

What to watch on TV this week

Television

Science meets superstition in Sky Atlantic's religious mystery *The Miracle*

Niccolò Ammaniti's series about a weeping Virgin Mary adds an existential dimension to the critique of Italian society



Tommaso Ragno in 'The Miracle'

Suzi Feay FEBRUARY 22, 2019

That a verifiable, inexplicable, bona fide miracle would be a devastating philosophical challenge to an atheist is obvious. However, it would quite possibly deliver as much of a seismic shock to a believer. In new Italian-language series *The Miracle*, the first two episodes of which air on Tuesday (Sky Atlantic, 9pm), a troubled priest faints dead away when faced with a statue of the Virgin that weeps blood at the rate of nine litres per hour. This messy Madonna was discovered in the lair of a Mafioso, the aptly (and Satanically) named Molocco (Moloch); found wallowing naked in the gore he is now catatonic, unable or unwilling to declare where he got the icon. The police spirit it away, and find themselves engulfed in a religious mystery whose implications threaten the Italian state itself.

The Virgin has chosen a strange vehicle for her latest manifestation: a cheap and tacky effigy made from solid plastic. Visitations from the Madonna usually confer some duty or obligation; just what is she after in a Rome hallmarked by decadence, cynicism and compromise? Once hidden pipes and chemical reactions have been ruled out, the prime minister passes the buck with relief: "It's up to the Pope." But think of the hysterical crowds, the public disorder, urges the worried police chief. For now the lachrymose Lady is being kept for observation in the disused underground swimming pool she could easily fill with haemoglobin if the tank beneath her slight frame were not continually being emptied for analysis. Scientists note that the blood changes in composition every few hours; one jokes that the Virgin has had her regular mid-morning doughnut.

Cutting-edge science exists side by side with superstition. Sandra, a haematologist, hopes for a miracle cure for her unconscious and unresponsive elderly mother. Hardened police fall to their knees before the dripping statue. Series creator and button-pushing Italian novelist [Niccolò Ammaniti](#) cuts through Italian society from top to bottom, using the miracle as a scalpel to expose the hypocrisies of a shallow, nominal spirituality. An uprush of faith unsettles the PM's own household, as his children's meekly devout nanny inculcates them with dogma and strange rituals. Meanwhile, his wife Sole, a petulant socialite, visibly chafes at her bland role, boozing openly at a philanthropists' fundraiser.

The most confounding character is Marcello, a greasy-haired, hangdog-featured denizen of the night, and yet also the missing link between the man in the highest office and the lowest drug-addicted streetwalker. The moment when his identity is unmasked gives an illicit frisson. That present-day Rome is corrupt, pleasure-loving, sordid and hypocritical is something of a platitude; shaping up as a mash-up of *La Grande Bellezza* and *The Exorcist*, *The Miracle* adds a disturbing existential dimension to cultural critique.

★★★★☆

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Science meets superstition in Sky Atlantic's religious mystery *The Miracle*

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Buckets of blood and not a wise guy in sight

James Jackson

TV review

The Miracle

Sky Atlantic/Now TV

★★★★☆

Inside the Factory

BBC Two

★★★★☆

As the latest Italian crime drama to hit our screens, **The Miracle** has a couple of things in common with *Gomorrah* and *Suburra*. There is the Catholic obsession with faith, and there are buckets of blood, but that's about it. Because this isn't any old Neapolitan mobster blood, but rather the crimson tears streaming down the face of a plastic statuette of the Virgin Mary. Nine litres an hour.

It's inexplicable, and a measure of a drama that offers something different

from the usual mafiosi, operatic betrayals and corrupt politicians, which, let's face it, we've seen a lot of since *The Godfather*. Instead, as the benevolent Italian prime minister gazes at the blood-spurting figure, here's a drama that is so hushed, solemn and weird that it's almost flirting with being deadpan satire.

A white-coated boffin explained to the prime minister: "Imagine squeezing an orange; the juice will always weigh less than the orange itself. So far, since we've been here, a statue that weighs 2 kilos and 300 grams has produced more than 600 litres of blood." The prime minister nodded solemnly and furrowed his brow as he realised he had bigger fish to fry than calling a referendum to leave the EU. For in Italy a weeping statue is a national emergency.

What could this holy MacGuffin

mean? A warning? A symbol for the spiritual bankruptcy of elite society (which we saw contrasted with despair on the streets)? A cipher triggering crisis in each person who sees it? So far it's not clear, but certainly everyone seems depressed, and perhaps a telling twist came at the end when a vile, whoring sleazebag — shambling about looking like some decayed 1970s-era Marlon Brando — was revealed to be a high-level priest and pillar of the community. At the close he gave a sermon of staggering

hypocrisy about the need to walk according to the spirit ("You must not be led to satisfy the desires of the flesh"). Frankly, I'd weep blood if I had this man as my representative.

Moving as slow as a Mass, this opening double bill of Niccolò Ammaniti's drama lulled you into its strange, dislocated world, and it could be the most distinctive two hours of television I've seen this year. Clearly, there really is something about Mary.

After four series, isn't **Inside the Factory** starting to feel just a smidgin samey? A powerful blast of déjà vu overcame me while sitting for an hour in the company of Gregg Wallace, looking like a maniac, at a Birds Eye frozen food factory where potato waffles are manufactured. Where, as usual, there were small shapes of food product flying along conveyer belts and being spat out of machines as he bellowed about "the 'umble potayto!"

In fairness, Wallace's barrow-boy shtick is still the USP of an amiable show that harmlessly teaches us a few things about our everyday food. While he looked on wide-eyed and amazed at the marriage of machinery and

product, the most astonishing thing was that it took him a full 50 minutes before giving in to his urge to say, "I'll stop waffling on!" and "I find this waffley exciting!" You can insert your own waffle joke here.

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Is 'The Miracle' Based On A True Story? Sky Atlantic's New Italian Thriller Has Religious Roots

By [AOIFE HANNA](#) | 9 days ago |



'The Miracle'/Sky UK Ltd

New Italian TV show *The Miracle* is captivating viewers across the globe and, y'all, it's not difficult to see why. The beautifully shot and mysterious-as-hell show is one of the

grizzly Al murder spree type deal with violence upon violence. No no no. As wild and shocking as this show is, one can't help but wonder, [is *The Miracle* based on a true story?](#)



Well, I will get straight to it and say that *The Miracle* is not based on any specific true story, but the history of statues allegedly crying tears of blood is definitely a thing in the Catholic church.

Although the whole "weeping statue" phenomenon was first recorded centuries ago, according to Encyclopedia.com, it began to resurface in a big way in the middle of the 20th century, around the time of World War II. The site explains that there are multiple versions of the [weeping statue](#), but not all are crying blood. It states:

"Statues and pictures of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints have appeared to bleed, and they bleed in significant ways, from the hands or the brow, places where Christ was wounded during His last days on Earth, or from the eyes, as if weeping."

Although the claims are often turn out to be disproven, a statue that cries blood always garners a lot of attention. Especially from devoted followers who believe [the tears are a sign from God](#). Some even believe that the tears have healing powers.

Speaking about the inspiration behind *The Miracle*, Sky Italia's chief of content, Andrea Scrosati, explained that the show aims to go beyond belief, disbelief, and everything in between. In an interview with *Variety*, he said:

"There have been a lot of crying Madonnas in Italy. If you go to the place, everybody will tell you it's true, but in their heart they know it's not. But what happens if it's actually true? How would politicians react to this? How would the church react to this? There is obviously money involved. And the characters that interact with this event, their lives are completely affected in ways that you would not expect."

his native Italy and around the world. The show was, of course, made in Italian, but English subtitles are available. The story of *The Miracle* begins when a bleeding figurine is found. With the figurine's veracity being confirmed by several people, the powers that be are in a fearful state. Not only that, but it seems that [the statue appears to be able to control them](#). Let's be real, politics could make anybody's eyes bleed but, in this instance, it's the statue that is low-key in charge. Filmed and based in the busy hive that is Rome, *The Miracle* is a vision of what could happen if peoples' belief systems travelled full circle.

The Miracle is available to stream now on [Sky Atlantic](#) and [Now TV](#).
