UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Literary and Poetic Languages

2526-1-F5702R012

Course title

***"Mouse, mouse/ no purpose, what comes after you?": Toti Scialoja's nonsensical bestiary

Mice, moles, tapirs, hippopotamuses, octopuses, bats, hares, lizards, dormice, bears, ibises, salamanders, as well as mosquitoes, wasps, ants, cicadas and - of course - dogs and cats. Toti Scialoja's poetic-iconographic bestiary keeps more than a hundred paper animals at bay where pleasure and fun, lightness and humour pass through linguistic, rhythmic and metric play, but also pass through the author's illustrations paired with the poetic texts.
The quid of the elusive, of melancholic suspension, of surprise stretched over emptiness, the gap, the leap to the side, the whimsy say something else, say what they do not say. Scialoja's nonsense shows an unconventional 'logic of sense', it refers to precise models of the English tradition such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass*, to Edward Lear's limericks, and to a more or less submerged line of the Italian literary tradition that from Burchiello flows into the avant-garde of the second half of the 20th century.
But the root of this playful humour may well be traced back to the paradox of ancient Stoic philosophy and the dialectical principle that opposes it to Socratic irony: surface versus depth, surface as the disavowal of false depths, as the discovery that 'everything happens at the frontier'; paradox as that which destroys common sense, the one-way street, the assignment of fixed identities.
Associations, puns, inversions, reversals, paradoxes, combine to make nonsense the event, the privileged place of a revelation of meaning that happens in language, passes through language. This is a (literary-linguistic-philosophical) field of reflection that has in the counter-song, in the subversion, in the disavowal of the rules and of the 'adult' principle of responsibility and education its most characteristic feature.

Topics and course structure

This academic year's course is dedicated to the multifaceted figure of Toti Scialoja (1914-1998), poet and painter, teacher and director of the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, who also worked for a long time for the theatre as a set designer and collaborated with artists and writers of the avant-garde movements of the second half of the 20th

century.
After a propaedeutic and theoretical introduction (on the concept of literature), the course will focus on Scialoja's personality and poetic (but also pictorial) work, in particular on animal nonsense through two illustrated collections – *Tre per un topo* and *Zanzara senza zeta* – that best enable us to deal with the dynamics between words and images.

Literature has always been a privileged field of inquiry for the observation of socio-cultural 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 aim of the course is an approach to texts that highlights the educational dimension of literature. This is done through three main ways.

1. On the thematic level, the prominence given to the literary representation of educational processes, such as the Bildungsroman tradition, coming-of-age 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 experience, and thus as an exceptionally copious and varied repertoire of human models, i.e., 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; recognition of the different communicative contexts represented, of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the expressive choices made by the interlocutors, and of the existential and social meaning of the different verbal interactions.

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

The course is co-conducted in Italian.

Objectives

The aim of the teaching is to promote and consolidate the ability to read, understand and elaborate texts and works of art in general. 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, and 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.

Through the exercise of interpreting literary texts and works of art, students will learn to measure the depth and complexity of the universe of discourse and the underlying dynamics of the work, and thus appreciate the potential of a conscious use of words. By this route they will be able to corroborate both their communication skills and their autonomy of judgment. Conscious and trained reading skills enable them to transform aesthetic experience into a way of extending their own existential experience, enhancing and refining their understanding of discourse, choices, and the point of view of their 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.
With this teaching, through participatory class attendance, the following learning is intended to be promoted:

1. Knowledge and skills:

- Acquire mastery of the complexity of language, the semantic depth of terms, the variety of possible meanings also depending on the context of utterance and the variety of linguistic usages;
- Acquire awareness of the nature and character of literature, and the functions it can play within a cultural and artistic context
- Learn the main factors of literary communication, and the main categories of analysis, including the fundamental principles of rhetoric;
- Understand and master expressive, performative and participatory art-based languages in the field of educational professions
- Acquire knowledge regarding models of coordination of services, events, training paths
- Acquire knowledge regarding models of cultural and environmental heritage enhancement

2. Application of knowledge and understanding:

- Enriching one's expressive and communicative skills, increasing the propriety and precision of language;
- Developing awareness of the communicative and expressive properties of language, with particular attention to the semantic depth of words and the orchestration of said and unsaid;
- Developing the ability to interpret the speech of others, appreciating the difference between contexts and circumstances
- Apply knowledge and skills for problem solving in both concrete contexts and unexpected situations, demonstrating an understanding of the relationships between theory and practice
- Design, coordinate responses to needs,using and enhancing the potential of the arts
- Apply acquired knowledge to design, implement and evaluate educational activities in cultural and artistic contexts

3. Autonomy of judgment

- Develop reading skills, cultivating and exercising one's linguistic and textual sensitivity;
- Acquire sufficient familiarity with critical language to compare the interpretation of proposed texts with one's own reading experience
- Develop skills of analysis, synthesis and critical thinking
- Develop original thinking and planning in response to the needs of work contexts
- Promote innovative research based on the synergy between educational and artistic skills

4. Communication skills

- Development of the ability to relate and effectively communicate acquired knowledge to both professional partners in the educational, organizational and artistic-cultural sphere (colleagues, managers, principals, administrators, etc.) and non-professional partners (users, families, widespread society).
- Use of artistic-expressive languages not only as training tools, but also as fundamental means of communication.

5. Learning skills:

- Ability to rework and organize knowledge.
- Ability to use personal methods of autonomous promotion and tools to support one's own professional growth
- Reflective and metacognitive skills to monitor the adequacy of one's knowledge and skills and identify any areas that need further study.

Methodologies

Methods:
The course consists of 19 lessons (18 three-hour lessons and 1 two-hour lesson, totalling 56 hours), and includes equally a part of frontal lectures, so-called didactic delivery, and a part of participatory lectures, (exercises with the support of artistic-literary materials: texts, videos, images, music, etc.), so-called interactive teaching.
During classroom work ample space will be devoted to dialogue, 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 lecture includes deliverable and interactive moments: part of the lecture will be frontal didactics, to introduce content on which to then lead discussions and/or exercises. Some initial lessons on theoretical issues and presentation of authors and works will have a longer time of frontal didactics, always maintaining, in each lesson, a part of participatory reflection on the topics addressed, also with the help of different didactic supports (video, audio, etc.). Lectures on expressive methods and techniques will involve the interactive involvement of students in the form of exercises, discussions and/or small group activities supervised by the lecturer.
Teaching activities will take place in-person, and some lectures or parts of lectures, especially of the delivery part, (the equivalent of about three lectures, depending on the situation and class context) will be recorded and made available on the course e-learning page.

Talks by outside guests from the literary-theatrical world or practitioners in the artistic-pedagogical field are also planned.
Where possible, visits to museums, events, exhibitions, etc. will be organised.

Online and offline teaching materials

Materials, resources and tools used in class are available on the course e-learning platform.
The lecturer provides materials to support non-traditional students in their study and preparation for the exam: short recordings (presentation of the syllabus, exam bibliography, method of organising the exam; indications on the oral interview; recapitulations of aspects and salient concepts covered in the lecture); she points out video materials available on the web (interviews with writers, lectures, documentaries, etc.) and websites. The lecturer is available (on request) to organise a distance meeting at the end of the course to recapitulate the topics covered, reiterate some indications for exam preparation, and answer students' questions or doubts.

Attendees and nonattendees are advised to subscribe to the course's e-learning platform to also access in-depth material.

Programme and references

**Monographic part:

Toti Scialoja:
Tre per un topo, Quodlibet 2014
La zanzara senza zeta, Quodlibet 2018
Versi del senso perso, Einaudi Ebook 2014

Critical bibliography:

Toti Scialoja, *La mia infanzia sono io…*, in Id., *Animalie*, Grafis edizioni, 1991, pp. 29-33; *Come nascono le mie poesie*, «il verri», dicembre 1988, p.18. The papers will be made available on the e-learning platform.

Eloisa Morra, *Un allegro fischiettare nelle tenebre. Ritratto di Toti Scialoja*, Quodlibet 2014

Luca Serianni, *Il gioco linguistico nella poesia di Toti Scialoja*, in *«Nominativi fritti e mappamondi». Il nonsense nella letteratura italiana*, Atti del Convegno di Cassino, 9-10 ottobre 2007, a cura di Giuseppe Antonelli e Carla Chiummo, Salerno Editrice, Roma 2009, pp. 307-324. The essay will be available on the e-learning platform.

Giovanni Raboni,* Prefazione* a T. Scialoja, *Poesie 1979-1998*, Garzanti 2002, pp. 5-9; Id., *Prefazione* a T. Scialoja, *Quando la talpa vuol ballare il tango. Poesie con animali illustrate dall'autore*, Mondadori 1997, pp. VII-X. The two forewords will be available on the e-learning platform.

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 interview is held in Italian.

NB: An integral part of the examination bibliography will be a series of texts made available to students on the e-learning teaching platform, in particular poetic texts, critical readings, cover pages, drawings, statements and interviews.

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 verifying the level of knowledge, comprehension and reworking of the topics covered during the lectures, of all the items (volumes and essays) in the bibliography and 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 (for frequent attendees only).
Assessment will be based on the Dublin Descriptors: 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.

Students are reminded that

- all the texts on the syllabus must be read and studied in full
- a hard copy or ebook of Scaloja's texts must be presented at the oral interview
- by law, the works of living authors, and up to the 70th year after their death, can only be photocopied in full only to the extent of 15% of the volume or essay.

NB: Students with **PUOI** must email the document to the lecturer before the examination. In addition to accepting requests certified by the PUOI, the lecturer is available for any clarification on the topics of the lectures by appointment in person or remotely.

NB: Examination interviews will follow the order of registration. On an average day, and subject to other institutional commitments of the lecturer, approximately 15 interviews will be held.
In the event of a large number of candidates, once enrolment has been completed, a timetable with possible continuation days will be communicated to those enrolled. In order to have a reliable timetable, students who decide not to attend the interview are advised to cancel in good time or, once enrolment has closed, to inform the

lecturer of their absence.

Office hours

Reception by appointment, by writing to angela.borghesi@unimib.it.
The reception takes place in the lecturer's office, room 4098, floor 4, Agora building (ex U6). It is possible to request a remote reception, which takes place in the lecturer's virtual room:
https://unimib.webex.com/meet/angela.borghesi

Programme validity

The programs are valid for two academic years.

Course tutors and assistants

Dott. ssa Alessandra Farina

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS