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ISLI 330: A Taste for Knowledge: Food in Italian Literature
Course Syllabus
Fall Semester 2017

Instructor: Elgin K. Eckert, Ph.D.

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Class Time: Mondays and Wednesdays 12-1:30pm.

Course/Lab Fee: € 150

Course Description

This hybrid literature/creative writing/narrative theory course will examine the role of food in Italian and Italian-American literature. It will analyze women's issues in relation to the narration of food and the importance of food during war times, especially in extreme situations, such as displacement and bombardments. As the Italian words *sapore* (taste) and *sapere* (knowledge) share a common root: *sap-, which means not only "to taste", but also "to research" and "to be wise", this course will consider how the preparation, production and consumption of food intersect with wisdom and (self) knowledge in literature and culture. By examining excerpts from some of the most important works in recent Italian literature as well as select writings from Italian American women authors, students will examine the historical, social and symbolic value of food while focusing on the development of cultural, national and individual /feminist identity.

Students in this course will find their own voices in the form of fiction and non-fiction creative writing assignments. They will demonstrate an understanding of literary devices, figures of speech and sound patterns through actual use in writing. Through their own writings, students will demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of the various literary genres, such as plot, narrative voice, setting, characterization, and description. In order to hone students' skills both as readers and as writers of narrative, this course will also discuss the principal issues in narratology and narrative theory.

Course Objectives

This course will stress close reading of selected texts and stimulate creativity and critical thought in an academic environment. Careful attention will be given to choice of language, historical and political implications, as well as the overall "message" of the work.

By the end of this course, students will:

- have an understanding of the principles of narratology and narrative theory;
- have initiated, researched, and written short pieces of original writing;
- become aware of the connections between creativity, structure, and discipline;
- have analyzed texts by major female writers in contemporary Italian literature;
- have expanded their critical understanding of major contemporary women authors;
- have worked with non-traditional literary texts;
- be able to discuss the specific course topic critically and confidently.

Bibliography

Novel:

Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*

A course reader of selected narrative and scholarly texts.

Selections from *The Milk of Almonds: Italian American Women Writers on Food and Culture*. Guinta, Edvige and Louise DeSalvo (eds.) – are designated [MoA] on the syllabus.

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Grading

This course will be taught as a lecture course with frequent group discussions and readings. Thus, students are expected to complete the assigned readings **before class** and to actively contribute to the class discussion.

Grades will be awarded on the basis of

Participation and Preparation	10%
3 Creative Writing Assignments	30%
3 Exams on Theory	30%
Midterm and Final Discussions	5% + 5%
Service Learning	
Group Project	10%
Individual Story	10%

PARTICIPATION AND PREPARATION

Takes into account: preparation for and participation in class discussion, during the Field Trip, during the Reading at the School, and during the various Special Academic Events (CE presentations, Creative Writing Readings etc.).

THREE CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

These assignments will be handed out in class on the days indicated. The first assignment will be worth 5%, the subsequent ones 7.5%.

THREE THEORY EXAMS

These exams will be 45 minutes each and consist of a comprehensive test of students' knowledge on the narrative theory covered in class as well as application of the studied concepts.

MIDTERM AND FINAL DISCUSSIONS

Instead of a traditional written exam, students will each lead a discussion of a particular aspect of the literature studied in this course.

SERVICE LEARNING

Instructions for the two service learning written components will be handed out in class.

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory. Students are allowed **two** "free" absences, which they do not need to justify in any way. Each additional absence, unless for a very serious reason, will lower the student's grade by one level (e.g., B+ becomes a B). If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during the office hour. It also the policy of the Institute that any student who has eight or more absences automatically fails the class.

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Please Note: **Presence during the mandatory field trip and the book presentation** is especially important for student performance in this class. Missing a mandatory field trip, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower students' final grade by one grade level (e.g., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Service Learning Project Description

In this course, students will first collaborate with *SapereFood*, an online magazine dedicated to sharing the Umbrian agricultural traditions and food producers' narratives with consumers. They will meet with the producers and participate in tastings of Umbrian products, which will serve as the basis for one of the course's creative writing assignments. The collection of student stories will then be published on the SapereFood webpage section titled 'Umbra Diaries'. Students will then transform their experience during the visits into a children's story on food in both English and Italian. To conclude the project, students will share their creative piece at "Apriti, scuola!", a weekly multi-lingual children's reading hosted by "**Il Castello Rotondo**" Elementary School. At the end of the semester, students will present their work to the Umbra community and participate in the Creative Writing Reading.

Field Trip

Day trip to Umbrian food producers, which will serve as the basis for two of the creative writing assignments. Missing this field trip will adversely affect students' ability to complete these assignments.

Course Content Note

During the semester, the class will be discussing literature that may be considered disturbing, or even traumatizing, to some students. Reading selections include descriptions of rape, violence (against women and against children), eating disorders, and death. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I would be happy to discuss any concerns that students may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if students ever wish to discuss personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our class work.

Class discussions will generally not **focus** on the aforementioned topics, although references to the topics will be made. If students ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion they may always do so without academic penalty. They will, however, be responsible for any material they miss. If students do leave the room for a significant time, they should make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

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Week 1 Food in Contemporary Cinema I

Sept. 4

Introduction to the course
The use of Food in Narrative
Screening of *Le fate ignoranti* (His Secret Life)

Sept. 6

Screening of *Le fate ignoranti* (His Secret Life) (cont.)
Discussion of food in Ozpetek's film

CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT 1 HANDED OUT

SATURDAY, SEPT. 9TH : VISIT TO TWO LOCAL UMBRIAN FOOD PRODUCERS

Week 2 Food in Medieval and Renaissance Italy

THEORY:

- WHAT IS NARRATIVE?;
- ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE;
- DIFFERENT TYPES OF NARRATIVE.

Sept. 11

Food in the Middle Ages.
Giovanni Boccaccio: his life and times.
The *Decameron*: general introduction.
Discussion of Food in the *Decameron*.

Readings:

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* V,9 (Federigo degli Alberighi); *Decameron* VI,4 (Chicchibio); *Decameron* VIII,3 (Calandrino).

Sept. 13

Literature and Recipes.

Readings:

Pellegrino Artusi: Selections from the Reader.

Week 3 Food in Children's Literature

THEORY:

- TIME AND SPACE;
- STORY, PLOT, NARRATIVE PROGRESSION.

Sept. 18

Pinocchio: the Seduction of Food.
Food as Didactic Instrument.

Readings:

Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio* – selections in the reader.

CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT 2 HANDED OUT

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Sept. 20

**Theory on Children's Literature
Brainstorming for Story**

Reading (handout in class):

Tom Furniss; *Histories of Childhood and Literary Competence: Teaching Children's Literature in the University*.

Week 4 Food and the Mother I

THEORY:

- VOICE: AUTHORS, NARRATORS, AUDIENCES.

THEORY EXAM 1

Sept. 25

Discussion of Reading Selections
Mother = Nurturer

Readings:

Sibilla Aleramo, *Una donna*.

Clara Sereni, *For a Baby* (from *Keeping House*).

Sept. 27

Discussion of Reading Selections.
The Role of the Mother in Literature.

Readings:

Fabrizia Ramondino, *Perfetta's Day*.

Susanna Tamaro, *Monday Again*.

Week 5 Food and the Mother II

THEORY:

- PARATEXT, METANARRATIVE AND METAFICTION.

Oct. 2

War and Displacement.
Macrohistory and Microhistory.

Readings:

Elsa Morante, *History* 1941, chapters 1 and 4.

Oct. 4

Discussion of Morante's novel

Readings:

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Elsa Morante, *History* 1943, *History* 1944, (selections).

CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT 3 HANDED OUT

Week 6 Food in Extreme Situations

THEORY:

- INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STRUCTURES IN NARRATION.

Oct. 9

Food as currency in extreme situations: the concentration camps.

Interview with Primo Levi.

Selections from Francesco Rosi's film *The Truce*.

Readings:

Primo Levi *The Survivor* (poem)

Primo Levi *Survival in Auschwitz* (selections in the reader)

Primo Levi *The Truce* (selections in the reader)

Oct. 11

Elena Ferrante: introduction to the life and work of the reclusive author.

Discussion of Ferrante's novel.

Readings:

Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*.

Week 7

THEORY EXAM 2

Oct. 16

Food and social class in literature.

Discussion of Ferrante's novel.

Readings:

Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*.

Oct. 18

Midterm Discussion of Ferrante's novel.

Readings:

Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*.

FALL BREAK OCT. 23-27

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Week 8

Oct. 30

Workshop: Children's Story.

Nov. 1

Italian Holiday, school closed.

Week 9 Food in Crime Literature I

THEORY:

- PERSPECTIVE: POINT OF VIEW, FOCALIZATION, REFLECTOR FIGURES.

Nov. 6

Introduction to the works of Andrea Camilleri.
Food and crime literature.

Reading:

Andrea Camilleri, *Seven Mondays*.

Nov. 8

- different types of crime literature.

Reading:

Andrea Camilleri, *Montalbano afraid*.

Andrea Camilleri, *Montalbano's Rice Fritters*.

Week 10

THEORY

- CHARACTER AND CHARACTERIZATION.

Nov. 13

Continuation of discussion of food in crime novels;
Workshop: Children's Story.

Reading:

Andrea Camilleri, *Montalbano says no*.

Optional Reading:

Eckert, Elgin K., "Inspector Montalbano a tavola: Food in Andrea Camilleri's Police Fiction" in *Representing Italy through Food*. Eds. Elgin K. Eckert, Peter Naccarato and Zachary Nowak. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Nov. 15

GROUP PROJECT CHILDREN'S STORY DUE

- Workshop: presenting the Children's Story.

Friday Nov. 17 Presentation of Short Story at *Il Castello Rotondo* in Ripa, PG

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Week 11

Nov. 20

When food becomes a problem.
Italian American Women's writing.

Readings and Assignments:

[MoA] Cheryl Burke, *Bone, Veins, and Fat*.

[MoA] Loryn Lipari, *Cracked*.

[MoA] Anne Calcagno, *Let them Eat Cake*.

Nov. 22

Writing Workshop

Week 12

THEORY:

- REPRESENTATION OF SPEECH AND THOUGHT.

Nov. 27

Discussion of three short stories that combines aspects of food and eroticism.

Readings:

Milena Milani, *Ice Cream*.

[MoA] Mary Bucci Bush, *Aperitivo*.

FIRST DRAFT OF CREATIVE WRITING STORY FOR SAPEREFOOD DUE

Nov. 29

Writing Workshop

Week 13 **Food and Gender(ing)**

THEORY:

- OVERVIEW OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES.

Dec. 4

- Discussion of Short Stories.
- Screening of *Mine vaganti*.

Reading

Dacia Maraini, *Maria*.

[MoA] Rita Cirisi, *Big Heart*.

FINAL DRAFT OF CREATIVE WRITING STORY FOR SAPEREFOOD DUE

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Dec. 6

THEORY EXAM 3

- Discussion of article.
- Screening of *Mine vaganti* (cont).

Reading:

Eckert, Elgin K. and Zachary Nowak. "In cibo veritas: Food Preparation and Consumption in Ozpetek's 'Queer' Films" in *Representing Italy through Food*. Eds. Elgin K. Eckert, Peter Naccarato and Zachary Nowak. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Dec. 11-15: Week of Final Exams and Special Academic Events - Final Exam: exact date TBD