Italian Migrant Literature

Instructor: Laura Lenci  
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Contact hours: 40 + 2 hour exam

Course Overview:

It is difficult to define Contemporary Italian Literature today. In fact, the recent history of Italy demonstrates a progressive change in the identity of the Italian population, due to the strong flux of migration into the country. These changes affect not only the view of history, culture and language, but also the perception of reality. Like art, literature shows that a peaceful development of cultures is possible by reconciling both critical elements and positive aspects that naturally come to light when one meets the “other”, while often, at a social level, the fragmentation persists.

In literary fiction, language and experience, otherness and identity, tolerance and intolerance coexist. How will the “other” meet the Italian experience and translate it into its own experience? How is the conflict between Italian citizenship and “foreign” roots overcome? How is it possible to express the “I” in a specific language, and at the same time represent a world that does not belong to the adopted country? Many are the authors writing in Italian today whose native language is not Italian. And many of them are now recognized for their excellent works as a part of current Italian literature. This course offers a unique opportunity for students to study a particular field of Italian Literature, and to appreciate not only the language, but also the path to integration among many different cultures within one country. Students will discover authors such as Helga Schneider, Giorgio Pressburger, Ornella Vorpsi, Tim Parks, Igiaba Scego and many others not only through their books, but also in person. Students are expected to read excerpts from their works, articles and essays relevant to the topic of the course, and one book from the reading list provided.

Bibliography:
- Course pack including critical essays and articles  
- Students select one book by an author studied during the course  
- Interviews, videos and documents listed below
Works:
Helena Janecezck, *Cibo*, Milano, Mondadori, 2002

Critical readings:
- AA.VV., *Scrittori italiani di origine ebraica ieri e oggi: un approccio generazionale*, Utrecht, University Library Utrecht, 2007
- Roberto Derobertis, <Insorgenze letterarie nella disseminazione delle migrazioni>, in *Scritture migranti*, Università di Bologna, 2007 (www.scritturemigranti.it)
- Paola Ellero, <Letteratura migrante in Italia>, in *Lingua Nostra, e Oltre*, Università di Padova, 2010 (www.maldura.unipd.it/masters/italianol.2/Lingua_nostra_e_oltre)
- Andrea Gazzoni, <L’intento poetica dell’esilio: Gëzim Hajadri>, in *Scritture migranti*, Università di Bologna, 2007 (www.scritturemigranti.it)
Students are expected to
1. Read the texts indicated in the syllabus before every class.
2. Actively participate in the class discussions.
3. Read one additional book by an author studied during the course.
4. Present the biography of the author, on whom the lesson is focused, and discuss current criticism on the author. Each student will present their reflections to the class and will lead a discussion session. The presentation schedule will be decided during the first two classes.
5. Complete a written midterm exam (open questions).
6. Complete two 2-page response papers, responding to a topic or question proposed by the instructor, at the end of the fourth and the eighth weeks. Papers will have a grade expressed in numbers: mistakes will be indicated and every student will have a possibility to revise his/her paper and work to receive a better grade.
7. Write a final research paper. The final 6-page paper will be preceded by a detailed outline (see appendix) with bibliography, and by a draft that is to be turned in to your professor*, handed into the Academic Office, and that the teacher will edit. The written paper should indicate thorough research and critical use of bibliographic sources, making use of at least two books and web-sites indicated by the teacher in the bibliography.
8. Complete a final oral exam about topics and works covered during the course.

* Late submission of the research paper will result in the automatic lowering of a grade.

Assessment Method
Attendance, class participation: 15 %
Class presentation: 10%
Midterm written exam: 20%. The 2 hour exam paper contains two essay questions which will be handed out in Lesson Ten
Two response papers: 15% (2 pages each, in Italian, Times New Roman 12, double spaced, margins 2cm)
Final oral exam: 20% (includes all topics discussed in class during second part of the course)
Final paper: 20% (6 pages, in Italian, Times New Roman 12, double spaced, margins 2cm)

Attendance
Boston University Padua students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, and field trip required for the class. Students should note that attendance will be taken into account by faculty when determining final grades. Students absent from class for medical reasons need to provide a local doctor’s note. Please notice that weekend trips and family visits are not acceptable reasons for either lateness or absence.
Plagiarism
Simply stated, plagiarism is taking another's work and presenting it as your own. Dictionary definitions of plagiarism frequently include terms such as 'theft' or 'steal'. Plagiarism is, in fact, intellectual theft. It is one of the most serious forms of academic misconduct. Plagiarism committed by a student will certainly result in course failure and may result in suspension or dismissal. For more details please see the Boston University Academic Conduct Code: http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

Religious Holidays
Boston University's Office of the University Registrar states: 'The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.' See Chapter 151C of the General Laws, Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Calendar

I Lesson
Topics - Course presentation. The canon and Italian literature today. Cultural, linguistic and historical fragmentation as a description of Italian identity. Writing in a second language: Joyce as self-translator and Svevo’s works as an example of middle-European melting pot.
Texts - excerpts from literature and conversations in dialect (and translation into current Italian), excerpts from Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and from Svevo’s *La coscienza di Zeno* (chapter V).
Criticism - Giuseppina Commare, “La letteratura migrante come fattore di integrazione europea”, in *I quaderni europei*.

II Lesson
Topics - Human nomadism: from the Greco-Roman ancient concept of “otherness” to modernity. Italian as a neutral language that doesn’t indentify a colonial empire. Definition of “migrant writers” with respect to the concept of “glocal”.
Texts - Konstantin Kavafis’ poem “Aspettando i barbari”; Italo Calvino, “Eufemia” in *Le città invisibili*.

III Lesson
Topics - Emigration, immigration and migration: Italian history and histories.
Texts - Excerpts from travel memoirs, letters, and immigrants’ experiences in the northeastern part of Italy; Giovanni Pascoli, *Italy*;
Criticism - Excerpts by Emilio Franzina’s essay *Merica! Merica!*, excerpts from Benedetto Croce and Gian Luigi Beccaria on the question of the use of language.
IV Lesson
Topics - The concept of “transculturation” and progressive transformation of Europe: from literature on the foreigner to literature written by foreigners. Living in between spaces.
Texts - K. Komla Ebri, Neyla. Un incontro due mondi; Igiaba Scego “Dismatria” in AA.VV., Pecore nere; excerpt from Laila Wadia, Amiche per la pelle and Amara Lakhous, Scontro di civiltà per un ascensore in piazza Vittorio.
Criticism - Excerpts from Tzvetan Todorov, L’uomo spaeato. I percorsi dell’appartenenza; excerpts from Lessico e alterità. La formulazione del diverso by Federico Faloppa.

2-page response paper due.

V Lesson
Topics - Italian recent emigration: German-Italian-Arbëresh: the case of Carmine Abate.
Texts - Tales from Il muro dei muri by Carmine Abate.
Criticism - Excerpts from Francesco Pompeo’s Il mondo è poco.

VI Lesson
Topics - Carmine Abate. Analysis of linguistic aspects and style; reflections upon the metamorphosis of the autochthon language. Migration to Italy.
Texts - excerpts from La moto di Scanderbeg by Carmine Abate.
Criticism - excerpts from Alessandro Barbero’s Barbari, immigrati e profughi.

VII Lesson
Texts - Giuseppe Ungaretti’s “In memoria”, tales from the anthology titled Vu’ cumprà, excerpts from Imbarazzismi by K. Komla Ebri.
Criticism - Article titled ‘Letteratura migrante in Italia’ by Paola Ellero in Lingua Nostra, e Oltre; excerpts from Taddeo’s Letteratura nascente, Letteratura italiana della migrazione.

VIII Lesson
Topics - Philosophical and anthropological concept of “identity”. Archetype of “otherness”: Robinson Crusoe. Acceptance vs. rejection. The question of recognizing of citizenship and belonging to a group. When otherness becomes identity. Tim Parks’ anthropological view of Italy.
Texts - Excerpts from Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe; excerpts from Italiani by Tim Parks.
Criticism - Excerpts from works by Levi-Strauss.

2-page response paper due.

IX Lesson
Topics - Sedentarianism-nomadism. The metaphor of the bridge as horizontal displacement of identity. The exile and the poetry of Gëzim Hajadri.
Texts - Poems and articles by Gëzim Hajadri;
Criticism - Poetica del diverso by Édouard Glissant; excerpts from Culture and Imperialism (ital.trans. Cultura e imperialism) by Edward Said; article titled ‘L’intentio poetica dell’esilio: Gëzim Hajadri’ by Andrea Gazzoni
X Lesson
Topics - Jarmila Ockayová.
Texts - Excerpts from Verrà la vita e avrà i tuoi occhi by Jarmila Ockayová; Cesare Pavese, “Verrà la morte e avrà i tuoi occhi”
Criticism - Interview with J. Ockayová by Paolo Pegoraro; "Insorgenze letterarie" by Roberto Derobertis, in Scritture migranti. If possible conversation with Jarmila Ockayová at Boston University Study Abroad, Padova.

XI Lesson
Written mid term exam.

XII Lesson
Topic - The question of truth: between literature (fiction) and life-experience (document). The cases of Helga Schneider and Helena Janeczek.
Texts - excerpts from Helga Schneider’s Il rogo di Berlino
Criticism - excerpts by Philippe Lejeune’s essay On Autobiography. If possible conversation with Helga Schneider at Boston University Study Abroad, Padova.

XIII Lesson
Topic - Helena Janeczek.
Texts - Poems by Helena Janeczek and excerpts from Cibo
Criticism - Excerpts from Hayden White’s "Historical Text as Literary Artifact", in Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism.

XIV Lesson
Topics – Article 3 of Italian Constitution. The conflict between the “one’s own” roots and Italian citizenship. Ornela Vorpsi. Life, travelling and language as ingredients of representation of the “I” and of the experienced reality.
Texts - Excerpts from Ornela Vorpsi’s novels Il paese dove non si muore mai and Vetri rosa. If possible, conversation with Ornela Vorpsi at Boston University Study Abroad, Padova.

Criticism - Article by Massimo Rizzante in the on-line review Nazione Indiana titled <La bellezza andrà all'inferno. Lettera ad Ornela Vorpsi>.
(http://www.nazioneindiana.com/2008/05/15/la-bellezza-andra-allinferno-lettera-a-ornela-vorpsi/)

XV Lesson
Topics - Second generation writers. The question of religion and civil society in the process of integration. Literature as a way to integration.
Texts - Tale titled “Salsicce” by Igiaba Scego, in AA.VV., Pecore nere;
Criticism - “Europa in estinzione?” by G. Piombini, in AA.VV., L'Europa fra radici e progetto.

Proposal of final paper title due.
XVI Lesson
Topics - The conquest a place and of a voice in the Italian cultural landscape. The question of citizenship with respect to culture and geographic limitations.
Texts - Excerpt from Porto il velo, adoro i Queen: nuove italiane crescono by Sumaya Abdel Qader and “Documenti, prego” by Ingy Mubiayi, in AA.VV., Pecore nere.
Criticism - Essay by Igiaba Scego and interview with her (www.scrittoriperunanno.rai.it)

XVII Lesson
Topics - The topos of Jewish wandering: in and out Italian literature and culture. Is there a place? The case of Giorgio Pressburger.
Texts - Excerpts from L’orologio di Monaco by Giorgio Pressburger.

XVIII Lesson
Topics - Organization, diffusion and instruments: on-line reviews, editors, events, associations and national conventions.
Texts - Articles from the most important reviews: “Manifesto” (www.elghibli.org)

Presentation of final paper draft.

XIX Lesson
Final reflections on the language: testimonials, questions and observations by Cristina de Caldas Brito, Tahar Lamri, Cristina Ali Farah, Igiaba Scego and others.
Texts: essays on the language written by migrant writers.

XX Lesson
Conclusions

XXI Lesson
Final written and oral exam.