



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 comprehension

The objective of the course is in the first place to promote and consolidate the ability to read texts. Through the exercise of interpretation, the student will learn to understand the formal and thematic aspects of the works, the characters of the experiences represented, their organization; and also to question themselves on the relative motivations and implications, including in relation to their personal experience. In addition, the student will have an opportunity to study in depth questions of great significance, the object of the literary works approached each time: historical events, psychological problems, moral problems, relation and communicative situations.

Ability to apply learning and comprehension

Through the exercise of interpreting the texts, students will learn to measure the depth and the complexity of the universe of the discourse and therefore to appreciate the potential of a conscious use of the word. This way they can corroborate both their communication skills and their autonomy of judgement. A conscious and trained reading skill allows transforming the aesthetic experience into a way of extending one's own existential experience, improving and refining the comprehension of speech, of choices, of the point of view of those similar to oneself. In the final analysis, literature is an instrument which aims at increasing of responses (emotional, intellectual pragmatic) to new situations and, consequently, to intensify the skills of social interaction.

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.

**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. Falchetto, 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. Falchetto, 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. Falchetto, 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]

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.

NB: The oral examinations will follow the order of enrolment. On average in one day, there will be about 16 orals. The Lecturer does not interfere in the order of enrolment. In the event of requirements of time or calendar for problems of work please notify this in good time by email to francesca.caputo@unimib.it

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 to 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

Dottorssa Alessandra Farina
Dott. Alessandro Terreni

Sustainable Development Goals

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