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# A Mafia Story: its Representation in Literature, Cinema and Television

PROF. MARIA SEPA

<b>Term</b>	Summer 2026
<b>Area of study</b>	Cultural Studies
<b>Course code</b>	SO/LT 300su
<b>Credits</b>	6 ECTS
<b>Dates</b>	22 June – 3 July 2026 (2 weeks)
<b>Method of instruction</b>	In person

## Description

From its local origins in Sicily, the Mafia has become a global phenomenon and a widespread model of organized crime that threatens and corrupts the international economy, political systems and social environments. Yet film, television and literature have shown a continued fascination of the Mafia which has often been portrayed with romantic and even heroic connotations.

In this course we will explore the representations of the Mafia in Italy through literature, film, and television; in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Combining the analyses of historians, sociologists, and intellectuals, along with the testimonies of victims, we will challenge the stereotypes through which cultural productions envision the Mafia, and more importantly, we will explore how the Mafia envisions the world, in particular what is its ethics, its relationships with law, politics, business and finance, its ideas of femininity and masculinity, its portrayals of children. Examining both the visions on and by the Mafia through cultural, socio-political, and historical perspectives, this course aims to deconstruct the mythological eye and instead form an analytical eye with which to investigate and better understand the Mafioso universe and power, and the cultural Italian identity as well.

## Course contents

In the course we will investigate the following topics:

1. The origins/the myth (*The Leopard* film and excerpts from book, *The Godfather* film)
2. Mafia and politics (*In un altro paese*, docu)
3. The Camorra (*Gomorra*, book and film)
4. Women in, against and around the Mafia (Women's Testimonies, *Gomorra*, "Women", *Gomorra* TV Series, Ep. 7)
5. The 'Ndrangheta (Perry's Article)
6. The Mafia in Milan (*Gomorra*, TV Series, Ep. 5)

## Prerequisites

None.



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## Method of teaching

The course will alternate lectures, class discussions, students' exercises and presentations, film showings and two field studies. Great emphasis will be given to the active participation of the student.

## Course requirements

Each student will be asked to give short presentations and do exercises on the material assigned daily. On the last day of class there will be the Final Exam. Attendance is mandatory, as well as the punctual reading of the material assigned daily.

## Grading

Class participation, exercises, presentations	60 % of final grade
Final exam	40 % of final grade

## Course readings and materials

### Novels:

1. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard* (Pantheon, 2007, excerpts)
2. Leonardo Sciascia, *The Day of the Owl* (NYRB Classics, 2003)
3. Roberto Saviano, *Gomorra* (Picador, 2017, excerpts)
4. Women Testimonies
5. Alex Perry, "Blood and Justice," (The Women Who Took On the Mafia), *The New Yorker*, January 22, 2018, pp. 36-47.

### Films:

1. Luchino Visconti, *Il gattopardo* (1963)
2. Francis Ford Coppola, *The Godfather* (1972)
3. Marco Turco, Alexander Stille, *In un altro paese* (2005)
4. Matteo Garrone, *Gomorra* (2008)

### TV Series:

1. *Gomorra*, Episode 5, 7

Extra readings and the lectures slides will be available on Blackboard.

## Rules of Conduct

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and no absence/s will be excused. Please consider that Field Trips are considered equal to regular classes and indeed you are expected to attend the visits. Unexcused absences will not be accepted. An excused absence will only be granted if you are seriously ill and can support your claim with a local doctor's certificate dated the day you missed class (therefore you must go to the doctor that same day) that has to be delivered to the Professor or to Cattolica International Office. Any



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other absence will not be excused and will result in not being admitted to the final exam, which corresponds to a 0 (zero) in the final exam.

**Exam Date:** The exam date cannot be re-scheduled. Should the dates of the final exams be moved for force major reasons, Cattolica International Office and the Professor will promptly inform you in class and/or via e-mail on the new date agreed. Unexcused absences to the exams will result in a failing grade in the course.

In cases of unforeseeable circumstances such as illness or injury on the day of the exams, you must submit a medical certificate and communicate your absence to the Professor and Cattolica International Office via email prior to the exam. If the student does not justify his/her absence through sufficient documentation and with adequate notice before the final test, you will receive an automatic Failed. Absences for other unforeseeable circumstances will not be accepted and will result in a failing grade.

### Instructor bio

**Maria Sepa**, Ph.D. Italian Literature, Brown University (Providence, RI); has taught Italian Literature at University of Virginia, Wellesley College, Brown University, Brown University in Bologna, and is currently teaching at IES Milan. She is also translating from English into Italian for the cultural pages of *Il Corriere della Sera*. She is engaged in promoting a dialogue between American and Italian studies, through two blogs, [www. http://usalibri.blogspot.it/](http://usalibri.blogspot.it/), and <https://italiannewsclinks.fas.harvard.edu/>. She is the author of *Milano downtown*, a novel (Manni, 2013).

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### Course Schedule

Lesson	Date	Time	Topic	Reading/Course Material
1	June, 22	2-5 PM	Introduction to the course and to <i>The Leopard</i>	Lecture on the origins of the Palermo Mafia
2	June, 23	9:30 AM-3:30 PM	The Leopard, first chapters, Mafia and politics	The Leopard, Ch, 1-2 and film
3	June 24	9:30 AM-4:30 PM	The Leopard, conclusions.	The Leopard, film
4	June 25	9:30 AM-3:30 PM	The Mafia Goes to America, The Godfather	The Godfather, film
5	June 26	9:30 AM, 12:30 PM	The Mafia during Fascism and WWII	The Godfather
6	June 29	9:30 AM-3:30 PM	The Last, Bloodiest Years of the Palermo Mafia, 1	Sciascia, The Day of the Owl, In un altro paese, documentary
7	June 30	9:30 AM-3:30 PM	The Last, Bloodiest Years of the Palermo Mafia, 2 and The Mafia in Milan	Gomorrah, the TV Series, Episode 5. Field Study
8	July 1	9:30 AM-3:30 PM	Women in/around/against the Mafias	Women's Testimonies, Gomorrah, the TV Series, episode 7
9	July 2	9:30 AM-4:30 PM	The Camorra and the 'Ndrangheta	Perry's Article, "Blood and Justice." Field Study
10	July 4	9:30-12:30 AM	Conclusions and Final Exam	