ITAL 230: Understanding Italy

Lectures:
Tuesday and Thursday 8:35 pm - 9:55 am (Fall 2021)
Room: SH688 295
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E-mail: tania.zampini@mcgill.ca
Office Hours: T/Th, 10:00 – 11:00am

Course Description
The paradoxes and contradictions of Italian culture and society are notorious. Italian themselves find it difficult and frustrating to define their own national identity, while outsiders are often baffled by a seemingly intractable complexity. In recent years, scholars in Italian studies have been increasingly attracted by the idea that, more than most other European countries, Italy is in fact an optical illusion, a mirage that dissipates as soon as one gets too close to it. An extremely varied geography (ranging from the highest peaks on the European continent to the centre of the Mediterranean Sea), a “common” language that was not widely spoken or understood by the majority of the population until the arrival of television in the 1950s, a political history of division and separation that a bloody unification was not able to overcome, all these factors have long resisted the emergence of a strong national identity. And yet, today perhaps more than ever, certain aspects of Italian culture have become international and indeed global points of reference. No major city in the world lacks Italian restaurants, much of the global elite wears Italian fashion, young people all over the world dream of driving a Ferrari, cultivated people in Tokyo and Singapore attend Italian Opera, and young people in New Delhi no less than in London, Moscow, or Cairo study the films of Visconti, Fellini, Antonioni. In sum, the global importance of Italian culture seems to be out of proportion with the country’s overall weight, in population, in the international economic system, and on the global political scene.

We will examine the emergence of modern Italy from the problematic process of unification and will trace its development up to the contemporary period, focusing on key moments such as WW I, Fascism, WW II and the post-WW II economic boom. In this way we will attempt to map some of the central characteristics of contemporary Italian society and culture. We will be guided by the idea that Italy is less a coherent concept than an experience characterized by key tensions and controversies more than by stable qualities and attributes. The objective is to develop the basic understanding necessary to orient oneself in the seeming incoherence of contemporary Italian reality.
Course Work

Attendance is mandatory and participation in class discussion is essential. Together, they will determine the student’s participation mark. Students will also be responsible for:

a. Two (2) 400-word research assignments and oral presentations on historical figures and events or artistic and political movements. Students will sign up for specific topics and presentation dates and will post their findings on the MyCourses class forum by midnight on the day of their oral presentations. The first research assignment will be due between September 21st and 30th. The second may be scheduled at any point thereafter until the end of the term.

b. a Mid-Term Take-Home Examination on the material covered in class up to that point. The exam questions will be released on MyCourses on Thursday, October 28th and will be due on Tuesday, November 2nd at 8am.

c. a final paper (maximum length: 2,000 words) due on Thursday, December 9th. A list of suggested topics for the final paper will be made available after the Mid-Term Take-Home Examination is marked and returned to students. Students wishing to discuss a topic of their choice must obtain the professor’s permission.

All assignments must be handed in electronically in .docx or pdf form through MyCourses (at midnight of the due date). Submissions made by e-mail will be discarded. There is no final examination for this course.

Evaluation

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance and participation in class activities:</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research assignments (MyCourses forum; 2 x 10%)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oral presentation of research (2 x 5%)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-term take-home exam:</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final paper (2,000 words):</td>
<td>35%</td>
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Please note that students will not be entitled to do extra work to improve their mark.

Course Materials:

a) book to be purchased at the McGill Bookstore: Paul Ginsborg’s *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (history); Natalia Ginzburg’s *Family Lexicon*, and Nino Ricci’s *Lives of the Saints*;

b) two short stories that will be made available for students on MyCourses: Beppe Fenoglio’s “The Debut of the Partisan Raoul” (from *The 23 Days of the City of Alba*) and Igiaba Scego’s “Sausages” (from the *Pecore nere* anthology);

c) passages from literary texts, articles and book chapters that will be made available for students on MyCourses;

d) films/documentaries (to be watched individually by students): Guido Chiesa’s *Lavorare con lentezza* (feature), Matteo Garrone’s *Gomorrah* (feature, Alina Marazzi’s *We Also Want Roses* (docufiction), Martone’s *Noi credevamo* (feature), Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisan* (feature), Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fire at Sea* (documentary), Paolo Sorrentino’s Il Divo (feature), Luchino Visconti’s *Rocco and His Brothers* (feature), Lorella Zanardo’s *Women’s Bodies* (documentary), *Lead and Fire: Mussolini’s Seizure of Power*
(documentary), *The Furies: Mussolini in Power* (documentary), *Cadaveri eccellenti* (documentary), and *Girlfriend in a coma* (documentary)

**Use of Cellphones, Computers and Recording Devices**

Cellphones must be turned off and stored away during class. Computers may be used ONLY for discrete note taking. The instructor will ask students using the computer for any other purpose (such as e-mail or web browsing) to leave the classroom. No recording device of any kind can be used unless specifically authorised by the instructor.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

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 [http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://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 [http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity)).

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**INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

*As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.*

**END OF COURSE EVALUATION**

End-of-course evaluations are one of the ways that McGill works towards maintaining and improving the quality of courses and the student’s learning experience. You will be notified by e-mail when the evaluations are available. Please note that a minimum number of responses must be received for results to be available to students.

**Tentative Class Calendar**

Please note that the following calendar is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion based on the pace of the course and other necessary considerations (class oral presentations, in-class work). The instructor will communicate all major changes at least one week in advance and will confirm required readings and evaluation dates weekly in class, via e-mail, and on MyCourses.
WEEK 1: Introduction to course
Sept. 2 – Syllabus and Introduction

WEEK 2: ITALIAN UNIFICATION
Sept. 7 – Pre-Italy (lecture on Italy pre-Unification)
Sept. 9 – Risorgimento (lecture on Italian resurgence and wars of independence)

WEEK 3: ITALIAN UNIFICATION AND CAMPAIGN FOR WWI
Sept. 14 – Risorgimento
   FILM: Noi credevamo
Sept. 16 – Italian Campaign for WWI (lecture)
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Gabriele D’Annunzio (selected poems)

WEEK 4: FASCISM
Sept. 21 – Fascism / Research project
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Family Lexicon
Sept. 23 – Fascism / Research project
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Family Lexicon

WEEK 5: FASCISM
Sept. 28 – Fascism / Research project
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Family Lexicon
   DOCUMENTARY: Lead and Fire: Mussolini’s Seizure of Power
Sept. 30 – Fascism / Research project
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Family Lexicon
   DOCUMENTARY: The Furies: Mussolini in Power

WEEK 6: WWII
Oct. 5 – Partisan Resistance
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Beppe Fenoglio, “The Partisan Raoul”
Oct. 7 – Wartime Italy
   FILM: Paisan

WEEK 7: POSTWAR
Oct. 15 – The Italian South
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Lives of the Saints

WEEK 8: POSTWAR
Oct. 19 – The Italian South
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Lives of the Saints
Oct. 21 – Second wave of Emigration
   PRIMARY SOURCE: Lives of the Saints

WEEK 9: LEAD YEARS
Oct. 26 – Student resistance in the lead years
   FILM: Lavorare con lentezza
Oct. 28 – Lead Years – Women’s Rights
   FILM: Vogliamo anche le rose
MIDTERM

WEEK 10: ORGANIZED CRIME
Nov. 2 – Cosa Nostra: Falcone and Riina
  DOCUMENTARY: Cadaveri eccellenti
Nov. 4 – Neapolitan Camorra
  FILM: Gomorrah

WEEK 11: GOVERNMENT AND CORRUPTION
Nov. 9 – Organized Crime and Government
Nov. 11 – Tangentopoli
  FILM: Il divo

WEEK 12: “DEMOCRACY”
Nov. 16 – Berlusconi, economy, and media
  DOCUMENTARY: Girlfriend in a Coma
Nov. 18 – Women in the media
  DOCUMENTARY: Women’s bodies

WEEK 13: IMMIGRATION
Nov. 23 – Bossi-Fini and Immigration
  PRIMARY SOURCE: “Sausages” by Igiaba Scego
Nov. 25 – Immigration today
  FILM: Fuocoammare

WEEK 14: ITALY TODAY
Nov. 30 – Italy today
  FILM: Girlfriend in a coma
Dec. 2 – Course wrap-up

FINAL PAPER DUE

Recommended additional films
(may be used for oral presentations, research assignments, or final paper):

Alessandro Blasetti, 1860
Ettore Scola, La famiglia
Roberto Rossellini, Rome, Open City
Vittorio De Sica, Bicycle Thieves
Pier Paolo Pasolini, Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom
Giovanni Amelio, Lamerica
Marco Bellocchio, Buongiorno, Notte
Stefano Sollima, Suburra
Paolo Sorrentino, Loro
Agostino Ferrente, Orchestra di Piazza Vittorio
Fred Kuwornu, Blaxploitation : 100 years of Black in Italian Cinema