



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Letteratura Italiana Contemporanea - 2

2425-2-G8501R044-G8501R069M-T2

Course title

Resistance to unjust violence: the choice of war in twentieth-century Italian fiction

"Situations such as always having to be in a situation, not being able to live without struggle and suffering, of having to inevitably assume one's guilt, of having to die, I call them limit situations. They do not change in themselves, but only in their appearance; with respect to our being, they have a character of finality. They elude our understanding; in our being, we can no longer see anything behind them. They are like a wall against which we bump and shipwreck. We cannot effect any change in them, but must limit ourselves to considering them with extreme clarity, without being able to explain or justify them on the basis of anything. They subsist with being itself." These are the words of the philosopher Karl Jaspers who, in the 1930s, reflected on human existence as an inescapable and unstoppable process of continuous choice, taking a position, profound assumption of responsibility. The existentialist thinker's reflections provide a valuable starting point for reasoning about two crucial texts in twentieth-century fiction: *Un anno sull'Altipiano* (1938), by Emilio Lussu (1890-1975), and *Una questione privata* (1963), by Beppe Fenoglio (1922-1963), indeed testify, with narrative wisdom and extraordinary power of portrayal, to the inevitable necessity, constantly experienced by each of us, to make a decision, to act in the world, to take full responsibility for the words, gestures, actions performed and the consequences triggered, though often unforeseen, by what we have said and what we have done.

In the two largely autobiographical novels, the war, which has dramatically returned to urgency in our most recent contemporaneity, constitutes at the same time the subject and context of the narrative, as well as of the words and gestures of the characters; the course thus retraces events, situations, decisions and actions of two "men against," according to Francesco Rosi's film (1970) dedicated to *Un anno sull'Altipiano*: vigorously anti-fascist, the authors and their characters show themselves willing to risk their own and others' lives by choosing to take up arms to defend what they, with deep conviction, believed in. Indeed, as the protagonist of the first novel asks himself, "What would become of the civilization of the world if unjust violence could always be imposed without resistance?". More than a century later, profoundly changed historical-social and economic-cultural conditions of existence, the question shows, even today, all its dramatic relevance.

Topics and course structure

Course topics and articulation

The course will be divided into 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 program. The lectures will then focus on the two novels on the program, soliciting active participation in students.

Literature has always been a privileged field of inquiry for the observation of sociocultural phenomena. In literary works, the deep tendencies of every civilization formation find expression: values, aspirations, contradictions, conflicts. Moreover, literature plays a major role in individual and collective aesthetic experience: and its nature as an art of speech makes it a particularly fertile ground for the analysis of communicative mechanisms and artistic processes. The object of the course is an approach to texts that highlights the formative dimension of literature. This is done through three main avenues:

1. Thematically, the prominence given to the literary representation of educational processes and personal formation, such as the Bildungsroman tradition, formation stories, images of childhood, adolescence, school, family, disability, and educational contexts in general.
2. On the aesthetic level, the enhancement of the idea of literature as a simulation and artistic projection of experiences, and thus as an exceptionally copious and varied repertoire of human models, i.e., of psychological constellations, paradigms of behavior, social and cultural contexts.
3. On the linguistic level, attention to the ways in which subjects (narrators, characters, poetic voices) speak about themselves and others, inner and outer events, private and public affairs, facts and ideas; the recognition of the different communicative contexts represented, the appropriateness and effectiveness of the choices expression made by interlocutors, of the existential and social meaning of different verbal interactions.

The course covers theoretical-methodological and cultural-historical topics necessary for in-depth monographs, chosen from year to year, and devoted to the reading and interpretation of works by one or more authors.

Objectives

Objectives

The teaching objective is primarily to promote and consolidate the ability to read texts. Through the exercise of interpretation, the student will learn to grasp the formal and thematic aspects of the works, the characters of the experiences represented, their organization; and at the same time to question the related motivations and implications, also in relation to his own personal experience. Moreover, he/she will have the opportunity to delve into major issues that are the subject of the literary works addressed from time to time: whether historical events, psychological nodes, moral problems, relational and communicative situations.

Ability to apply knowledge and understanding

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 conscious use of speech. By this route they will be able to corroborate both their communication skills and their autonomy of judgment. Conscious and trained reading skills enable one to transform aesthetic experience into a way of extending one's existential experience, enhancing and refining one's understanding of discourse, choices, and the point of view of one's fellow human beings. Ultimately, literature is a tool aimed at increasing flexibility and pliability of responses (emotional, intellectual, pragmatic) to novel situations: and, consequently, to intensify social interaction skills.

Cross-cutting knowledge

Teaching also aims to promote the following transversal skills:

- critical thinking and autonomy of judgment;
- analytical and synthesis skills;
- effective communication skills;
- ability to rework and organize knowledge.

Methodologies

Methodologies used

Prerequisites

A good high school background in the humanities. Outlines of literary history and Italian and European history of the 20th century. Good expressive skills.

Methodologies:

The course involves dispensational teaching activities (frontal lecture: about 70%) and interactive teaching with moments of participatory lectures (about 30%). During the 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 attention, observation, reading skills and acquisition of expressive techniques.

Therefore, each lesson will include deliverable and interactive moments: part of the lesson will be frontal didactics, to introduce content on which to then lead discussions and/or exercises.

The teaching activities will take place in presence, subject to the organizational reasons of the degree course and/or University especially in relation to the availability of classrooms in the University.

It is planned, at the end of each of the individual lecture blocks, corresponding to the three parts of the course, to have a recap and study direction meeting (what to remember? What approach to take when reading the essays provided in the institutional part-how? How to use the critical bibliography? How often to read the novels in preparation for the exam?), which will also be made available asynchronously.

Online and offline teaching materials

Instructional materials (online, offline).

Texts, images, video materials. Materials, resources and tools used in class are available on the course e-learning platform. Attendees and nonattendees are advised to register, in order to also access the in-depth material that will, eventually, be indicated from time to time during the lectures.

NB. A pdf of the anthology of WORKSHOP texts, the subject of group work, will be available on the platform-learning. Students **MUST** come to the first lesson of the workshop having read the anthology and chosen a short story and a poetic text to propose to the tutor and the group.

Programme and references

General part

Reading and Literature

Mario Barenghi, *Che cosa possiamo fare con il fuoco? Letteratura e altri ambienti*, Quodlibet, Macerata 2013 (only *Che cosa possiamo fare con il fuoco? Un'ipotesi sulle origini della letteratura*, pp. 11-24; *Come una rete da pesca. Preliminari su letteratura e comunicazione*, pp. 26-34; *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 marzo 2018, <http://www.doppiozero.com/materiali/perche-insegnare-letteratura-e-non-solo-agli-studenti-di-lettere>.

Recommended reading is Vittorio Spinazzola, *La fatica di leggere*, in *L'esperienza della lettura*, Unicopli, Milano, 2010, pp. 99-136, especially pp. 99-125.

Thematic part: texts

Emilio Lussu, *Un anno sull'Altipiano*, 1938. The volume is currently available in paperback from Einaudi, Turin. Any edition is accepted as long as it is unabridged. The Einaudi edition with Introduction by Mario Rigoni Stern, 2014 will be used during the lecture.

Beppe Fenoglio, *Una questione privata*, 1963. The volume is currently available in paperback from Einaudi, Turin. Any edition is accepted as long as it is unabridged. The Einaudi edition with Introduction by Gabriele Pedullà, 2014 will be used during the lecture.

*Thematic part: critical bibliography

About *Un anno sull'Altipiano*

- Giovanni Falaschi, *Un anno sull'Altipiano di Emilio Lussu, in *Letteratura italiana, Le opere, IV, Il '900, La ricerca letteraria*, Einaudi, Torino 1996, pp. 603-650:
- Francesca Caputo, Per una guerra senza retorica: discorsi e dialoghi in *Un anno sull'Altipiano*, in Buffarini P.C. e Mileschi C. (a cura di), *Gli scrittori e la Grande Guerra*, Parigi, Istituto italiano di Cultura, 2009, pp. 43-53;

About *Una questione privata*

- Gabriele Pedullà, *La strada più lunga. Sulle tracce di Beppe Fenoglio*, Roma, Donzelli, 2001, chapters VII *Morti* e VIII *Muri* (pp. 117-150);
- Elena Porciani, *Io sono bella e allegra. Lo ero. Le ragioni di Fulvia in «Una questione privata» di Beppe Fenoglio*, in *I cantieri dell'italianistica. Ricerca, didattica e organizzazione agli inizi del XXI secolo. Atti del XVIII congresso dell'ADI – Associazione degli Italianisti* (Padova, 10-13 settembre 2014), a cura di Guido Baldassarri, Valeria Di Iasio, Giovanni Ferroni, Ester Pietrobon, Roma, Adi editore, 2016 <https://www.italianisti.it/pubblicazioni/atti-di-congresso/i-cantieri-dellitalianistica-ricerca-didattica-e-organizzazione-agli-inizi-del-xxi-secolo-2016/PORCIANI.pdf>

Any other critical readings will be provided during the course and will be an integral part of the program. Hard-to-find materials will be provided in pdf scan on e-learning.

The Contemporary Italian Literature course (Shift 2 / M-Z) will have its online extension on the e-learning teaching platform (elearning.unimib.it). To access the service, students must register for the course.

Assessment methods

Assesment Methods

Type of test: oral interview.

Evaluation criteria:

The interview consists of verifying 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 interview consists of commenting on a passage, theme or aspect of the works on the syllabus, and/or presenting exercises or in-depth studies carried out during the course.

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

NB. Examination interviews will follow the order of registration, so students are urged NOT to contact the lecturer for requests for changes in the order. The established practice is that once the roll call has taken place - with possible remote connection for those who could not be physically present - the lecturer draws up a schedule of those present and then students, among themselves, can take action to change the order.

Office hours

By appointment, also remotely, by writing to alessandro.terreni@unimib.it.
The lecturer is also available after class.

Programme validity

Two academic years

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals
