

Department of Humanities

Academic Year 2023/2024

ITALY'S LITERARY CULTURE – FROM ANTIQUITY TO MODERNITY

Major: Historical, Philological and Literary Studies

Coordinator: Federica Pich

Professors: Alberto Comparini, Claudio Giunta, Sandro La Barbera, Luca Morlino, Federica Pich

Hours: 30

Period: Autumn Semester

Credits: 6

Course objectives and learning outcomes

The course is designed for and mainly aimed at **incoming international students**. Students will be offered an introduction to the literary culture that developed in Italy, from Classical antiquity to the present day.

At the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Contextualise and discuss the works of Classical, medieval, Renaissance, modern and contemporary authors working within an Italian geo-cultural sphere;
- Compare and contrast interrelated literary works from different periods;
- Analyse primary texts (in English translation) through the appropriate critical tools and categories;
- Discuss and examine literary genres and modes in their development over time.

Entry requirements

A good knowledge of the English language.

Contents

The course is composed of five units (6 hours per unit, for a total of 30 hours), each of which will be led by a different instructor. Attendance of all five units is mandatory. Each class will cover a range of narrative modes, forms and genres from antiquity to modernity, with a specific focus on poetic narration. Nowadays we tend to identify poetry with short texts that express the ideas and feelings of a poet, but for centuries poetry was also and mainly a way of telling stories. Each instructor will select a few examples across European history (in this order: Classical Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Modernity) and show how authors of each period dealt with verse story-telling and built off of their predecessors' achievements as they pursued further avenues.

The five units are structured as follows:



1. Vergil's *Aeneid* (Prof. Sandro La Barbera, sandro.labarbera@unitn.it)

Vergil's *Aeneid* (1st century BCE) re-elaborated the epic genre as it had developed since the Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and established a norm for it that all subsequent authors of (not only) epic narrative poetry had to conform to and engage with.

The poem's arc sees the adventures of those Trojans who survived the destruction brought forth by the Greeks through the Trojan Horse. Guided by their leader, Aeneas, they will finally reach Italy and establish the foundations of Roman civilization, thus fulfilling Jupiter's prophecy. In this unit students will read selections from all twelve Books of the poem, with a special focus on those that deal with the Trojans' arrival in Italy.

2. The Legends of France, Brittany and the Far East in Medieval Italy (Prof. Luca Morlino, luca.morlino@unitn.it)

Since its medieval origins, Italy's linguistic and literary culture developed within a significant network of international exchanges that we would now term 'global'. Students will be introduced to such a network by reading the legendary accounts of Charlemagne and the paladins of France, King Arthur and the knights searching for the Holy Grail, and Marco Polo's book of travels and marvels.

3. Dante's *Comedy* (Prof. Claudio Giunta, claudio.giunta@unitn.it)

In the *Comedy*, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) narrated his journey through the three realms of the afterlife (Hell, Purgatory and Paradise), which is also, and most importantly, an itinerary of human growth and moral perfecting. Students will read selections from all three parts of the *Comedy*.

4. Ladies and Knights between Epic and Romance (Prof. Federica Pich, federica.pich@unitn.it)

In the two masterpieces of *ottava rima* narrative in the Renaissance, the *Orlando furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533) and the *Jerusalem Delivered* by Torquato Tasso (1544-1595), two basic narrative models intertwine and oppose: romance errancy and epic closure. Students will read selections from both poems.

5. An Epic Bildungsroman (Prof. Alberto Comparini, alberto.comparini@unitn.it)

Beppe Fenoglio (1922-1963) was one of the most influential novelists in the modern Italian canon. His posthumous novel *Una questione privata* (1963) tells the story of the Italian Resistance against Nazi-Fascism (1943-1945) through the eyes of its protagonist, partisan Milton, and combines the narrative traditions of classical epic and chivalric romance. Students will read selections from the novel.

Teaching and learning methods and activities

All classes will be in the form of lectures. Students will be encouraged to engage with each instructor through questions, group discussions, and materials shared ahead of classes. Teaching materials and suggestions for further reading will be made available through the course's online page.

Tests and assessment criteria

Students' results will be assessed through an original paper in English, of 3,500-5,000 words (bibliography excluded), on a topic pertaining to one or several of the five course units. Each



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student will meet with the instructor in charge of the unit to which the paper topic pertains. The proposed topic will have to be accepted and confirmed by the respective instructor. Students are expected to meet with their paper supervisor at least one month ahead of the exam session. Exam dates will be announced around the end of the course and typically start three weeks after courses have ended. Each paper will be read and scored by a committee comprising the course instructors.

Bibliography/Study materials

Primary and secondary readings will be suggested by professors at the start of the course and through the course's online page. Students must complete readings ahead of each class wherein they are to be presented and discussed. Each instructor will notify students with class readings at least one week ahead of each class. The readings for the first class (Vergil's *Aeneid*) will be notified to students ten days before the start of classes at the latest.

Other information

For general information about the course, email Prof. Federica Pich (federica.pich@unitn.it). For specific information about each unit, email the relevant instructor.