UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Contemporary Italian Literature

2627-3-E2001R001

Course title

Restless and Light. Young Protagonists Outside the Norm in Twentieth-Century Italian Literature

Topics and course structure

«Nessuno, nessuno poteva tenerlo quel ragazzo irrequieto e leggero come gli aquiloni di carta che i bambini mandano su ai primi venti d'aprile.»
Fausta Cialente, Cortile a Cleopatra

The **general part** of the course introduces the basic principles of literariness, examining the characteristics of narrative communication and the main categories used in the analysis and interpretation of narrative texts. Attention will be paid to the relationships texts establish with other texts and with the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which they are produced and read, also in relation to the authors' biographical experience. Particular attention will be devoted to the relationship between narrative and experience and to the role of the reader in the construction of meaning.
Building on these tools, the course offers a broader reflection on the nature and functions of literature, understood both as a form of communication and as an individual and collective aesthetic dimension in which the values, aspirations, and conflicts of different historical and cultural contexts find expression. The specificity of literature as the art of language will provide an opportunity to explore the reasons why we tell stories and read, and to examine the ways in which texts represent behaviours, relationships, and forms of experience.

The **monographic part** of the course focuses on two novels, *Cortile a Cleopatra* (1936) by Fausta Cialente and *Il barone rampante* (1957) by Italo Calvino, and on a long short story, *Lavinia fuggita* (1951) by Anna Banti: narrative forms that intersect and intermingle in twentieth-century Italian literature, here explored through two women writers and one male writer who differ greatly in their poetics, style, and modes of representation. At the centre of the three works are young protagonists who transgress norms and challenge the dominant patterns of behaviour within the

societies to which they belong. Their rebellion takes different forms and arises from different motives – Marco's intolerance of any constraint, Lavinia's artistic vocation, Cosimo's radical choice – but in each case it stems from a refusal to conform to imposed roles and desires. Breaking rules, resisting expectations, and inventing alternative destinies thus become the only way of remaining true to oneself, even at the cost of isolation, estrangement, and flight. Through a comparison of three profoundly dissimilar modes of writing, the course explores literature's capacity to represent and make conceivable identities that call into question the values and conventions on which collective life is founded. The three works thus explore the search for one's own way of being and inhabiting the world, together with the contradictions and costs entailed by individual determination and fidelity to oneself.

The course is structured so as to integrate the general and monographic parts, bringing theoretical tools and textual analysis into constant interaction. Examined individually and in chronological order, the two novels and the long short story will serve as the primary laboratory for acquiring and applying the interpretive tools progressively introduced during the course. The categories presented in the reference handbook (see the bibliography below) will therefore be examined and tested in the concrete workings of the texts:

- text, author, and context (relationships between biographical experience, history, and narrative invention): *Cortile a Cleopatra, Il barone rampante*;
- narrative segmentation and the actantial model: *Cortile a Cleopatra*;
- narrative functions of the fairy tale and their reuse in the novel: *Cortile a Cleopatra*;
- narrative voice and narrative levels (homodiegetic and heterodiegetic, extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrators): *Il barone rampante, Lavinia fuggita*;
- point of view, focalization, and polyphony: *Cortile a Cleopatra*;
- order of events, fabula and plot: *Lavinia fuggita*;
- story time, discourse time, and time of narration (order, duration, rhythm, and frequency): *Cortile a Cleopatra, Lavinia fuggita*;
- narrative pact, verisimilitude, and suspension of disbelief: *Il barone rampante*;
- construction and system of characters: *Il barone rampante*;
- intertextuality and the relationship with models from the literary tradition: *Il barone rampante*;
- symbols, archetypes, and cultural and ideological codes: *Cortile a Cleopatra*;
- semantic isotopies and the construction of underlying thematic patterns: *Lavinia fuggita*;
- reader-characters, modes and functions of reading: *Il barone rampante*.

Objectives

Within the educational objectives of the Degree Programme in Intercultural Communication, the course aims to contribute to the development of a critical awareness of communication processes through the analysis of the distinctive features of literary language.
The course aims to provide the essential tools for reading and interpreting narrative texts, with particular attention to compositional techniques, linguistic and rhetorical choices, semantic values, and cultural implications. Through the practice of textual analysis, students will be guided to recognize the complexity of utterances, points of view, and cultural and historical references, while developing linguistic, interpretive, and argumentative skills.
The course also aims to develop students' ability to engage with different experiences, values, and perspectives, strengthening critical thinking and encouraging the search for an informed and responsible position in relation to the discourses and representations that contribute to shaping the reality in which we live.

Methodologies

The course consists of 28 two-hour, in-person classes. Lectures will be complemented by textual analysis of the works, with particular attention to linguistic and rhetorical features, narrative forms, and cultural and ideological

codes. Ample space will be devoted to discussion and interaction with students, who will be actively involved both in defining concepts and categories and in interpreting the texts.

Online and offline teaching materials

Within the limits permitted by current regulations, the critical materials listed in the syllabus (with the exception of books) will be made available on the course e-learning platform.

Supplementary materials and resources for further study of the topics covered will be provided on the course e-learning platform. Both attending and non-attending students are strongly encouraged to enrol.

Programme and references

Bibliography for attending students

Prerequisites
A basic knowledge of twentieth-century literary history, corresponding to upper secondary school level, is required, with particular reference to the Italian context and to the period from the 1930s to the 1950s: Fascism, the Second World War, the Resistance, and the early post-war period.

General part
Andrea Bernardelli, Remo Ceserani, *Il testo narrativo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2005.
Mario Barenghi, *Cosa possiamo fare con il fuoco? Letteratura e altri ambienti*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2013, capitoli I-III (pp. 1-44).

Monographic part
Fausta Cialente, *Cortile a Cleopatra*
Anna Banti, *Lavinia fuggita*, in Ead. *Le donne muoiono*
Italo Calvino, *Il barone rampante*

Critical tools
Francesca Rubini, *Cortile a Cleopatra*, in Ead., *Fausta Cialente. La memoria e il romanzo*, Milano, Fondazione Arnoldo e Alberto Mondadori, 2019, pp. 218-271.
Francesca Rubini, *Lavinia fuggita di Anna Banti. Il racconto come spazio aperto*, «Filologia e critica», 2019, 3, pp. 401-420.
Mario Barenghi, *Il barone rampante*, in Id., *Calvino*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2009, pp. 33-40.
Claudio Milanini, *Genesi e struttura dei Nostri antenati*, in Id., *Da Porta a Calvino. Saggi e ritratti critici*, Milano, LED, 2014, pp. 219-228.
Claudio Milanini, *Le passioni secondo Biagio: paradossi strutturali del Barone rampante*, in Id., *L'utopia discontinua*, Roma, Carocci, 2022, pp. 201-208.
Cesare Cases, *Postfazione*, in Italo Calvino, *Il barone rampante* (edizioni Oscar Mondadori).

Bibliography for non-attending students
The examination syllabus for non-attending students is the same as that for attending students.
Non-attending students are expected to have a basic knowledge of the biographical and literary profiles of the two women writers and the male writer studied in the monographic part of the course; these profiles will be presented during classes. The following sources are recommended for non-attending students:
– Fausta Cialente, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Treccani, a cura di Nunzio Ruggiero;
– Anna Banti (Lucia Lopresti), Enciclopedia delle donne, a cura di Laura Guarino;

– Italo Calvino, Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani, Treccani, a cura di Domenico Scarpa.

Assessment methods

The examination consists of an **oral interview** designed to assess students' knowledge of the topics covered during the course and of the texts listed in the bibliography, as well as their ability to apply the concepts and analytical tools acquired during the course. Part of the examination will be devoted to the analysis and discussion of a passage from one of the works on the syllabus; students must therefore bring copies of the texts with them.
Assessment will take into account the relevance and completeness of the answers, comprehension and analytical skills, familiarity with the works on the syllabus, interpretive and argumentative skills, clarity and accuracy of presentation, and appropriate use of critical terminology.

Oral examinations will be conducted in order of registration. On average, 16–20 students will be examined per day; if a large number of students register, a schedule distributing the examinations over several days will be announced after registration closes. Students who decide not to take the examination are asked to remove their names from the list in good time. If they are unable to attend after registration has closed, they are asked to notify the lecturer by e-mail.

Students wishing to take the examination on the basis of a syllabus taught by Prof. Mario Barenghi in previous years are asked to indicate this when registering for the examination by sending an e-mail to francesca.rubini@unimib.it.

Office hours

Office hours by appointment: please contact the professor by email.

Programme validity

Two academic years (until February 2029).

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

QUALITY EDUCATION | GENDER EQUALITY | SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES | CLIMATE ACTION | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS