UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Contemporary Italian Literature - 1

2425-2-G8501R044-G8501R069M-T1

Course title

**'I would write short stories all my life'. Italo Calvino's short storytelling and compositional play in *Ultimo viene il corvo* and *Marcovaldo, ovvero le stagioni in città*
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Ultimo viene il corvo (Einaudi 1949) by Italo Calvino is the writer's first collection of short stories, published in different venues between 1945 and 1949, under the banner of thematic and tonal variety. They are rural narratives, stories of adolescents and young people, resistance tales with a tragic-mythical register, colourful and somewhat grotesque post-war picaresque events. The texts in the initial and final parts of the collection, with skilful progression, stage 'the restless idyll of the tales of childhood and nature and the utopian polemic of the political apologies, that is, opposite and specular images of a limpid presocial world and of a possible recreated sociality' (Falcetto). The stories will be selected, reselected and rearranged in subsequent editions, only to be re-presented to the reader in their original dispositio: the comparison between editions thus becomes an opportunity to reflect on the textual structure (of the individual texts and the relationship between a single text and the whole).
Similarly, from 1952-1953 until 1963, Calvino published in the daily newspaper 'l'Unità', in magazines and in the 'Corriere dei piccoli', 'a series of modern fairy tales' reproducing the narrative structure 'of the cartoon stories of children's magazines' (so Calvino) with Marcovaldo as the protagonist, a city worker who feels a great nostalgia for the countryside, for nature, and seeks glimpses of green and blue among the concrete: a kind of Charlot, candid, optimistic and imaginative, whose creative ideas almost always fail. Calvino would then reunite these 'sketches of contemporary life' in 1963, within a series for children, with illustrations by Sergio Tofano, in an autonomous volume, entitled *Marcovaldo ovvero Le stagioni in città*, rearranging the texts into five seasonal cycles. Calvino's project was that of an "education in pessimism, which is the true sense that can be derived from the great humourists" and that of "a simple and repeatable narrative structure, which serves as a model for organising a series of experiences [...] and which gives the idea that the book [...] is a construction in which everyone can collaborate", to which is added "a certain margin of opinability [...] in the 'moral of the tale', in the ultimate sense to be given to characters and situations".

Topics and course structure

The course will consist of an institutional and propaedeutic part in which, through different materials and tools (non-fiction readings, images, videos), an attempt will be made to motivate the meaning and function of teaching within the Degree Course. The lectures will then focus on Italo Calvino's works, soliciting active participation in students.

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 object of the course is an approach to texts that highlights the educational dimension of literature. This takes pace through three main ways.

1. On the thematic level, the significance given to the literary representation of educational processes, for example the traditions of the Bildungsroman, stories of formation, images of childhood, adolescence, school, the family, disability and educational contexts in general.

2. On the aesthetic level, the development of the idea of literature as simulation and artistic projection of experiences, and therefore as an exceptionally rich and varied repertoire of human models, or of psychological constellations, paradigms of behaviour, social and cultural contexts.

3. On the linguistic level, attention to the ways in which the subjects (narrators, characters, poetic voices) speak of themselves and of others, of interior and exterior events, of private and public issues, of facts and ideas; the recognition of the different communicative contexts represented, of the adequacy and effectiveness of the expressive choices made, of the existential and social meaning of the various verbal interactions.

The course approaches subjects of a theoretical-methodological and historic-cultural nature, necessary for monographic in-depth study, chosen each year and dedicated to reading and the interpretation of works by one or more authors, including foreign.

Objectives

Knowledge and Understanding
The teaching and workshop meetings associated with the course are primarily intended to promote and consolidate the ability to read literary texts. Through the exercise of direct interpretation of the texts, students will learn to grasp the formal and thematic aspects of the works, the characters of the experiences represented, their organisation, and will learn, at the same time, to question themselves on the relative motivations and implications, also in relation to their own personal experience and experience. In addition, they will have the opportunity to delve into questions of great importance, the subject of the literary works tackled from time to time, be they historical events, psychological issues, moral problems, relational and communicative situations.

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding - Autonomy of judgement - Communication skills - Learning skills

Through the exercise of text interpretation, students will learn to gauge the depth and complexity of the universe of discourse, and thus appreciate the potential of a conscious use of words. In this way they will be able to corroborate both their communicative skills and their autonomy of judgement. A conscious and trained reading ability enables students to transform aesthetic experience into a practice of expanding their existential experience, improving and refining their understanding of discourse, choices, and the point of view of their peers, inside and outside the professional sphere. Ultimately, literature is proposed as a tool that aims to increase the flexibility and pliability of responses (emotional, intellectual, pragmatic) to new situations and, consequently, to intensify social interaction skills. Through the comparison with the proposed literary texts, the aim is to promote awareness of the usefulness of literary reading as a device for dislocation of the self, as an openness to simulations of realities and

experiences other than one's own, with a view to a more articulated pliability in the face of different educational situations.

Methodologies

Prerequisites:
A good high-school level in humanities.
Italian and European history of the 20th century. Good expressive ability.
Methodologies:
The course (28 lessons, 2 hours each) includes dispensational teaching activities (70%), interactive teaching with moments of lecture participation (30%).
During classroom work ample space will be devoted to dialogue, collective discussion, textual reading and commentary exercises (themes, linguistic and rhetorical aspects, narrative modes, cultural paradigms), individual, or small group exercises to promote the ability to pay attention, observe, read and acquire expressive techniques. Therefore, each lesson includes deliverable and interactive moments: part of the lesson will be frontal didactics, to introduce content on which to then conduct discussions and/or exercises.
The teaching activities will take place in presence, subject to the organizational reasons of the degree course and/or the University especially in relation to the availability of classrooms in the University.

Online and offline teaching materials

Text, images, video materials.
Materials, resources and tools used in class are available on the course e-learning platform.
The professor makes available materials to support non-traditional students in their study and preparation for the exam: short recordings (presentation of the syllabus, of the exam bibliography, of the organisation of the exam; indications on the oral interview; recapitulations of aspects and salient concepts addressed in the lesson; examples of textual analysis); she points out video materials available on the web (interviews with writers, conferences, documentaries...) and websites. At the end of the course, the professor announces and organises a late afternoon or Saturday meeting to recap the topics covered, reiterates some indications for exam preparation and is available to answer students' questions or doubts.

**All students are advised to register, in order to access in-depth materials as well and to receive alerts.
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Programme and references

Institutional part:
Mario Barenghi, *Cosa possiamo fare con il fuoco? Letteratura e altri ambienti*(Quodlibet); solo i saggi: *Cosa possiamo fare con il fuoco? Un'ipotesi sulle origini della letteratura*, pp. 11-24; *Perché si legge? Pretesto calviniano sulla funzione educativa della letteratura*, pp. 35-44; *Silenzi in aula. Breve riflessione sul mestiere dell'insegnante*, pp. 53-58.
Mario Barenghi, *Perché insegnare letteratura (e non solo agli studenti di Lettere)*, "Doppiozero", 13.03.2018 (https://www.doppiozero.com/perche-insegnare-letteratura-e-non-solo-agli-studenti-di-lettere).
**Monographic part:

Italo Calvino, *Ultimo viene il corvo* (available on paperback edition, Oscar Mondadori)

Italo Calvino, Marcovaldo ovvero Le stagioni in città (available on paperback edition Oscar Mondadori)***

Critical bibliography

M. Barenghi,* Nota* a *Marcovaldo ovvero Le stagioni in città*, in Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti*, vol. I, edizione diretta da C. Milanini, a cura di M. Barenghi e B. Falcetto, prefazione di J. Starobinski, Mondadori, Milano 1991, [pp. 1366-1389].

F. Caputo, *Marcovaldo*, in *A-Z Calvino*, a cura di M. Belpoliti, Electa, Milano 2023, pp. 62-64

M. Corti, *Testo o macrotesto? I racconti di Marcovaldo*, in *Il viaggio testuale*, Einaudi, Torino 1978, pp. 185-200.

B. Falcetto, Nota a Ultimo viene il corvo, in Italo Calvino, *Romanzi e racconti,* vol. I, edizione diretta da C. Milanini, a cura di M. Barenghi e B. Falcetto, prefazione di J. Starobinski, Mondadori "I Meridiani", Milano 1991, pp. 1261-1276

D. Scarpa, *Postfazione* a I. Calvino, *Marcovaldo*, Oscar Mondadori, Milano 2023, pp. 129-141

D. Scarpa, voce *Italo Calvino* del *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/italo-calvino_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/)

F. Serra, *Calvino*, Salerno, Roma 2006 [solo il capitolo *Ultimo viene il corvo*, pp. 62-71]

Students wishing to biennialise the examination** must agree on the bibliography with the professor.

For Erasmus students: a good knowledge of Italian is required since the texts in the programme must be read in the original language and the oral test is taken in Italian.

Assessment methods

Type of examination: oral

The interview consists of checking the level of knowledge, understanding and reworking of the topics covered during the lectures, of all the items (volumes and essays) in the bibliography, and of the in-depth materials used in class (for frequent attendees only), as well as the ability to apply the concepts and tools used during the classroom activities and/or learned from the texts in the bibliography.

Students are expected to demonstrate the ability to answer questions in a relevant, clear, correct and argued manner, using critical terminology with ownership. Part of the colloquium consists of a commentary on a passage, theme or aspect of the works in the program, and/or the presentation of exercises or in-depth studies carried out during the course (for frequent attendees only)

Since understanding the letter of the text is an inescapable condition for literary interpretation, the use of a good vocabulary (including online, of course) is recommended when preparing for the colloquium.

The Dublin descriptors will be used for assessment: the level bands are as follows

Low level (0-17/30): Not sufficient

Knowledge and Understanding: The student shows limited and fragmentary knowledge of the texts and topics covered, with misunderstandings of the texts proposed.

Ability to Apply Knowledge: The student is not able to verify on the texts the general considerations on poetics, style, reading effects of the authors examined; he/she is very partially able to synthesise the contents of the texts presented, he/she is not able to contextualise and compare them.

Autonomy of Judgement: lacks critical capacity and autonomy of judgement; depends exclusively on information provided by the teacher or the critical bibliography.

Communication skills: The student has a stunted, approximate, stereotyped oral expression and a poor command of discipline-specific language.

Learning skills: The student has a limited ability to rework knowledge and link it to her own experience as a reader; a poor awareness of the usefulness of literary reading as a device for dislocating the self, as an opening to simulations of realities and experiences other than one's own, in the perspective of a more articulate ductility in the face of different educational situations.

Average level (18-24/30): Sufficient - Good

Knowledge and comprehension: The student shows a general knowledge of the texts and topics addressed, albeit with some gaps, imprecision on specific but not essential aspects, or some misunderstandings in the analysis of the texts.
Ability to Apply Knowledge: The student is able, albeit with some difficulty, to verify on texts the general considerations on poetics, style, reading effects of the authors examined, at the teachers' prompting; she/he is able to summarise the texts presented in a discrete manner, to interpret, contextualise and compare them correctly. She/he can recognise different expressive registers in literary texts.
Autonomy of judgement: She/he shows partial autonomy in formulating critical evaluations, often limited to the reiteration of others' judgements.
Communication skills: She/he has a clear and sufficiently precise expression, a fair command of the specific language of the discipline. Is aware of the need to use different linguistic registers according to communicative situations.
Learning ability: She/he has a discrete ability to rework knowledge and link it to her own experience as a reader; she/he has a partial awareness of the usefulness of literary reading as a device for dislocating the self, as an openness to simulations of realities and experiences other than her own, in the perspective of a more articulate ductility in the face of different educational situations.

High level (25-30/30): Distinguished – Excellent
Knowledge and Understanding: The student shows thorough and solid knowledge of the texts and topics addressed; understands and analyses the proposed texts without uncertainty.
Ability to Apply Knowledge: The student knows how to find in the texts, with confidence and effective personal observations, the general considerations on poetics, style, reading effects of the authors examined; with argumentative effectiveness they know how to analyse, synthesise, interpret, contextualise and compare the texts presented, also making use of interdisciplinary links. She/he know how to recognise the different expressive registers in literary texts, associating them with the situations that are the subject of the literary representation.
Autonomy of Judgement: She/he demonstrates excellent critical ability, autonomy of judgement, originality in the analysis and interpretation of texts.
Communication skills: The student has clear, rigorous, fluent and appropriate expression. Is fully aware of the need to use different linguistic registers according to communicative situations.
Ability to learn: The student shows excellent independent learning skills, is able to effectively rework knowledge and link it to her own experience as a reader; she/he has full awareness of the usefulness of literary reading as a device for dislocation of the self, as an openness to simulations of realities and experiences other than her own, in the perspective of a more articulate ductility in the face of different educational situations.

N. B. The oral examinations will follow the order of registration. On an average day, and subject to other institutional commitments of the professor, between 15 and 20 interviews will be held. Once enrolment has been completed, a calendar with the possible continuation days will be communicated to those enrolled. Students will be able to swap dates and times with each other. In order to have a reliable timetable, if a student decides not to attend the colloquium, it is recommended that she/he cancels in good time or, once enrolment has closed, inform the professor of her/his absence.

Office hours

Student reception by appointment: contact the professor by email francesca.caputo@unimib.it; meetings take place in the professor's office, room 4098, floor 4, Agora building (u6). It is possible make a meeting online, in the professor's virtual room: https://unimib.webex.com/meet/francesca.caputo

Programme validity

Two years

Course tutors and assistants

Dottoressa Alessandra Farina
Dottoressa Chiara Lungo
Dott. Alessandro Terreni

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS