Fall 2020
ITAL 363 Gender, Literature and Society
3 cr.

Instructor: Prof. L. Kroha
T TH 10-11:30
Office hours: by appointment

Course overview:
Questions of gender identity and literary representation as they emerge from women's texts or from comparisons of women's and men's texts, in relation to specific social and historical conditions. May focus on any time period in Italian history, from medieval to contemporary.

Topic: Women Writers in Italy 1880-present
The course will focus on a selection of novels, novellas and short stories by women writers beginning with the late-nineteenth century and ending in present-day Italy with the work of Elena Ferrante, whose novels have attained world-wide recognition. The readings are divided into three distinct sections, each representing a different era: (1) first wave feminism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the focus is almost exclusively on female subjectivity, on correcting male representations of women’s experience and on examining the ways in which women’s upbringing contributes to determining their possibilities; (2) second wave feminism of the mid-twentieth century when the revolts of 1968 and the late introduction of divorce in 1974 put an end to the dominance of the traditional family (3) the twentieth-first century when the limitations of “having it all” begin to emerge.

Learning Outcome:
By the end of this course students will understand the specific circumstances that favoured the emergence of Italian women writers as a force to be reckoned with. They will understand how these authors interacted, as women and as writers, with the cultural, social and literary forces – and pressures – confronting them in their particular contexts. They will be able to identify themes that seem to endure in writing by women across time and judge whether and on what basis a case can be made for the existence of a female literary tradition. They will also be acquainted with some theoretical questions regarding the study of women writers and with the variety of positions that have developed in feminist literary theory and criticism since their inception.
READINGS:
Neera, Teresa, 1886 (novel) available from the McGill Bookstore or as an e-book from Amazon
Marchesa Colombi, A Small-town Marriage, 1885 (novella) available from the McGill Bookstore or as an e-book from Amazon
Marchesa Colombi, Learn a Trade for a Rainy Day, 1877 (novella) link on Mycourses
Matilde Serao, Checchina’s Virtue, 1884 (long short story) link on Mycourses
Maria Messina, Behind Closed Doors: Her Father’s House and Other Stories of Sicily (available from Amazon as e-book; also available from McGill Library via Hathi Trust)
Natalia Ginzburg, Family, 1977 (novella) on Mycourses
Dacia Maraini, Woman at War, 1975, (novel) available from the McGill Bookstore or as an e-book on Amazon
Valeria Parrella, The Imagined Friend, 2005, (long short story) on Mycourses
Elena Ferrante, My Brilliant Friend, 2011 (novel) available from the McGill Bookstore or as an e-book on Amazon

In addition to the primary texts some articles and essays may be assigned in the course of the semester. They will be placed on Mycourses.

EVALUATION:
Ongoing project 35%
Response papers 45%
Participation 10%
Short oral presentation 10% (optional; students who do not choose the oral presentation will have to choose (in advance) to allocate the additional 10% either to the project or to the response papers)

An important part of the course is the Ongoing Project. At the beginning of the course each student will choose one theme to pursue throughout the course. Students have the option of undertaking the project alone or with a partner, making notes on the treatment of the theme they have chosen as they move through the readings. Gradually, on the basis of their reflections, they will develop a thesis for a final essay of approx. 2000 words (8-10 double-spaced pages). Possible themes include:

Mothers and Daughters
Female Friendships
the Representation of Male Characters
Sexuality and the Body
Outsiders
Fantasy and Imagination in the Lives of Women.

You will find that that some themes run across all the readings, others do not. You are not required to treat all the readings in your essay, but to focus on the ones in which the theme is most significant. Partners will be responsible for setting up their own periodic
meetings to discuss their work. Students working alone, as well as those working with a partner, will be able to discuss their ideas with me. More detailed instructions will be posted on Mycourses.

**Mode of Delivery & Technical Requirements**

Classes will meet remotely during the regularly scheduled class times. All students are required to have access to a computer, the internet, a microphone, and, if possible, a webcam. Although use of the webcam is not compulsory, it is desirable, as it contributes to creating a “class atmosphere”. However, students who prefer not to appear on screen will not be penalized. We will use Zoom and the link to the meetings will be posted on myCourses. Please do the following before you join the course:

- Create a basic account by clicking on the following link: [https://mcgill.zoom.us/](https://mcgill.zoom.us/) You must sign in with your McGill username/password. Having a Zoom account will help you facilitate virtual meetings for collaborative assignments.
- Read this article on [getting started](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac). If the link does not work, go to: [https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/201362033-Getting-Started-on-Windows-and-Mac)
- Contact your instructor if you do not have a webcam or microphone, so that we can find a solution together and make appropriate accommodations.

**Remote Learning Resources**

Since learning remotely is a new skill that we all have to acquire, I would encourage you to look at the resources that McGill’s Teaching and Learning Services compiled: [https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources)

Consider looking at all the tips, particularly the following points:

- [5 Strategies for Success](https://www.mcgill.ca/tls/students/remote-learning-resources)
- Study Tactics
- Learning Strategies Inventory
- Learning with Zoom

**Recordings**

Periodically, instructors may record a portion of a Zoom lecture that would be uploaded to myCourses. During a meeting, you will be notified through a “pop-up” box in Zoom if the class is being recorded. You can turn off your camera, so that only your name appears on screen. If you do not feel comfortable being in a class that is recorded, you may leave the meeting by logging off Zoom. In the latter case, you should watch the recording later so that you do not miss any content.

**Copyright**

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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.

**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, (chapters of a novel, a novella or a short story) each of which will be accompanied by a set of questions on Mycourses that are meant to guide your reading. You are expected to reflect on these questions and to be prepared to address them during Zoom meetings. 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 the sessions recorded and available on Mycourses.

If you are unable for some reason to be present at a Zoom meeting, you will be required to submit short written responses to the questions. At periodic intervals you will be asked to write short response papers (3) for submission within a week. 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 no fixed office hours. Rather meetings will be arranged by e-mail individually.

Students who wish to observe religious holy days MUST refer to McGill University's Religious Holy Days Policy.

**Deadlines**

Deadlines must be met. No accommodations will be made for any missed evaluation unless a medical note is provided. There will be no supplemental and no additional work to upgrade marks.

**COURSE CONTENT AND CALENDAR**

(dates and topics are subject to change. Topics are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. They are merely meant to provide an idea of the works under examination and some of the issues that will be discussed.)

**September 3** Introduction to course, discussion of modalities, introduction of students and instructor

**September 8** Theoretical questions regarding the study of women’s literature: Is this a valid category? Does it make sense to look at literature from a gendered perspective: to
what extent is writing gender-specific? Where and how can we begin to look for what is distinctive about women’s writing? Is there such a thing as a female literary tradition? Review of various positions on the question, past and present.

-a brief overview of feminist criticism and its connection to feminist movements (Readings willl posted on Mycourses)

September 10, 15 The specific case of Italy: The exclusion of many women writers from the Italian canon. The re-discovery of women writers in conjunction with second-wave feminism of the 1960’s and 70’s. The social and cultural climate in which 19th century Italian women’s writing developed (the changing role of women in post-Unification Italy, industrialization, the rise of the middle-class and the development of a mass-market publishing industry and the popular novel, the rise of feminism and the debate on the questione femminile or the “woman question”). The lack of Italian role models for women writers, residual Risorgimento ideals and images of women on post-Unification Italy, the Catholic church and women, women as custodians of the private sphere, the influence of the French novel, thoughts on the education of women and the pernicious influence of novels and reading on women, attitudes to women writers, social and literary pressures facing women writers. Italian naturalism or verismo and the woman writer. The representation of women in major 19th century male writers such as Manzoni and Verga. (Readings will be posted on Mycourses)

PART I The late 19th and early 20th centuries: the emergence of women writers and first-wave feminism

September 17, 22, 24, 29 Neera’s Teresa: Finding a husband (or not). Teresa as a naturalist novel and its place in the arc of Neera’s career. Neera’s opinions on the role of women and writing as a career for women. Women in patriarchal society, mothers and daughters, the role of fantasy and imagination, madness and desire, duty and desire. Spinsterhood and hysteria: the body’s response. Teresa and its relationship to George Eliot’s The Mill on the Floss. The “ghost” of Georges Sand. The representation of male characters. Is this a feminist novel or not??

**Sept 29 First response prompt on Mycourses

October 1, 6,10 Marchesa Colombi’s A Small-Town Marriage. Finding a husband (or not): a different take. A different form of naturalism: the absurdity and the banality of everyday life. The representation of the home. First-person retrospective narration and the use of irony. Marchesa Colombi and the role of literature and of reading in women’s lives. The role of fantasy and the imagination in creating desire.

**October 6 First response paper due.
October 13 Marchesa Colombi, *Learn a Trade for a Rainy Day*. Upper middle-class women and the search for autonomy and for alternatives to marriage and family. The spectre of spinsterhood.

**October 15. Second response prompt on Mycourses.**


October 20 Maria Messina, *Her Father’s House*. The extended family in Sicilian society. The unhappy marriage and how to extricate oneself.

**October 22 Second response paper due.**

PART II The mid-to late 20th Century: the revolts of 1968 and the end of traditional society

October 22, 27 Natalia Ginzburg, *Family* Images of the family and of marriage. The loosening of family ties and the end of strong values. Loneliness and confusion in the face of an increasingly superficial and materialistic society. The generation gap and the clash of values in the move from an agricultural to an industrial society, and from the country to the city. Style as content. The case for a female literary tradition: Ginzburg and Marchesa Colombi

**Oct. 29 Third response paper on Mycourses**


**November 5 Third response paper due**

Part III The 21st Century: Having it all; the emergence of a literary phenomenon, Elena Ferrante

November 12 Valeria Parrella, *The Imagined Friend*. Having it all: husband, child and career. What has changed and what has not in the lives of middle-class women. The case for a female tradition: Parrella and Serao.

Dec. 8 Ongoing project due

Reference available for e-reading:


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).