**Contemporary Italian Literature**

## Prof. Angela Ida Villa

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

The general aim of the course is to allow students to achieve a good knowledge level of the features of the history of contemporary Italian literature (movements, authors, works), with particular reference to the period between 1850 and 1950.

More specifically, the course aims to provide students with the technical and methodological skills necessary not only for the understanding, but also for the interpretation of literary texts: it will therefore stimulate their ability to recognise the complexity of the semantic and linguistic levels used in literary texts.

The course also aims to train students to recognise the educational responsibility of literary words and the educating and - possibly - miseducating potential of literary texts, to help them develop a personal, and perhaps even original, reflection on the relationships between language literature, images and human sciences in the pedagogical context in which they will operate.

Specifically, starting from the reading of some literary texts by famous authors (both in verse and in prose), through the systematic aid of both images composing the literary text ("Ut pictura poësis", Horace, Ars poetica), and the reflection on the layered semantic values of words and literary images, as well as implementing diversified strategies for a critical reading of texts, including multidisciplinary ones, the course of Contemporary Italian Literature aims to:

– introduce students to the work of hermeneutic investigation of literary texts aimed at discovering interesting and innovative interpretative perspectives, as compared to previous knowledge;

– stimulate: the students’ aptitude for both inductive and deductive reasoning; the ability to grasp the possible symbolic and symbolic-religious significance of apparently realistic literary images; the ability to grasp the unspoken logical links between poetic images and the concepts (ideological, philosophical, poetic, artistic, religious, etc.) that support them; the ability to identify the polysemic complexity of literary words and the methods and purposes used by the author in their works;

– train students to recognise both the educational and formative potential of a literary text and its - possible - negative implications.

After being trained: to understand the hidden meaning of literary texts (meaning often cloaked in intrinsically symbolic and symbolic-religious images and expressed in polysemic words), to recognise and identify the underlying ideas, and to hone their critical and investigative thinking skills, at the end of the Contemporary Italian Literature course, students:

– will be able not only to know the unfolding of the features of the history of Italian literature from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, but also to implement the most appropriate methodologies and strategies to get to understand both the obvious and hidden meaning of a literary text;

– will be able to analyse the different meanings of the literary terms with which the author “plays”, as well as the multiple semantic stratifications they include in their literary text; to recognise whether this text has been cloaked in intrinsically symbolic and symbolic-religious images, as well as formulated with polysemic words, alluding to further semantic stratifications of the text; to identify the concepts of poetics, ideologies, philosophical and religious concepts underlying it;

– being able to understand the clear and hidden meanings of a literary text, after learning to recognise its multiple semantic stratifications, as well as the various meanings of literary words, students will be able to autonomously grasp the educational and formative, as well as the - possibly - miseducating implications of literary texts;

– will be able to convey the cultural knowledge, methodologies and techniques acquired not only in the disciplinary field of Italian literature, but also in that of other disciplines and in the wider field of pedagogical planning;

– will be able to develop learning skills that allow them to carry out educational and training interventions through the awareness of the possible symbolic significance of the images and linguistic implications.

***COURSE CONTENT***

1. General part

Revision and clarification of features of the history of Italian literature from 1850 to 1950: movements, authors and works.

2. Single-subject course

Eugenio Montale and Giovanni Pascoli: poetics, ideology, religion, symbols, religious symbols and “ancient fables” in their respective works in verse, with innovative hermeneutic implications (the topics of Pascoli-Montale monographic course will not be a repetition of what has already been studied by students in high schools but will be completely new to them and will therefore be very interesting).

I module: *Eugenio Montale*

– Little and completely unknown aspects of Montale's religiosity and his diachronic developments revealed by the hermeneutic investigation of his work in verse and prose.

– Montale as “misleading” poet and the pseudo-realistic and crypto-symbolic-religious (pagan) objects of his metaphysical-religious poetry.

– Metaphysical-religious sun and sea in *Ossi di seppia (Cuttlefish Bones)*, set in the “five classic lands” in Liguria, characterised by a “mysterious local mythology”.

– The “(mis)educating” sea in *Mediterraneo* (*Ossi di seppia*).

– New interpretative readings of famous texts by Montale.

II module: *Giovanni Pascoli*

– Little or completely unknown aspects of Pascoli's religiosity revealed by the hermeneutic investigation of some of his poems both from his youth and his maturity.

– Pascoli as “misleading” poet and the pseudo-realistic and crypto-symbolic-religious (pagan) objects of his poetry.

– The crypto-pagan enigmas of the *Fanciullino* (and their solutions).

– Scherlock Holmes, Watson or Professor Moriarty? The many faces of Pascoli (“Giano Nemorino” and “Gianni Schicchi”) crypto-solver of the erudite “mystery” of the symbolic crypto-Dionysian “bunch of roses and violets” in the *Sabato del villaggio* (*Saturday Evening in the Village*) by Giacomo Leopardi.

– New interpretative readings of famous texts by Pascoli.

***READING LIST***

1. Reading list for the general part

The list of movements, authors and works will be provided on the Blackboard platform.

For the review/study of these topics, students can use the manual of the history of Italian literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries already used in secondary school.

Alternatively, the following manual is recommended:

G. Langella-P. Frare-P. Gresti-U. Motta, *“Amor mi mosse”. Letteratura italiana* [from the second half of the nineteenth century to the second half of the twentieth century], Bruno Mondadori, Milan (latest reprint available).

For the single-subject course:

1) - A.I. Villa, *«Arte di modesta apparenza e pur ricca di vasti sottintesi». Saggi su Eugenio Montale. Serie prima* [volume in print at the Publisher Agorà&Co, Sarzana-Lugano]: 2 chapters of your choice.

- 2 course-packs downloadable from Blackboard.

2) - A.I. Villa, *La modernità dell’antico nelle poesie giovanili di Giovanni Pascoli*, EDUCatt, Milan, 2012 (pp. 13-76 and 129-246).

- A.I. Villa, *Sul Pascoli cripto-interprete di Leopardi. La memoria del mazzo floreale del Polifemo dell’Idillio XI di Teocrito nelle notazioni reticenti, dissi-mulatrici e depistanti circa l’abbinamento “sbagliato” delle «viole di marzo» con le «rose di maggio» nel «mazzolin» del “Sabato del villaggio”*, “Otto/Novecento”, no. 3, 2014, pp. 5-62 (for students enrolled at the Catholic University, the article can be downloaded in pdf form from the Library website https://biblioteche.unicatt.it/biblioteca/sbda-home)

The single-subject course - focusing on Montale and Pascoli - which has been illustrated above will be explained by the lecturer in class.

Any students wishing to explore authors or topics other than those explained in class will be given the opportunity to choose an alternative single-subject course from the following list (the reading list will be made available on the website <http://blackboard.unicatt.it>):

I) Literary and symbolic aspects of the *Avventure di Pinocchio (Adventures of Pinocchio)* by Carlo Collodi and the *Novelle (Short stories)* by Arrigo Boito; II) The Milanese Scapigliatura and Arrigo Boito, poet and narrator; III) Rebels and “*maudits”* in post-unification Italian literature: Arrigo Boito and the young Giovanni Pascoli; IV) Scapigliatura and Decadentism V) Decadentism and Crepuscularism; VI) From Pascoli to Crepuscolar authors along the “karst” thread of the “ancient fables”; VII) The “other” Pascoli and the erudite “mystery” of the roses and violets of the “bunch” in the *Sabato del villaggio (Saturday evening in the village)* by Giacomo Leopardi; VIII) D'Annunzio novelist of the Hellenistic-Latin Renaissance: *Le vergini delle rocce (The virgins of the rocks)* and *Il fuoco (The flame)*; IX) Neo-idealism and Latin Renaissance between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The crisis of verism, naturalism, realism and materialism: anti-positivism, irrationalistic neo-idealism, neo-mysticism, neo-romanticism, symbolism and Helleno-Latin renaissance in Italian culture and literature at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in particular in the Roman and Florentine Crepuscularism of Corazzini, Palazzeschi, Moretti and Govoni; X) “submerged” Dionysism in Sergio Corazzini's poetic work and Umberto Saba's tragic Helleno-Semitic goat speaking with the ancient voice of *The* *Birth of Tragedy* by Friedrich Nietzsche; XI) “crepuscular” poetry and Svevo's theater; XII) The “crepuscular” poetry and Pirandello; XIII) The “crepuscular” poetry and Pavese; XIV) The “crepuscular” poetry and Buzzati; XV) The “crepuscular” poetry and Calvino.

***TEACHING METHOD***

Classroom lectures with image projections aimed at decrypting literary texts. The lesson may sometimes be held in seminar form in co-presence with scholars or specialists, both Italian and international, through the use of interactive teaching. The material available to the student will be optimised with the help of the Blackboard platform (<http://blackboard.unicatt.it>).

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

Oral exam divided into two parts: 1) general part, 2) single-subject course. To access the second part of the exam, students must have already passed the first part (the mark obtained in the institutional part will have unlimited time validity). The final mark of the exam will result from the average of the marks obtained in the two parts.

The student can take the first and second part of the exam in the same exam. Or student can take the exam taking the two parts of the exam in two different exam dates, not necessarily in the same exam session. The interview on the general part will focus on the authors, works and literary movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the list of which will be provided on the Blackboard platform. The exam relating to the single-subject course will cover both theoretical questions and the analysis and commentary of literary texts.

Both the partial (General course) and the final (Single-subject) assessment will be based on: the level of preparation achieved by the students; their presentation and argumentative skills; their aptitude for both inductive and deductive reasoning; the ability to grasp both the possible symbolic and symbolic-religious significance of apparently realistic literary images and the polysemic value of literary words; the ability to grasp the logical links unexpressed by the author; their skills for personal critical reflection regarding the educational and non-educational implications of the themes and literary passages that will be analysed.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

There are no content-related prerequisites for attending the course, neither for the general nor for the single-subject part of the course.

Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.