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CATTOLICA
del Sacro Cuore

Italian Heroines in Contemporary Literature and Culture

PROF. ELEONORA FORNASARI/Prof. CARMELA PIERINI

Area of study:	Italian Studies and Culture
Area Code:	LT/AR330
Method of Instruction:	In-person

Description

This course invites students on a cross-cultural journey through the iconic female figures that have shaped Italian literature, opera, and cinema from the 19th to the 21st century. From the femme fatale to the angel in the house, from tragic lovers to defiant mothers, we'll explore how evolving archetypes mirror changing social expectations around gender and identity. Through a dynamic, comparative lens, students will analyze classic and contemporary texts alongside operatic scenes and cinematic portrayals. Special focus will be given to how Italian culture frames and reframes femininity—challenging romanticized tropes and interrogating modern stereotypes. Designed for international learners with diverse academic backgrounds, the course encourages active participation, critical thinking, and intercultural dialogue. Midterm group presentations allow students to bring in global literary examples and reflect on shared or divergent narratives of womanhood.

Course objectives can be synthesized as follows:

By the end of the course, students will gain a deeper understanding of Italian cultural heritage—and a broader awareness of how femininity is imagined, performed, and resisted across artistic forms and societal contexts.

Course contents

Texts (final selection will be made in class):

- *The Betrothed*, Alessandro Manzoni;
- *Fosca*, Iginio Ugo Tarchetti;
- *The Troubadour*, Giuseppe Verdi – Salvatore Cammarano; *The Tourandot*, Giacomo Puccini
- *The Pleasure*, Gabriele D'Annunzio;
- *Artemisia*, Anna Banti;
- *The lost daughter*, *The days of abandonment*, Elena Ferrante.

Movies (to be watched before class):

- *Bellissima* (Luchino Visconti, 1951)
- *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and his brothers*, Luchino Visconti, 1960);



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- *La Notte* (*The Night*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961);
- *C'è ancora domani* (*There's still tomorrow*, Paola Cortellesi, 2023)

Prerequisites

None

Method of teaching

Active, "learn by doing" approach, lecture and text analysis, class discussion and field trips related to the contents of the course. Intersections with other artistic disciplines like cinema, television, theatre and arts. Screening of clips from films, lecture and film analysis. Class readings and assignments.

Exams:

Midterm exam: group presentation to be decided with the professor.

Final exam: 2 written short essays.

Course requirements

In order to get their credits, students will be required to:

- Attend class regularly.
- Participate actively to the class activities.
- Keep up with the assigned readings and the individual and group assignments. The aim is to let the student acquire a critic approach to literature (in its different expressive forms). A few lectures will be assigned for the final exam.
- Pass the midterm and the final exam.

Credits

6 ECTS

Grading

Attendance and participation	20 % of final grade
Midterm test (Group presentation)	40 % of final grade
Final exam	40 % of final grade

Course readings and materials

All readings and the lecturers' slides will be available on Blackboard after each class with additional materials.

Students are required to watch the assigned movies:

- *Bellissima* (Luchino Visconti, 1951) is available on YouTube with English subtitles.



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- *Rocco e i suoi fratelli* (*Rocco and his brothers*, Luchino Visconti, 1960) and *La notte* (*The Night*, Michelangelo Antonioni, 1961) are available on Amazon Prime Video or can be accessed at the Università Cattolica's Mediateca through the following links:
 - [Rocco and his brothers](#);
 - *La notte*: [Italian and French](#) or [English](#);
- *C'è ancora domani* (Paola Cortellesi, 2023) is available on Netflix and soon at Mediateca

For any assistance with accessing these materials, students may contact Anna Caccia. Her contact details can be found in the [Mediateca page](#).

Instructor bio

Eleonora Fornasari holds an MA in International Screenwriting and Production, as well as a Ph.D. from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy. Her research focuses on studying female characters, with an initial emphasis on children's literature. She works as a scriptwriter for both animated TV series (*Igam Ogam*, *Julio Bunny*, *YoYo*, *Topo Gigio*, *The Game Catchers*, *Mini-Heroes of the Forest*) and live-action shows for RAI, the Italian national broadcaster (*Social King 2.0*, *La TV Ribelle*, *La Posta di YoYo*, *Piccolo Mostro*, *S-Fidiamoci*). In addition, she is a children's writer, having published books and novels for various age groups. She is an adjunct professor of "Literature, Cinema, and TV Series for Kids and Young Audiences" within the *Art and Industry of Narration* program (LM in Language Sciences and Foreign Literatures) and serves as an assistant professor for courses in "History and Industry of International Cinema," "Italian Contemporary Literature," and "Italian Grammar." She also teaches "Digital Journalism and Digital Media in Italy" within the International Curriculum.

@: eleonoraclaudia.fornasari@unicatt.it

Carmela Pierini holds a Ph.D in Italian Studies from the University of St. Andrews (Scotland) with a thesis focused on the Italian writer and essayist Anna Banti. Her research focuses on female writing and characters but also the intersections of literature with other disciplines, with specific attention to éckfrasis, connections between literature and advertising, and health humanities. She collaborates with the Catholic University of Milan as Assistant professor for the courses of Italian for Communication, Italian Contemporary Literature and Italian Literature moreover she is a member of the scientific secretary of «Otto/Novecento» and co-directs the prose session of the international journal «Il Pietrisco». In addition, with her own company Officinaventuno she works with main publishing houses and companies as CNR, Mondadori and EDUCatt.

@: carmela.pierini@unicatt.it