



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

## COURSE SYLLABUS

### Contemporary Italian Literature

2425-3-E2001R001

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#### Course title

Words of memory: Italo Calvino and Natalia Ginzburg

#### Topics and course structure

Literature has always been a preferred field of investigation for the observation of socio-cultural phenomena. Literary works express the profound tendencies of every civilization: values, aspirations, contradictions, conflicts. In addition, literature plays an important role in individual and collective aesthetic experience: and its character as an art of language makes it a particularly fertile ground for analysing communicative mechanisms and artistic processes.

The institutional part of the course covers the general principles of literariness and narrativity, with a focus on the features of literary reading and reading as experience, the factors of narration, the main categories of narrative analysis, and the typology of narrative texts. This year the monographic part will focus on self writing. In particular, two autobiographical texts from the early 1960s, Natalia Ginzburg's *Family Lexicon* and Italo Calvino's *The Watcher*, will be examined.

Knowledge of the main features of 20th century Italian history is essential for understanding the texts in the programme.

#### 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. At the same time the teaching programme aims to develop and corroborate reading skills and textual comprehension skills, and expressive proficiency.

In particular, this teaching is intended to develop the following learning in terms of knowledge and skills:

- To acquire mastery of the complexity of language, the semantic depth of terms, the variety of possible meanings also depending on the context of utterance, the variety of linguistic uses;
- Reflect on the variety of views of the past, become aware of the link between words and memory, and of the structuring of memories on the basis of discourse;
- Appreciate the importance of the formal structuring of texts with regard to the effectiveness of representing experiences.

In addition, it is intended to develop the following learning in terms of the application of knowledge and understanding:

- Enriching one's expressive and communicative skills, increasing the ownership and precision of language;
- Developing the ability to interpret the speech of others, appreciating the difference between contexts and circumstances;
- Developing the ability to focus on the meaning of personal experiences in relation to social and historical circumstances.

Finally, it is intended to develop the following learning in terms of autonomy of judgement:

- Acquisition of critical and self-critical skills
- Awareness of the role of discourse in the interpretation of experiences and in the construction of the self.

## **Methodologies**

The course consists of 28 two-hour lectures, which are usually held in face-to-face mode; exceptions are 2 lectures, which are held remotely in asynchronous mode. However, the face-to-face mode often leaves room for interaction with the students, who are involved both in the definition of concepts and categories (starting with the term "literature") and in the interpretation of texts. Referring to the concept of the "family lexicon", students are particularly invited to talk about their own domestic idiolect (which is likely to contain multilingual aspects). The ratio will be lectures 75%, interaction 25%.

In addition, summarization exercises will be offered during the course, providing an opportunity to reflect on the hierarchy of information, the appropriateness of vocabulary and the functionality of syntactic constructions.

The lectures will focus on textual analysis, aimed at highlighting the distinctive features of the works: : linguistic and rhetorical features, narrative modes, cultural patterns.

## **Online and offline teaching materials**

Supplementary materials and resources for further study of the topics covered will be provided on the course's e-learning platform. Attending and non-attending students are strongly encouraged to register.

## Programme and references

Institutional module:

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

Monographic module:

- Natalia Ginzburg, *Lessico familiare (Family Lexicon)*
- Italo Calvino, *La giornata d'uno scrutatore (The Watcher)*
- Italo Calvino, *The Road to San Giovanni e A spectator's autobiography* (from *The Road to San Giovanni*)

Critical tools:

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

Vargas Llosa's text, as well as the video of the Nobel lecture, is available on [www.nobelprize.org](http://www.nobelprize.org).  
The programme includes also some additional texts which will be uploaded on the didactic platform.

## 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.

## Office hours

Student reception by appointment: contact the professor by email ([mario.barenghi@unimib.it](mailto:mario.barenghi@unimib.it))

## Programme validity

Two academic years (until February 2027)

## Course tutors and assistants

## Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION | CLIMATE ACTION

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