



## CAS LI 354 CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN LITERATURE

Prof. Elisabetta Convento

### Office Hours:

**Office:** BU Padua, Via Dimesse 5 – 35122 Padova (Italy)

**E-mail:** [convento@bu.edu](mailto:convento@bu.edu)

**Phone:** Office (+39) 049 650303

**Class Meets:** Bu Padua Academic Center

**Credits:** 4

**Hub Units:** 1+2+1

### Course description

The course will explore main literary works and movements of contemporary Italian literature, starting from the end of the Second World War until today, and will provide students with the skills to conduct an analysis of literary works in Italian. Students will also learn figurative language, the terminology that is necessary to understand and speak about literature and will learn to identify and interpret different literary genres such as short stories, novels, novellas and films.

By the end of the course, students will realize that Twentieth Century history, the arts and literature proceed hand in hand. The course, in fact, follows historical and geographical coordinates that allow the students to recognize and synthesize the major literary authors and movements and set them in a geo-historical and cultural Italian and European context, and identify main ideas that circulate across the various works. Some of the topics discussed in class are: the representation of the post-war situation; the 60s and the industrial development and how they shape literary works and values; the transformations of the Italian society; the female condition; modernist and postmodernist ideas.

During the semester the students will recognize and compare some of the most important voices of the Italian panorama. The course will guide students from North to South, starting in Piedmont with Cesare Pavese and his novel *La Luna e I Falo'*, set during the Italian Civil war and touching upon the theme of identity and migration. Students will learn of the scars of the war in Naples, as depicted by Anna Maria Ortese. The geographical coordinates will then lead them to the familiar space of Natalia's Ginzburg *Le piccole virtù* first, and then to the metaphysical space of Calvino's *Le città invisibili*. Criticism of contemporary society, postmodernist ideas and progress will instead be emphasized when reading Sebastiano Vassalli.

The course requires that students complete four response papers (both revised by instructor and peer reviewed), class oral presentations, a midterm and final research paper.

Some of the main course educational strategies will comprise lectures, guest lectures and experiential learning in the form of on-site lessons, during which students will engage in authentic experiences and will reflect on them through guided discussions.

### Prerequisites

- No previous knowledge of Italian literature is required. The course is entirely taught in Italian. CAS LI 212 Fourth Semester of Italian is the only requirement.
- Students will need to have successfully completed a First-Year Writing Seminar (e.g., CAS WR 120) prior to enrolling in this course.

## Hub Learning Outcomes and Course-Specific Learning Objectives

This course satisfies the following requirements for the BU Hub:

### *Aesthetic Exploration - Hub Learning Outcomes*

1. *Students will demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of notable works in literature and/or the arts, including the cultural contexts in which those works were created, and be able to identify their ongoing significance and relevance.*
2. *Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and vocabulary necessary to interpret a work of art (literature, music, visual arts, etc.)*
3. *Students will produce evaluative, analytical, or creative works that demonstrate an understanding of the characteristics—such as genres, modes, styles, and cultural history— of at least one literary or artistic medium.*

In order to meet the above Hub learning outcomes, by the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Show knowledge and recognize value of notable authors and works of contemporary Italian literature in their socio-cultural context (for example the post-war society, the different living conditions between Northern and Southern Italy, the socio-political role of the working classes and the bourgeoisie) and as part of the broader literary movements (Neo-Avant-Garde, Modernism, or Postmodernism, just to quote some) they belong to. Themes and motifs addressed in class and identified in selected literary works stimulate students to draw comparisons with other literary and cultural traditions they know, including their own.
2. Draw from ideas and knowledge acquired to conduct creative and personal literary analysis of texts, demonstrated in the form of oral presentations and written essays. Students are presented with key critical questions for interpreting texts of contemporary literature in general, they recognize figurative language and use appropriate terminology (genre, characters, plot, metaphor, allegory, just to mention some) that is necessary to understand and analyze literary texts in Italian.

### *Writing-Intensive - Hub Learning Outcomes*

1. *Students will be able to craft responsible, considered, and well-structured written arguments, using media and modes of expression appropriate to the situation.*
2. *Students will be able to read with understanding, engagement, appreciation, and critical judgment.*
3. *Students will be able to write clearly and coherently in a range of genres and styles, integrating graphic and multimedia elements as appropriate.*

In order to meet the above Hub learning outcomes, by the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Improve their writing ability and communicative skills in Italian by means of assignments such as class presentations, written response papers and a final analytical paper that require them to organize and formulate ideas and interpretation of texts in a well-structured format and using the terminology of literary criticism. Both the instructor and peers will provide students with feedback on their work; students will be asked to re-write essays, when necessary, so as to improve the quality of their work.
2. Show understanding and appreciation of course readings and literary criticism by engaging with close readings, participating in interactive lectures, and by discussing about different theories and perspectives on texts. Students will be exposed to different approaches to literary texts, such as Feminist, Poststructuralist, Gender and Cultural Studies theories.
3. Through a variety of course assignments, students will show the ability to use with competence the specific terminology and styles they have studied. They will, for example, write brief reflective response

papers, longer and complex research papers, as well as synthetic and effective slides for oral presentations.

#### *Global Citizenship & Intercultural Literacy - Hub Learning Outcomes*

1. *Students will demonstrate, through comparative analysis, an understanding of global diversity as expressed in at least two different languages, cultures, religions, political systems, or societies.*
2. *Students will demonstrate detailed understanding of at least two cultural contexts through foreign language or culture study at BU, participation in a language or culture living-learning community at BU, or study abroad. This will involve reflection on the challenges and pleasures students discover in orienting themselves in new and unfamiliar cultures.*

In order to meet the above Hub learning outcomes, by the end of this course students will be able to:

1. Understand the intrinsic complexity and variety of contemporary Italian literature in a broad European context by means of reference to literary movements (i.e. Modernism, Postmodernism), to historical events and to the literary canon that have affected various European literary traditions. Themes and motifs addressed in class and identified in selected literary works, as well as guest speakers, stimulate students to draw comparisons with other literary traditions they know, including their own.
2. Improve understanding of cultural diversity and become more interculturally competent as they gain knowledge in Italian language, literature and culture through the reading of texts, class discussion, on-site classes, and analytical and reflective assignments that encourage them to open up to different point of views.

#### **Program learning outcomes**

Bu Global Programs/study abroad learning outcomes for BU Padova Italian and European Studies Program and Padua Internship program

<https://www.bu.edu/provost/planning/program-learning-outcomes-assessment/27362-2/#globallo>

#### **Learning Outcomes for IESP Program**

- Students show knowledge of written and oral Italian at different proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced, including the ability of interaction with locals in real life contexts.
- Students develop knowledge of Italian culture with respect to at least one of the following areas: history, literature, international relations, food policies, and the arts in general.
- Develop new perspectives on one's own culture and an ability to think critically about one's own values and beliefs.

#### **Learning Outcomes for PIP Program**

- Students gain knowledge of local work culture, workplace dynamics, labor market, and the role of Italy in the European economy.
- Students develop knowledge of skills appropriate to the field of the internship placement, including professional and inter-cultural communication, through written, verbal, and nonverbal means.
- Students refine and clarify professional and career goals through analytical reflection on their internship experience and research projects.
- Develop new perspectives on one's own culture and an ability to think critically about one's own values and beliefs.

### **Instructional Format, Course Pedagogy, And Approach To Learning**

- The course is structured as a seminar and is based on students' active learning and discussion.
- Class sessions will be led by the instructor as facilitator, but will include students' presentations of readings done out of class to facilitate the analysis of literary works, as well as class discussion.
- Guest lectures by literary critics will be designed to encourage student questions and reflections, and for the student to develop a creative and personal aesthetic analysis of texts.
- On-site classes in places that are significantly connected with the main literary works studied, will help the students to gain a stronger understanding of contemporary literary works. In addition to this, on-site classes provide students with the opportunity to contextualize readings in their socio-geographical and historical setting and therefore better understand culture, style, language and motif.
- During the course, the students will also have a chance to read a whole novel written by a known contemporary author whom they will have the privilege to meet and interview.
- Guest lectures and on-site classes are meant to open up students to a variety of points of view and interpretations and encourage them to make comparisons with other and their own culture of reference.
- The readings and the oral and writing assignments – such as oral presentations, short response papers, and a longer research paper - together with the study of critical approaches to literature and of specific terminology will give the students the opportunity to greatly improve their linguistic and interpretive abilities, as well as their writing skills.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Attendance and participation	10%
2 Class presentations	20% (10% each)
Midterm written exam	25%
4 Response papers	20% (5% each)
Final written paper	25%

#### **Attendance and participation** (*Aesthetic Exploration, Writing Intensive*)

The course is thought for students to be subjects of the learning process. Therefore, students are not only expected to be in class and present at all course activities (on-site classes and guest lectures included), but also actively involved in discussions and in preparation of questions for meetings with guest speakers. Students are responsible for reading (with a dictionary) all the course materials before each class appointment, and are expected to take notes in class and during on-site classes. Exit tickets and one-sentence summaries will be used to open up and conclude class appointments.

#### **2 Class presentations** (*Aesthetic Exploration, Global Citizenship & Intercultural Literacy*)

Students will take turns presenting authors in class. Each student will have two oral presentations that require the preparation of a PowerPoint. Students will provide the class with their own interpretation of the author and of his/her work based both on the reading of the day and on the literary criticism posted on the course Blackboard site. They will analyze the assigned works and their thematic content but also their structure, form and genre. Students are also encouraged to use their specific knowledge in other fields in the approach to the course material. They will lead a class discussion by preparing questions for their classmates. Questions will not only refer to the content of the text but will prompt personal interpretation and comparisons between texts, authors, movements, and cultures.

In addition to displaying knowledge of the literary works and criticism, students will be evaluated also on appropriate use of the specific terminology of literary criticism.

The calendar of oral presentations will be prepared in class during the first week of class. Students will receive individual feedback on their class presentation.

**Midterm written exam** (*Aesthetic Exploration, Writing Intensive, Global Citizenship & Intercultural Literacy*)

The midterm exam will cover topics of the first part of the course. Students will take a written midterm exam with 3 open questions that will refer to the literary works, the theories, the analysis conducted in class, and the literary criticism discussed. Students will have to provide answers in Italian and will be allowed to use dictionaries available at the BU Padova Academic Center. The use of computers is not permitted unless otherwise stated by ODS. The evaluation will be based on content, textual cohesion and coherence, lexical appropriateness, and critical ability.

**4 Response papers** (*Aesthetic Exploration, Writing Intensive, Global Citizenship & Intercultural Literacy*)

The four two-page response papers written in Italian (Times New Roman 12, double spaced, side margins 2cm) are based on topics prepared by the professor and communicated to the students during the first week of class.

Response Paper 1: Students discuss a novel in terms of language, style and identity. As the novel refers to these themes, students are able to draw comparisons between Italian and American language and culture. Instructor-revised.

Response Paper 2: Students discuss an assigned work and focus on genre and poetics and practice using terms of literary criticism they learned. Peer-revised.

Response Paper 3: Based on reflections generated by the reading of an assigned work and on-site class, the paper asks the students to discuss about the relation between landscape/setting and genre. Instructor-revised.

Response Paper 4: The paper is based on readings and an on-site class in Venice. Students identify the landmarks of the city that are relevant for the architecture of a selected work and focus on form and space. Peer-revised.

By preparing these response papers students will review the content of the literary works and criticism examined, but will also produce comparative reflections inclusive of references to other literary and cultural traditions known they are familiar with.

Students electronically submit the response papers via email to the professor within 5:00pm of the day assignment is due.

Students will receive individual feedback on each response paper. Re-writing a paper to improve writing skills with regard to quality of content and form is possible, and at time encouraged by the professor. This must be an option that the professor approves of.

**Final written paper** (*Aesthetic Exploration, Writing Intensive, Global Citizenship & Intercultural Literacy*)

A final paper on a selected topic related to the book by Ferdinando Camon, *Un altare per la madre*, that students have read in its entirety. Reading the novel implies the identification of relevant passages, formal features (such as narrator, point of view, plot, style) that will help interpret the text in general, and focus on a subject for the composition of the final paper. Students will adopt one or more of the literary approaches studied and will be reflecting on cultural elements related to the Italian/European and their own tradition. Students will have individual meetings to agree with the professor on the topic of the paper. The students will write a detailed outline (see example provided in blackboard) inclusive of a bibliography. A paper draft and bibliography are due on week 9 of the course, so that the professor can make recommendations, suggest further readings, and make comments on language and style. The draft will not be graded and is meant to provide students with helpful comments.

The final paper, in Italian, will be 7 pages long (Times New Roman 12, double spaced, side margins 2cm). It is recommended that students use the library resources of the University of Padua and online materials in JStor or other official library databases. Electronic submission via email to the professor within 5:00pm of the day assignment is due.

**Resources/Support/How To Succeed In This Course**

Office hours: twice a week at scheduled time. Office hours can be also used to tutor students with some difficulties in the class, willing to know more on a certain subject or to improve their writing skills in Italian. Please contact professor via email if you need an appointment, [convento@bu.edu](mailto:convento@bu.edu)

## **Class and University Policies**

### **Examinations**

All academic commitments must be completed before you leave the site; no incompletes are permitted. Students who do not complete a course on time will be given an F. Students are required to sit their examinations on the dates, at the times, and in the same classroom as the other students in their class. If a student is ill or has another extenuating circumstance which causes the student to be absent from a scheduled examination, he/she must provide appropriate documentation and receive approval from the Director.

### **Attendance**

Students should note that attendance will be taken into account by faculty. Boston University Padua students are expected to attend each and every class session, tutorial, on-site class, internship work appointment, and activity required for the class as indicated in the syllabus. Any student with irregular class attendance may have his/her final grade penalized.

### **Absences**

Unjustified absences from class, and any class related activity, will affect the students' participation grade, which will be lowered by one letter grade for each absence.

### **Absence for Religious Reasons**

According to Chapter 151C of the General Laws, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, any student in an educational or vocational training institution, other than a religious or denominational educational or vocational training institution, who is unable, because of his or her religious beliefs, to attend classes or to participate in any examination, study, or work requirement on a particular day, shall be excused from any such examination or study or work requirement, and shall be provided with an opportunity to make up such examination, study, or work requirement that may have been missed because of such absence on any particular day; provided, however, that such makeup examinations or work shall not create an unreasonable burden upon such school. No fees of any kind shall be charged by the institution for making available to the said students such opportunity. No adverse or prejudicial effects shall result to students because of their availing themselves of the provisions of this section. Students who have questions about practicing their religion while abroad should contact Boston University Study Abroad.

### **Lateness**

Students arriving more than 10 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Being late three times is equivalent to missing one class.

### **Late Assignments**

Students are expected to turn in all course assignments on time as stated in each course syllabus. Late assignments will not be accepted and missed assignments will automatically be awarded an F. Please note that all coursework must be completed by the end of the program.

### **Plagiarism**

Simply stated, plagiarism is taking another's work and presenting it as you own. 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 Boston University's Code of Student Responsibilities: <http://www.bu.edu/lifebook/universitypolicies/policies-code.html>

### **Disability accommodations**

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Disability and Access Services office (DAS) at 617-353- 3658 to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests. For more information, please visit: <http://www.bu.edu/disability>

### **Interruption of program or early departure**

Only in serious cases – mostly related to medical emergencies – the Director will allow a student to take a significant break during the program or to leave before its official conclusion. Official written approval must be received by the Director.

### **Academic Advice**

The Director and Assistant Academic Director serve as the head of the faculty and as academic advisors. The Director/Assistant Academic Director is available on an appointment basis to assist students with academic issues. For academic advice regarding students' home institutions' policies and transfer credit information, non-Boston students should also contact their school's academic advisors.

### **Tutorials**

BU faculty are available by appointment for students who may need support in the learning process. We strongly encourage you to take advantage of this resource. Students in the past found it very useful to succeed. Students who receive a C on a test must seek support from faculty.

### **Course Materials And Readings (Required)**

- Course Pack contains extracts from the following narrative works and history of literature manuals:

All these books are under reserve for this course and can be found in the BU Padua library.

#### *Narrative works*

Dino Buzzati, *I misteri d'Italia*, Mondadori, Milano 2002.

Dino Buzzati, *Il «Bestiario» di Dino Buzzati. Cani, gatti e altri animali*, Vol. I and II, a cura di Lorenzo Viganò, Mondadori, Milano 2015.

Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Mondadori, Milano 2005.

Ferdinando Camon, *Un altare per la madre*, Garzanti, Milano 1978.

Natalia Ginzburg, *Le piccole virtù*, Einaudi, Torino 2005

Elsa Morante, *L'isola di Arturo*, Einaudi, Torino 2005.

Anna Maria Ortese, *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, Adelphi, Milano 2008.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, *Teorema*, Garzanti, Milano 1994.

Cesare Pavese, *La luna e i falò*, Newton Compton, Roma 2010.

Sebastiano Vassalli, *La morte di Marx*, Einaudi, Torino 2006.

Sebastiano Vassalli e Giovanni Tesio, *Un nulla pieno di storie*, Interlinea, Novara 2010.

#### *History of Literature*

Alberto Casadei, *Il Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005.

Giulio Ferroni, *Letteratura Italiana contemporanea*, Mondadori, Milano, 2007.

- Students purchase at local bookstore the book by Ferdinando Camon, *Un altare per la madre* in any Italian edition. The book must be read in its entirety.
- Literary Criticism (posted on course Blackboard site):

The list of critical readings below is subject to modifications and additions

Mario Barenghi, *Calvino*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2009, pp. 81-87.

Andrea Benardelli e Remo Ceserani, *Il testo narrativo. Istruzioni per la lettura e l'interpretazione*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, pp. 74-82.

Sandro Bernardi, "Pasolini e l'uso dell'allegoria in *Teorema*", in *Studi Novecenteschi*, Vol. 31, No. 67/68 (giugno · dicembre 2004), pp. 109-119.

Pierina Borrani Castiglione, "Dino Buzzati", *Italica*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Dec., 1957), pp. 195-201.

Italo Calvino, "Il fantastico nella letteratura italiana", in *Saggi II 1945- 1985*, a cura di Mario Barenghi, Milano, Mondadori, 1995, pp. 1672- 82.

Italo Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, Mondadori, Milano 1998, pp.195-200.

Alberto Casadei, "La letteratura nell'età postmoderna" in *Il Novecento*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, pp. 131-139.

Elisabetta Convento, "Il mondo sommerso e salvifico di *Un altare per la madre* di Camon" in *Tematiche del Sottosuolo*, RIVISTA DI STUDI ITALIANI, Anno XXXVI, n. 2 Agosto 2018, pp. 241-255.

Elisabetta Convento, "Il paradosso del materno in *Interno familiare* di Anna Maria Ortese", in *La Letteratura Italiana e il concetto di maternità*, Edizioni Ca' Foscari, Venezia 2015, pp. 9-15.

Derek Duncan, "Naming the Narrator in *la Luna e i Falò*", *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 86, No. 3 (Jul., 1991), pp. 592-60.

Giulio Ferroni, *Letteratura italiana contemporanea, 1945-2007*, Mondadori, Milano 2007, pp. 3-8; pp. 41-42; pp. 105-109, pp.279-281.

Cesare Garboli, Introduzione a *L'Isola di Arturo*, Einaudi, Torino 2005, pp. V-XVIII.

Luisa Guj, "Illusion and Literature in Morante's *L'Isola di Arturo*", in *Italica*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Summer, 1988), pp.144-153.

Gabriella Imperatori, "Ferdinando Camon" in *Profondo Nord*, Edizioni Nord-Est, Padova 1988, pp.189-214.

Domenico Scarpa, "Introduzione" a *Le piccole virtù*, Einaudi, Torino 2005, pp. V-XXXII.

Tzvetan Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica* (1970), Garzanti, Milano, 2000, pp. 45-50.

John Welle, "From Babel to Pentecost: The Poetry of Andrea Zanzotto", in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 58, No. 3, Varia Issue (Summer, 1984), pp. 377-380.

- Documentaries/films (available in the BU Padova library)

"Teorema" di Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1968.

- Literary criticism, literary terms and rhetorical figures posted on the course Blackboard site.