needs to become accustomed to), the formality of his or her speech, the content of the speech (you can know in advance the topic, but usually the content of the speech is unknown) and so on. The "burning out phase" is in my opinion the moment in which the interpreter has concluded his or her delivery. The Nasa website says that "a supernova burns for only a short period of time, but it can tell scientists a lot about the universe". I believe it can be applied to interpreters too. Indeed, the brain of the interpreter is suddenly lighted up and full of information which are delivered to the audience. The metaphor of the supernova is the way I imagine this profession to be.

It's really fascinating to see an interpreter at work. They appear to be calm, but it is not always the case. During my interpreting courses I was always enchanted by other students interpreting. Apart from the delivery, I was fascinated by how some people really can put themselves in other's shoes and still be calm even though the task is arduous. Indeed, the interpreter doesn't always agree with the speaker. Sometimes the topic is interesting and sometimes it's not. I suppose it's normal and it's human to disagree. Here comes the hard work. The interpreter must remain unbiased and continue interpreting. There are times in which is even hard to find the perfect solution, and if you love the Italian language the way I do, you are never satisfied. Unfortunately, the interpreter cannot always control or remember everything in that precise moment (we are human beings), so you need to use your practical experience to do your best, even though you know you could have done better. Making mistakes is human and it's probably the best way to learn and improve your skills.

Since my childhood I had no idea what I wanted to do, but I had different interests, as for example criminal justice, science, physics, sports, history, and music. If people asked me what I wanted to do with my life, probably I couldn't find an answer. Nonetheless, I remember that languages were always my back-up answer, or at least I thought they were. As a matter of fact, they weren't, but I realized that only later. I consider languages to be at the root of everything. We wouldn't be able to talk about science or archaeology without languages. By acknowledging this, I have also understood that I could gather all my different interests under one category or better said, one profession: interpreting. Only in this way I could experience for a moment what is like to be an astronaut, or to be a lawyer, or to win a gold medal at the Olympics. Languages have this great power of being part of our lives in everything we do. When I have come to this conclusion, I have understood that interpreting was the only way to express myself and I found this profession even more fascinating than before. I wish everyone could understand that. Nevertheless, I know that we're still half the way to giving this profession the recognition it deserves.

Thank you