UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Letterature Comparate

2526-2-F0101R017

Course title

These ghosts. Hypothesis and examples concerning the anthropological function of literature

Topics and course structure

An approach to the study of literature understood as cultural criticism (criticism of culture(s)), without predetermined linguistic or chronological boundaries. The analysis and interpretation of texts, themes, poetics is intended to contribute to reflection on the relationship between words and things, reality and discourse, worda and power, socio-historical conditions and symbolic forms.

The main focus of the course is an approach to texts that highlights the importance of literature in cultural dynamics. This is done in different ways.

1. On the thematic level, the topics chosen by literary representation: moral values, interpersonal relationships, social roles, norms and transgressions, with a focus on the different declinations of similar themes, situations, characters within different literary cultures.

2. On the aesthetic level, the emphasis of the ability to simulate experiences and propose models of meaning, and thus as an exceptionally broad and diverse repertoire of human models and destinies, i.e. psychological constellations, paradigms of behaviour, social and cultural contexts.

3. At the linguistic level, attention to the ways in which subjects (narrators, characters, poetic voices) speak about themselves and others, about internal and external events, private and public matters, facts and ideas; the recognition of the different communicative contexts represented, of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the expressive choices made by the interlocutors, of the existential and social significance of the different verbal interactions.
   The general part of this year's course takes its cue from Italo Calvino's essay Cybernetics and Ghosts,

which together with other interventions from the 1970s and 1980s sets up an instructive dialogue with the anthropological dimension. Brought up in the school of Cesare Pavese - founder, with Ernesto de Martino of the Einaudi “purple series” (Collection of religious, ethnological and psychological studies) - interested since the 1950s in the study of the fairy tale, attentive at every stage of his activity to the relations between literature and other fields of knowledge, Calvino moved more and more clearly towards a conception of literature as experience, centered on the dimension of reading, which converges with some theses expressed by William Turner, notably with the idea that artistic expressions have a “liminal” character, and can therefore represent a reservoir of possibilities useful for updating and preserving the foundations of any cultural system..

The monograph section deals with two chronologically contiguous classics of literature in the English language, quite different in subject matter and style, but united by the fact that they are built around an unspoken, an enigma, which has aroused lively critical debate. Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) could be either a ghost story or an account of a series of hallucinations, depending on the credit one decides to give the narrator. Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* (1899) is a novel on the subject of European colonialism in the Congo Basin: but the denunciation of the brutality of the colonizers' conduct gradually gives way to the realization that Africa is also the place where ghosts of the mind take shape, cracking the certainties of so-called civilization.

Objectives

The teaching objective is to promote and consolidate the ability to read, understand and re-elaborate texts, also in relation to different cultural contexts and to intercultural dynamics. 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 organisation; and at the same time to question the relative motivations and implications. In addition, they will have the opportunity to delve into issues of great importance, which are the subject of the literary works tackled from time to time: be they historical events, psychological issues, moral problems, relational and communicative situations.

Through the exercise of interpreting literary texts, students will learn to gauge the depth and complexity of the universe of discourse and the dynamics underlying the work, and thus appreciate the potential of a conscious use of the word. In this way, they will be able to corroborate both their communicative skills and their autonomy of judgement. A conscious and trained ability to read enables one to transform aesthetic experience into a way of extending one's own existential experience, improving and refining one's understanding of discourse, choices, and the point of view of one's fellow human beings. Ultimately, literature is 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.

This teaching is intended to promote familiarity with the forms and languages of literature, and the ability to appreciate its semantic richness, cultural poignancy and intrinsic dynamism. Furthermore, it is intended to corroborate the ability to apply the acquired knowledge both to the interpretation of different cultural contexts and to the related possibilities of communication, dialogue and intervention. In general, it is intended to develop the skills of analysis and synthesis, as a part of a critical approach to cultural situations and phenomena.

Methodologies

The course consists of 19 three-hour lectures, which are usually held in face-to-face mode. However, space will be given as often as possible for interaction with students, who will be involved in defining concepts and categories (starting with that of "literature"), interpreting texts, and discussing the relationship between literary theory and

anthropological reflection. Lessons will be in Italian.

Online and offline teaching materials

Some critical texts, 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

• Italo Calvino, *Cybernetics and Ghosts* (from *The Uses of Literature*, also published as *The Literature Machine*)
• Italo Calvino, *Quickness* (from *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*)
• Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?* (from *Why Read the Classics?*)
• Victor Turner, *Antropologia, liminalità, letteratura*

- Arnold Van Gennep, *Blazing the Trail: Waymarks in the Exploration of Symbols*

• Henry James, *The Turn of the Screw* (1898); ed. it.: *Il giro di vite*. Testo inglese a fronte, a cura di Giovanna Mochi, Marsilio
• Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899); ed. it. consigliata: *Cuore di tenebra*, a cura di Giuseppe Sertoli, Einaudi

Although this course is held in Italian, for Erasmus students, course material can also be available in English, and students can take the exam in English if they wish to do so.

Assessment methods

Type of test: oral interview in Italian language. No intermediate tests are scheduled.
This mode was chosen because it is consistent with the formative objectives of the teaching and suitable for assessing comprehension of the text and the ability to critically rework the topics addressed in the course, mastery of expressive registers, and dialogue skills. In general, it is believed that the chosen mode also benefits in countering a now well attested sociolinguistic phenomenon, namely the loss of competence in oral elocution among the younger generation, also fomented, during the schooling process, by the indiscriminate dissemination of written tests.

Evaluation Criteria:
The interview consists of checking the level of knowledge, understanding and reworking of the topics covered during the lectures, the texts read, the critical and bibliographical tools indicated in the program, in the materials uploaded on the e-learning platform, 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 should demonstrate the ability to answer questions in a relevant, clear, correct and argued manner, using critical terminology properly.
The Dublin Descriptors will be used for assessment: below are the level bands.

Low Level (0-17/30): Not Sufficient
Knowledge and Understanding: Student demonstrates limited and fragmentary knowledge of texts and topics covered, with misunderstandings of proposed texts.

Ability to apply Knowledge: is unable to verify on the texts the general considerations on textual structures, style, reading effects of the authors examined; is very partially able to synthesize the contents of the texts presented; is unable to contextualize and compare them.
Autonomy of judgment: lacks critical ability and autonomy of evaluation; depends solely on information provided by the lecturer or critical bibliography.
Communication skills: has stunted, approximate, stereotyped oral expression; shows poor command of discipline-specific language.

Average level (18-24/30): Sufficient - Good
Knowledge and understanding: The student demonstrates a general knowledge of the texts and topics covered, although with some gaps, imprecision on specific but not essential aspects, or some misunderstanding in the analysis of the texts.
Ability to apply knowledge: he/she is able, although with some difficulty, to verify on the texts the general considerations on style, textual structures, reading effects of the authors examined, at the teacher's prompting; he/she is able to summarize the texts presented in a discrete way, to interpret, contextualize and compare them correctly. Can recognize the different expressive registers of literary texts.
Autonomy of judgment: shows partial autonomy in formulating critical evaluations, often limited to restating others' judgments.
Communication skills: expresses himself clearly and sufficiently precisely, has a fair command of the specific language of the discipline. Is aware of the need to use different linguistic registers depending on communicative situations.
Learning skills: has a fair ability to reframe knowledge and connect it to her own experience as a reader; has a partial 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, with a view to a more articulate pliability in the face of different cultural situations.
High Level (25-30/30): Distinguished - Excellent
Knowledge and Understanding: The student demonstrates thorough and solid knowledge of the texts and topics covered; understands and analyzes the proposed texts without uncertainty.
Ability to apply knowledge: can find in the texts, with confidence and effective personal observations, the general considerations on style, textual structures, reading effects of the authors examined; with adequate argumentative property can analyze, synthesize, interpret, contextualize and compare the texts presented, also making use of interdisciplinary connections. Knows how to recognize in literary texts the different expressive registers, associating them with the situations from time to time that are the subject of the literary representation.
Autonomy of judgment: demonstrates excellent critical ability, autonomy of judgment, originality in the analysis and interpretation of texts.

Office hours

The reception is by appointment, by prior message sent to mario.barenghi@unimib.it, in the lecturer's office, room 4096, floor 4, Agora building (formerly U6). It is possible to request remote reception that takes place in the lecturer's virtual room:
https://unimib.webex.com/webappng/sites/unimib/dashboard/pmr/mario.barenghi

Programme validity

Two academic years (until February 2028).

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION