

Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
ITAL 410
Italian Modernism

Winter 2021

Instructor: Prof. L. Kroha (lucienne.kroha@mcgill.ca)

T TH 1-2:30

Office hours: by appointment

Overview:

A study of Italian fiction and theatre published in the period 1890-1930 and the ways in which they reflect the reactions of art and artists to the sweeping changes taking place in Western societies, and in Italy in particular, in this period.

NOTE: Students whose major is Italian Studies must write their final essay and tests in Italian. Students for whom this is an elective or who are minoring in Italian Studies must write their shorter essays in Italian but may write their final essay in the language of their choice. (English, French, Italian).

This course is designed to acquaint students with a cross-section of novels and plays that represent Italy's contribution to literary Modernism.

Sweeping changes in western societies are creating new pressures on artists. The inventions of photography and cinema make old representational modes obsolete. Industrialization and the new technologies and scientific discoveries, the new demands of labour and women (socialism and feminism), the effects and traumas of World War I and the Russian revolution (in Italy the advent of Fascism in 1922), changes in gender roles, the movement from the countryside to cities, the discovery of the unconscious (Freud) are just a few of the transformations that affect the arts. Old certainties go out the window, values change, religion and family begin to lose their hold on society. Man's and woman's place in this new, emerging world is also in question as are his, and her, very nature, identity, and role. Novelists and playwrights, like all artists, have to confront the decline in prestige of intellectuals and artists, now also subject to market forces and the advent of consumer society and mass culture. In brief, the world is becoming more complex, difficult to understand and therefore to represent.

As a result new modes of representation begin to emerge. Mimesis, the basis of traditional literary realism, begins to fall by the wayside. Individual perception and subjectivity replace "objective" representation. Time and space are no longer perceived in absolute terms. Artists no longer use their medium to imitate reality, but to explore it, sometimes by deforming it. (Think: in painting, traditional landscape art as opposed to a painting by Picasso). They no longer worry about creating recognizable representations of reality, nor do they worry about organizing and clarifying relations of cause and effect that explain human behaviours. Instead, they re-invent themselves and literary genres. The internal landscape and its mysteries replace the outside world as objects of

representation, spawning new conventions for the representation of forces we do not fully understand.

Learning Outcome

Students will improve their reading comprehension of Italian, as well as their oral and written skills by regularly answering questions in writing and by making regular brief summaries, oral and written, of what they have read. Classes will be used to elucidate obscure passages, answer questions, and discuss issues arising from the themes under consideration. By the end of the course students will have become acquainted with the characteristics of literary modernism and will understand the assumptions about literature and its relationship to reality that underpin these approaches to writing. They will also become acquainted with some of the issues that plague Italian society in this period and how they impact Italy's specific artistic response to modernity.

Instructional Method and Expectations for Student Participation

Classes will consist of a combination of short lectures and group discussions to be held on Zoom. Each session will be based on a specific reading assignment, accompanied by a set of questions on Mycourses. This is a fixed activity, meaning that each session will take place once, live. Students who are in a time zone which makes it difficult for them to be present at fixed sessions, will find them recorded and available on Mycourses.

On Mycourses you will also find additional materials: scholarly articles in English or French, interviews with the authors, links to Youtube videos. None of this material is compulsory (unless you are told otherwise) but is there to supplement and support classes.

The sessions will be used primarily to give students a chance to express themselves in Italian, by answering the questions, by bringing their own questions and thoughts for discussions, and by choosing passages they have prepared in advance that they consider important and explaining their choices.

The number of classes we shall spend on each book depends on its length and relative difficulty (see Calendar); calendar dates are approximate and may change depending on how the classes proceed, and how much reading students are able to complete.

Students who are unable because of their time zone to be present at Zoom classes should let me know immediately. They will have to answer the questions provided for each reading in writing. They will also be able to meet with me on Zoom at pre-arranged times. Given the small size of the class there will be no fixed office hours. Rather meetings will be arranged by e-mail individually.

READINGS:

Luigi Pirandello, *Così è (se vi pare)* (1918) (teatro)

Luigi Pirandello, *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* (1921) (teatro)

Luigi Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal* (1906) (romanzo)

Italo Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno* (1923) (romanzo) [leggeremo solo una parte del romanzo]

Federigo Tozzi, *Tre croci* (1920) (romanzo breve)
Alberto Moravia, *Gli indifferenti* (1929) (romanzo)

All readings are available at the bookstore. Other materials may be placed on Mycourses.

GRADING:

Final essay 40% (to be submitted April 19)
Two shorter essays 40% (to be submitted Feb. 9 and March 9)
Oral presentation 10%
Attendance and participation 10%

Work submitted for evaluation as part of this course may be checked with text matching software within myCourses.

CALENDAR. ALL DATES ARE APPROXIMATE AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

7 gennaio Introduzione: presentazione e modalità del corso.

12 e 14 gennaio Introduzione: Che cosa è il modernismo?

la situazione politica, sociale e culturale in Italia, 1890-1930; le grandi trasformazioni sociali, tecnologiche e intellettuali nell'Occidente in questo periodo e il loro impatto sulla visione dell'uomo (e della donna!) in generale e sull'artista e sull'arte (pittura, letteratura in particolare)

19, 21, 26, 28 gennaio

Pirandello. *Così è (se vi pare)* e *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*. La Sicilia nella nuova Italia. Pirandello fra verismo e teatro di avanguardia, la famiglia, la sfida all'autorità teatrale e all'autorità patriarcale, la dissoluzione del personaggio ottocentesco

28 gennaio Primo saggio breve assegnato 20%. Consegna: 9 febbraio

2, 4, 9, 11, 16 febbraio

Pirandello, *Il fu Mattia Pascal*: romanzo e anti-romanzo; crisi dell'autobiografia; il desiderio mimetico e il vuoto dei valori; è possibile cambiare la propria vita?

18, 23, 25 febbraio

Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno* Svevo e Trieste; la psicanalisi come tecnologia della persona; critica della borghesia; romanzo psicanalitico o critica della psicanalisi? È possibile cambiare se stessi? Tempo e spazio nel romanzo moderno. La questione del desiderio.

25 febbraio. Secondo saggio breve assegnato 20%. Consegna 9 marzo.

1-5 marzo STUDY BREAK

9, 11 marzo

Svevo, *La coscienza di Zeno*

16, 18, 23, 25 marzo

Tozzi, *Tre croci* la crisi dei valori, la famiglia, la rappresentazione simbolica, l'attenzione ai minimi moti dell'anima, la rappresentazione dell'interiorità, la vita degli istinti

30 marzo 1, 6, 8, 13 aprile

Moravia, *Gli Indifferenti* influenza di Pirandello e di Freud; il romanzo teatrale; la famiglia, l'inetto moraviano; la sessualità e il denaro; il fascismo, la decadenza borghese

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/integrity).