UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Contemporary Italian Literature

2021-3-E2001R001

Course title

Becoming Calvino: apprenticeship, debut and experiments of a XX century classic

Topics and course structure

A critical approach to literary communication. In particular, the program deals with the main features of literariness and of narrative; the monographic section will focus on one or more patterns of narratives.

The monographic section of this lecture course will focus on Italo Calvino's debut. Our goal is to shed some light on the first years of the author's activity in the 1940s, which climaxed with two books, the novel *The Path to the Spiders' Nest* (1947), and the short stories collected in *Adam, One Afternoon* (1949), and includes some other attempts and experiments which were subsequently abandoned. Calvino's generation came of age at the beginning of World War Two. After the Liberation, Calvino left behind his previous literary endeavours – short stories close to the form of apologues based on humour and paradox – and sought a way to narrate the pivotal experience of his human and intellectual evolution: his taking part to the Resistance. The lecture course will focus on two key texts: the well-known Preface to the 1964 edition of *The Path to the Spiders' Nests* and the recently published short story *Flirting before fighting.*

Objectives

The main goal is to assure that the students become familiar with the close reading of texts, that includes the ability to understand semantic values, ambiguities, implicit assumptions, and therefore to appreciate both communicative principles and cultural significance.

Methodologies

Lectures and discussion. Text analysis: linguistic and rhetorical features, narrative modes, cultural patterns. Summarizing Exercises.

The didactic activity will include commentaries and discussions of texts in digital format by means of a device for the creation of annotations.

During the Covid emergency, all didactic activities will take place online, delivered remotely in video conference format. The classes will be recorded and uploaded onto the didactic platform. It is recommended to check the web page of the course regularly, in order to be updated about possible synchronous video conferences.

Online and offline teaching materials

Prerequisites:

A good high-school level in humanities; Italian and European history of the 20th century: fascism, World War II, Resistance, postwar period.

Programme and references for attending students

Institutional module:

- Mario Vargas Llosa, *In Praise of Reading and Fiction*
- H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*

Monographic module:

- Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*
- Italo Calvino, *Adam, One Afternoon and Other Stories*
- Italo Calvino, *Numbers in the Dark and Other Stories* (the first 15 stories)

Critical tools:

- Martin McLaughlin, *Italo Calvino*, Edinburgh U.P.

Vargas Losa's text, as well of the video of the Nobel lecture, is available on www.nobelprize.org.

The programme includes also some additional texts which will be uploaded on the didactic platform.

Programme and references for non-attending students

During the Covid-19 emergency, no distinction is made between attending and non-attending students.

Assessment methods

Oral test. Evaluation is based on the following factors: pertinence and complexity, text comprehension, familiarity with the literary texts in programme, capacity for argumentation and interpretation, interaction, clarity of exposition, linguistic appropriateness, competence in technical terminology.

During the Covid emergency, all oral tests will take place online, by means of the Webex platform. The web page of the course will indicate a public link for the access of possible virtual attendees.

Office hours

Student reception by appointment: contact the professor by email. Unless otherwise indicated by the University, reception will take place online.

Programme validity

Two academic years (until February 2023)

Course tutors and assistants

dr. Federico Pianzola, post-doc

dr. Benedetta Centovalli