

ITL 352 AUTORI ITALIANI CONTEMPORANEI

(TWENTIETH CENTURY ITALIAN AUTHORS)

THE BIRTH OF ITALIAN IDENTITY IN LITERATURE (1925-1990)

Tues & Thurs: 8:30-9:50 a.m

Instructor: Prof. Beatrice Fabbri

Office Hours: before and after class by appointment.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course intends to explore the works of some relevant Italian writers of the twentieth century. I will start with Italo Svevo, who lived at the beginning of the XXth century in a cosmopolitan town in northern Italy, Trieste and had friends such as James Joyce. He was the first to include psychoanalysis topics in his novels and revealed an extraordinary talent in focusing on the private, intimate dilemmas of men facing society's challenges. Then, I will concentrate on a group of writers that were linked to one another: P. Levi, N. Ginzburg, C. Pavese and I. Calvino. They lived and worked in Turin, one of the most interesting towns during the Second World War. Two of them, P. Levi and N. Ginzburg, were Jewish and lived the drama of the Holocaust. P. Levi dealt with the terror of the extermination camps in Auschwitz and all his works are full of details about his daily life and his meditations to survive that reality of death and sorrow. On the other hand, even if N. Ginzburg didn't suffer that condition, she was able to give an extraordinary outlook on Italian society and its attitude towards Jews. Besides, she used the tools of humor and female sensitivity to describe her own Jewish family from Fascism to the return of democracy. C. Pavese and I. Calvino took part to the intellectual movement that fought against Fascism, they took part actively in the *Resistenza* and their personal accounts have been translated into fascinating novels. C. Pavese, that was during his short life an extraordinary translator of some important masterpieces of American literature, such as W. Whitman and

H.Melville, dealt with the same topics with an essential and lyrical prose. I would add also that I. Calvino developed in the last few decades of the XXth century some interesting meditations on the role of literature in contemporary society very well summarized in his last book, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. As N.Ginzburg approached reality with humor and understatement, another woman novelist, E. Morante, who lived in the middle of the twentieth century, displayed a very poetic and magic look at reality. With a simple and sophisticated language, she gave emphasis to her own intimate feelings and to the search of an harmony with the elements of nature. Her accounts on childhood exposed a fresh and incisive approach to daily life even when around tragic historical events occurred. Particular attention at the end of the course will be given to women poetry in the last two decades of the XXth century. We will read some relevant examples of Alda Merini and Patrizia Cavalli's poems.

NOTE: The course will be taught in Italian but readings, home assignments, papers and exams will be in English. I usually make readings in Italian in class to let you enter the rhythm and the style of each single author. I think it's a fulfilling experience to improve your own fluency in Italian as well.

I am willing to offer explanations of texts in English if some of you have difficulties of any sort.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Two research or critical papers, 5-7 pages, will be based either on texts, authors, genres, forms, themes or the period of the texts we read and discuss in class. In this sense, it is important to attend classes regularly and participate actively in class discussion. Nevertheless, if some of you wish to undertake research outside the topics discussed in class but regarding texts, authors, genres, themes of the course content that stimulated you in some way, I will be willing to offer you other reading suggestions.

The due dates of these papers are marked on the calendar syllabus with a →.

We will be dealing with a choice of chapters from each single book, **but it will be mandatory to read at least one novel (in translation) from those included in the course. More than one novel read will increase automatically the grade.**

Grades will be based on the written work, with positive or negative considerations for attendance and participation in the class discussion. In the correction of papers, I will give also particular emphasis to underline whether you reveal your personal involvement and contribution to analysis and criticism of the texts. **NOTE: I will be not able to give a passing grade to any student who does not complete both of the writing assignments regardless of the percentage value of that assignment or to any student with 3 or more unexcused absences.**

General Attendance Policy 2009-2010 (for classes that meet twice a week)

Attendance to all CSU courses is mandatory. Two unexcused absences are allowed during the semester but more than two unexcused absences will lower your grade (excused absences will be accepted for serious medical reasons or emergencies) as follows: 3 unexcused absences, lowers one letter grade; 4 unexcused absences, lowers two letter grades; 5 unexcused absences , lowers 3 letter grades. More than **five unexcused absences will result in failure of the course.** In order not to disrupt the class, punctuality is required. Students are expected to be in class at the beginning of the class hour; any delay exceeding ten minutes will be considered an absence.

Dates of mid-term and final exams **can not** be changed for individual travel plans or personal needs. Students should take note of the dates and hours of the midterm and final exams and plan their trips after the last exam. It is important to inform friends and relatives about these exam dates so that no tickets are purchased for you that will interfere with these exam dates. Missing the midterm or the final exam will mean failure of the course.

During the academic year photocopies and other material may be distributed in class by the instructors. Students who were not in class are responsible for getting the material from their classmates and making their own photocopies.

Other class policies:

- ° Use of computer in class is restricted to oral presentations, unless previously approved by professor.
- ° Eating is NOT allowed in class.
- ° Cellular phones must be **turned off** or placed on *silent mode* during class.

A NOTE ON METHOD

Some lines to explain how I intend to develop this course. The course will be structured in lectures and in-class discussion. I will encourage students to participate actively in the class and I would like to underline that I will be totally dependent upon your contributions and courtesy. I, personally,

believe that sharing ideas and interpretations is fundamental to increase knowledge. My perspective will be either historical or literary. The historical perspective will help us to understand the contributions of literature to the social and cultural context. I will also give particular emphasis to reading in class some relevant passages of the novels so you could appreciate the rhythm, style, and vocabulary used by the different writers more or less in the same historical period. From the literary point of view, I will focus either on the illustration of the language style or the content. Besides, I will take into consideration how these texts constitute or not “patterns” for the evolution of Italian identity from a sociological point of view.

REQUIRED TEXTS

A photocopy packet with readings from texts both in Italian and English with short biographical profiles of each author and some critical essays that will be available at **MA.BE**. As I underlined in the course description, the course is taught in Italian but you can read novels in translation. I will also offer references to some movies that constitute relevant examples of the close relationship with Italian contemporary novels. I will give a detailed bibliography at the beginning of the course to be used as reference for mid-term and final papers. Most of texts are in CSU Library. I suggest to check books during library opening hours so they will be available to all students.

You need to read at least one novel during the course from those indicated below:

I.Svevo, *La Coscienza di Zeno/Confessions of Zeno*.

N.Ginzburg, *Lessico Familiare/Family Sayings*.

E.Morante, *L'isola di Arturo/Arturo's Island*.

I.Calvino, *Lezioni americane/Six memos*;

C.Pavese, *La casa in collina/the devil in the Hills*.

For the English translation any paperback edition is good! For the original version, I suggest **Einaudi** paperback (to be found at Feltrinelli, via Cavour or Melbookstore, via Cerretani).

FEES: Photocopy packet: around 25€, portable editions of required novels could be found at a price ranging from 7€ to maximum 10€.

CALENDAR:

02/23/2010: Introduction: historical and cultural perspective on Italian literary panorama: the role and the tasks of the writers from the beginning of the XXth century after the II World War.

02/25/2010 I.Svevo: La Coscienza di Zeno/Confessions of Zeno: the awareness of his own limits (the role of the stream of consciousness). Building a personal identity in front of the challenges of the society of the XXth century.

03/02/2010: I.Svevo: La Coscienza di Zeno/Confessions of Zeno: wife and lovers, dangerous women. A difficult approach to gender.

03/04/2010: I.Svevo: La Coscienza di Zeno/Confessions of Zeno: the pessimistic approach to reality, role and limits of psychoanalysis as a form of therapy. **The rise of Totalitarianism, Italian Intellectuals against Fascism. The role of writing.**

03/09/2010: N. Ginzburg: *Lessico Familiare/Family Sayings*: women role between Fascism and the rise of Democracy: private and public spheres. A sketch on Italian social history.

03/11/2010: NO CLASS due to CSU S. ITALY FIELD TRIP

03/16/2010: N.Ginzburg *Lessico Familiare/Family Sayings* - Living as a jewish woman during the twenties. Marriages, pregnancies: the sense of humour in women's daily lives. References to Italian Fascism and gender roles in Italian society through movies (Una giornata particolare di E.Scola with Sophia Loren and M.Mastroianni)

03/18/2010: N.Ginzburg: *Lessico Familiare/Family Sayings*. The use of language; how Ginzburg deals with autobiography.

03/23/2010: P.Levi: La Tregua/The wrench: Witnessing the horror of Holocaust: Literature as a rescue from death.

03/25/2010: P.Levi: La Tregua/The wrench: Coming back home: a long journey of pain and hope to Italy.

03/30/2010: P.Levi: La Tregua/The wrench: The search of his own identity and the elaboration of mourning.

04/01/2010: MID-TERM EXAM Mid-term papers due

04/02- 04/11/2010: SPRING BREAK

04/13/2010: E.Morante: Realism in Italian Literature during the II^d World War: a gender perspective.

04/15/2010: E.Morante: L'isola di Arturo/Arthur's Island: the discovery of adolescence and the birth of intimate identity.

04/20/2010: E.Morante: L'isola di Arturo/Arthur's Island: the search of his own past between reality and fiction.

04/22/2010: E.Morante: L'isola di Arturo/Arthur's Island: the definition of his own vocabulary, the ambiguity of gender.

04/27/2010: C.Pavese: La casa in collina/the devil in the Hills: the political involvement and the passion for literature of an intellectual and a writer.

04/29/2010: C.Pavese: La casa in collina/the devil in the Hills: Gender relations during the II World War: single women, old wise spinsters and the search for solidarity under the violence of the civil war.

05/04/2010: C.Pavese: La casa in collina/the devil in the Hills: Pavese's writing technique and the influence of American literature in his novel (references to Melville, Hemingway, Morley's novels, Pavese translated into Italian most of American writers during the forties)

05/06/2010: I.Calvino: Lezioni americane/Six memos: Reflections on literature at the end of the XXth century. Principles of Narratology. Chapt: Exactitude

05/11/2010: I.Calvino: Lezioni americane/Six memos: Reflections on literature at the end of the XXth century. Principles of Stylistics. Chapt: Quickness.

05/13/2010: I.Calvino: Lezioni americane/Six memos: Reflections on literature at the end of the XXth century. Calvino's philosophy of writing. Chapt: Lightness.

05/18/2010: Contemporary Women's Poetry: A. Merini – Between body and soul: parallels and comparisons with Anne Sexton's poetry.

05/20/2010: Contemporary Women's Poetry: P.Cavalli – Philosophy and poetry: the wit of a woman. **wfinal paper due**

05/25 or 05/27 : Final exam to be announced

Grade distribution:

Periodical quizzes: 20%

Midterm exam: 25%

Midterm Essay- Final Essay: 25%

Final Exam: 30%

Scale:

900- 1000:A

800-899: B

700-799: C

600-699:D

599 and below: F