

McGill University
Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures
Italian Studies

ITAL 230: Understanding Italy

Lectures:

Monday and Wednesday 8:35 am - 9:55 am (Fall 2022)

Room: BURN 1104

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Office: SH-688, 0445

Office Hours: M/W 10:00 – 11:00 or by appointment

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, WWII 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

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 8am 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.

Attendance is mandatory and participation in class discussion is essential. Together, they will determine the student's participation mark. Students' participation will be measured according to an impartial points system. Points will be attributed to students after each lesson. Students who attend class and contribute actively (vocally) to large-group discussions at least once, or small-group work will receive two points for that lesson. Students who attend class and participate passively (note-taking, active listening) will receive one point for that lesson. Students who are absent from class will receive no points. Occasionally, students will also be given the opportunity to participate in class through online contribution to the MyCourses discussion forum, where they may respond to prompts on selected primary sources.

Evaluation

Attendance and participation in in-class activities:	10%
Research assignments (MyCourses forum; 2 x 7.5%)	15%
Oral presentation of research (2 x 7.5%)	15%
Mid-term take-home exam:	25%
Final paper (2,000 words):	35%

Please note that students will not be entitled to do extra work to improve their mark.

A note on in-class participation: occasionally, students will be invited to respond to a reflection question on the MyCourses discussion forum. Doing so will provide them with an additional opportunity to participate in a classroom discussion they may have missed or foregone for personal or academic reasons. Participation in these discussions is recommended, but not mandatory.

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): Alessandro Blasetti's *1860*, 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), 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> or <https://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest> 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>).

“© Instructor-generated course materials (e.g., handouts, notes, summaries, exam questions, comprehension questions, grammar exercises, reflection questions) are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor. Note that infringements of copyright can be subject to follow up by the University under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.”

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.

As per the university, “The main language of instruction at McGill is English. You have the right to write essays, examinations, and theses in English or in French except in courses where knowledge of a language is one of the objectives of the course.” Please see https://www.mcgill.ca/study/2022-2023/university_regulations_and_resources/graduate/gi_lang_policy#:~:text=The%20main%20language%20of%20instruction,the%20objectives%20of%20the%20course. for more information.

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
August 31 – Syllabus and Introduction

WEEK 2: ITALIAN UNIFICATION

Sept. 5 – Labour Day (NO CLASS)
Sept. 7 – Pre-Italy (lecture on Italy pre-Unification)
PRIMARY SOURCES: *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri; The Prince* (excerpts)

WEEK 3: ITALIAN UNIFICATION AND CAMPAIGN FOR WWI

Sept. 12 – Risorgimento (lecture on Italian resurgence and wars of independence)
PRIMARY SOURCE: *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*
Sept. 14 – Risorgimento
FILMS: *Noi credevamo*, 1860
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oq6BFjzjD9w&t=1813s>)

WEEK 4: FUTURISM, CAMPAIGN FOR WWI, FASCISM

Sept. 19 – Italian Campaign for WWI (lecture)
PRIMARY SOURCES: Gabriele D’Annunzio (selected poems), Sibilla Aleramo, *Una Donna* (excerpt); Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “Manifesto of Futurism”
Sept. 21 – Fascism / Research project
PRIMARY SOURCE: *Family Lexicon*

WEEK 5: FASCISM

Sept. 26 – Fascism/ Research project
PRIMARY SOURCE: *Family Lexicon*

Sept. 28 – Fascism / Research project

PRIMARY SOURCE: *Family Lexicon*

DOCUMENTARY: *Lead and Fire: Mussolini's Seizure of Power*

(<http://proxy.library.mcgill.ca/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103901&xtid=42300>)

WEEK 6: WWII AND RESISTANCE

Oct. 3 – Fascism / Research project

PRIMARY SOURCE: *Family Lexicon*

DOCUMENTARY: *The Furies: Mussolini in Power*

(<http://proxy.library.mcgill.ca/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103901&xtid=42301>)

Oct. 5 – Partisan Resistance

PRIMARY SOURCE: Beppe Fenoglio, “The Partisan Raoul”

WEEK 7: WWII

Oct. 10 – **Thanksgiving (NO CLASS)**

Oct. 12 – **Reading week (NO CLASS)**

Oct. 13 (**MONDAY SCHEDULE**) – Wartime Italy

FILM: *Paisan* (<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/154471>)

WEEK 8: POSTWAR

Oct. 17 – The Italian South

PRIMARY SOURCE: *Lives of the Saints*

Oct. 19 – The Italian South

PRIMARY SOURCE: *Lives of the Saints*

WEEK 9: POSTWAR TO LEAD YEARS

Oct. 24 – Second wave of Emigration

PRIMARY SOURCE: *Lives of the Saints*

Oct. 26 – Student and worker resistance in the lead years

FILM: *Lavorare con lentezza*

WEEK 10: LEAD YEARS

Oct. 31 – Lead Years – Women's Rights

FILM: *Vogliamo anche le rose*

(<https://www.cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/52679/Vogliamo-anche-le-rose-We-want-roses-too>)

Nov. 2 – Individual consultations on final papers

MIDTERM

WEEK 11: ORGANIZED CRIME

Nov. 7 – Cosa Nostra: Falcone and Riina

DOCUMENTARY: *Cadaveri eccellenti* (<https://docuseek2-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/v/a/WSj5/1/0/0>)

Nov. 9 – Neapolitan Camorra

FILM: *Gomorra*

WEEK 12: GOVERNMENT AND CORRUPTION

Nov. 14 – Organized Crime and Government

Nov. 16 – Tangentopoli

FILM: *Il divo* (Criterion On-demand)

WEEK 13: THE BERLUSCONI ERA

Nov. 21 – Women in the media

DOCUMENTARY: *Women's bodies* (<https://en.lorellazanardo.it/womens-bodies/documentary/>)

Nov. 23 – Bossi-Fini and Immigration Laws

PRIMARY SOURCE: "Sausages" by Igiaba Scego

WEEK 14: IMMIGRATION AND ITALY TODAY

Nov. 28 – Immigration today

FILM: *Fuocoammare* (<https://www.kanopy.com/en/mcgill/video/11093286>)

Nov. 30 – Italy today

DOCUMENTARY: *Girlfriend in a coma*

(<http://proxy.library.mcgill.ca/login?url=https://fod.infobase.com/PortalPlaylists.aspx?wID=103901&xtid=150260>)

WEEK 15: FINAL THOUGHTS

Dec. 5 – Course wrap-up

Dec. 7 – (NO CLASS) FINAL PAPER DUE

Recommended additional films

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

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*