

ITAL5810

Fall 2023– Thursdays 12:00-2:00p.m.

Theories of Autobiography and Forms and Purposes of Italian
Autobiographies in the Twentieth Century

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Office Hours: Thursday 2-3.30 and by appointment.

Course Description

In the Twentieth Century and the Twenty-first Century theoretical and critical discussions around the notion of “autobiography” have involved a great number of theorists, literary critics, psychologists, post-colonial, feminist, queer and “ethnic” scholars, with significantly different approaches and outcomes about the “autobiographical issue”.

One result is clear: the uses of “autobiography” are more clearly definable than its theoretical definition. The course will address both of these aspects of the autobiographical question: the socio-cultural use, and the literary and epistemological aspects of autobiography with systemic reference to Italian writers (“primary sources”).

The course will explore the components of the traditional definition of autobiography: *autos*, *bios*, *graphein* as exemplified by Italian writers. Self-reference, life-narrative, and authorship and writing are key theoretical points which will be discussed in a plural cultural perspective.

One Italian “autobiographical” work will be discussed each week and contextualized with suggestions from Italian and international theorists and critics.

The reference text for these theoretical readings is: The Norton Anthology of Theory & Criticism, Third Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 2001. (Quoted in the Class Schedule as Norton Anthology with required reading page number).

Specifically, we will discuss: **Sibilla Aleramo’s** denunciation of the difficulties of self-definition; **Grazia Deledda’s** transfigured narrative of her own breast cancer”; **Alberto**

Moravia's narrative of a complex sexual coming of age; **Primo Levi's** stark and concise narration of an unspeakable tragedy; **Pier Paolo Pasolini's** essays on his personal involvement with a disappearing world; **Vasco Pratolini's** confession of writing as "expiation"; **Ignazio Silone's** "political" self-portrait; **Guido Morselli's** radical interrogation of autobiography as a human statement, in a posthuman world; **Rosetta Loy's** memories of the changing meaning-significance of the word "Jew"; **Antonia Arslan's** family narrative of the Armenian genocide; **Carmine Abate's** story of emigration and **Jhumpa Lahiri's** choice to write in Italian. These texts provide suggestive evidence of autobiographical possibilities, both at the thematic, structural, and stylistic level. Ultimately, the course provides a broad, extensive, and varied picture of Italians' "self-portraits" in the Twentieth and Twenty-first century, as narrators write their lives in front of history, experience, and the challenge of finding/defining themselves, individually and collectively.

Course Requirement

The course will be taught in English and the class discussions will be in English.

The required readings must be either in Italian or English, according to the student's preference.

All students are expected to attend classes and complete the readings for each session before the session itself.

Each student will produce a 300 word weekly comment to be shared on line before class (by noon on Tuesday). A printed copy of this comment must be handed in at the end of class. These "reading notes" will be collected after each class and will count towards the final grade. All these "notes" will be returned with comments by the professor the following week, and must be kept and handed in at the end of the course, together with the final paper.

Class participation with active and meaningful interaction will be counted as part of the final grade.

At the end of the course each student will write one final paper of about 12 pages double spaced (max 15 pages including bibliography) to be handed in by **December 11th at the latest**. The subject of this paper must be discussed with the instructor beforehand. The final paper will critically discuss one or more texts (Italian sources and/or theory sources), with a specific sound methodology, chosen according to the student's preference. A bibliography of at least 6 titles must be used to perform the reading developed in the paper. Final papers can be either in English or Italian.

Lack of indications of quoted material or paraphrased material with no reference will be considered plagiarism, and negatively impact the result of the final evaluation.

COVID PRECAUTIONS: Depending on the state of Covid, masks could be required in class. Thank you.

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Thursday 31st August: Introduction to the course

Thursday September 7th: Sibilla Aleramo, A Woman, Penguin Modern Classics, 2020. In Italian: Una donna (1906), Feltrinelli, Milano, 1950. From The Norton Anthology: Mary Wollstonecraft pp. 507-514.

Thursday September 14th: Grazia Deledda, The Church of Solitude, SUNY Press, Albany, 2002. In Italian: La chiesa della solitudine (1936), Mondadori, Milan, 2002. From The Norton Anthology: Hannah Arendt, pp. 1169-76.

Thursday September 21st: Alberto Moravia, "Agostino" in Five Novels by Alberto Moravia, Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, Inc, New York, New York, 1955. In Italian: Agostino (1945) Bompiani, Milano, 1979. From The Norton Anthology: Sigmund Freud, pp. 799-816.

Thursday September 28th: Primo Levi, If this is a Man, Penguin Books, 1979. In Italian: Se questo è un uomo (1947), Einaudi, Torino, 1958. From The Norton Anthology: Giorgio Agamben pp. 1972-83.

Thursday October 5th: Pier Paolo Pasolini, From: Corsair Writings (2018). In Italian: Scritti corsari, Garzanti, Milan, 1975. A selection of essays will be posted on Canvas.

Thursday October 12th: Fall BREAK - No CLASS

Thursday October 19th Vasco Pratolini, Family Chronicle, Italica Press, New York, New York, 1988. In Italian: Cronaca familiare (1963), BUR Rizzoli, Milano, 2012. From: Paul de Man, "Autobiography as Defacement" in The Rhetoric of Romanticism, pp. 67-81. This essay will be posted on Canvas.

Thursday October 26th: Ignazio Silone, Emergency Exit, Harper & Row, New York, New York, 1968. In Italian: Uscita di sicurezza (1965), Oscar Mondadori, Milano, 2001. From The Norton Anthology: Antonio Gramsci, pp. 929-935.

Thursday November 2nd: Guido Morselli, DISSIPATIO H. G. New York Review Books, New York, 2020. In Italian: Dissipatio H.G., Adelphi, Milano, 1977
From The Norton Anthology: Friedrich Nietzsche, pp. 752-753 and Rosi Braidotti, pp. 2329-37.

Thursday November 9th: Rosetta Loy, First Words. A Childhood in fascist Italy, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2000. In Italian: La parola Ebreo (1997), Einaudi, Torino, 1998. From The Norton Anthology: Hayden White, pp. 1466-1472 and pp. 1475-80.

Thursday November 16th: Antonia Arslan, Skylark Farm, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2006. In Italian: La masseria delle allodole, Rizzoli RCS Libri, Milan, 2004. From The Norton Anthology: Giorgio Agamben, pp.1968-1972.

Tuesday November 21st: Carmine Abate, The Homecoming Party, Europa Editions, New York, 2010. In Italian: La festa del ritorno, Mondadori, Milano, 2004. From The Norton Anthology: Giorgio Agamben, pp. 1979-1983.

Thursday November 23: THANKSGIVING - NO CLASS

Thursday November 30th: Jhumpa Lahiri, In altre parole (2015)/ In Other Words, Vintage, New York, N.Y., 2017. From The Norton Anthology: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Taban Lo Liyong, Henry Owuor-Anyumba, pp.1912-1916.

Thursday December 7th: Final Class. Discussion.

Deadline for turning in your final paper December 11th (by noon) at the latest.