ITALIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
Millicent Marcus

Director of Graduate Studies
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Lecturer Serena Bassi

Lector Simona Lorenzini

Affiliated Faculty Roberto González Echevarría (Spanish & Portuguese), Gundula Kreuzer (Music), David Quint (English), Gary Tomlinson (Music)

Visiting faculty from other universities are regularly invited to teach courses in the department.

FIELDS OF STUDY

The Italian department brings together several disciplines for the study of the Italian language and its literature. Although the primary emphasis is on a knowledge of the subject throughout the major historical periods, the department welcomes applicants who seek to integrate their interests in Italian with wider methodological concerns and discourses, such as history, rhetoric and critical theories, comparison with other literatures, the figurative arts, religious and philosophical studies, medieval, Renaissance, and modern studies, and the contemporary state of Italian writing. Interdepartmental work is therefore encouraged and students are accordingly given considerable freedom in planning their individual curriculum, once they have acquired a broad general knowledge of the field through course work and supplementary independent study.

SPECIAL ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS

The department recognizes that good preparation in Italian literature is unusual at the college level and so suggests that applicants begin as soon as possible to acquire a broad general knowledge of the field through outside reading. At the end of the first and second years, students’ progress is analyzed in an evaluative colloquium. Applicants who have had little or no experience in Italy are generally urged to do some work abroad during the course of their graduate program. For all students of Italian, a reading knowledge of Latin is essential. This may be acquired during the course of the first year, but applicants are reminded that it is difficult to schedule beginning language courses in addition to a normal graduate program. Students are advised to acquire proficiency in the languages required for the doctoral program before matriculation.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

Candidates must demonstrate a reading knowledge of a second Romance language, Latin, and a non-Romance language (German recommended). The Latin examination must be passed, usually before the beginning of the third term of study, and all language requirements must be fulfilled before the Ph.D. qualifying examination. Students are required to take two years of course work (as a rule sixteen courses), including two graduate-level term courses outside the Italian department. After consultation with the director of graduate studies (DGS), students who join the graduate program with an M.A. in hand may have up to four courses waived. The comprehensive qualifying examination must take place during the third year of residence. It is designed to demonstrate the student’s mastery of the language and acquaintance with the literature. The examination, which is both written and oral, will be devised in consultation with members of the department. In the term following the qualifying examination, the student will discuss, in a session with the departmental faculty, a prospectus describing the subject and aims of the dissertation. Students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. upon completion of all predissertation requirements, including the prospectus. Admission to candidacy normally occurs by the end of the sixth term.

Teaching is considered to be an important component of the doctoral program in Italian. Students will be appointed as teaching fellows in the third and fourth years of study. Guidance in teaching is provided by the faculty of the department and specifically by the director of language instruction.
COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAMS
Italian and Film and Media Studies

The Department of Italian also offers, in conjunction with the Film and Media Studies Program, a combined Ph.D. in Italian and Film and Media Studies. For further details, see Film and Media Studies. Applicants to the combined program must indicate on their application that they are applying both to Film and Media Studies and to Italian. All documentation within the application should include this information.

Italian and Renaissance Studies

The Department of Italian also offers, in conjunction with the Renaissance Studies Program, a combined Ph.D. in Italian and Renaissance Studies. For further details, see Renaissance Studies.

MASTER’S DEGREES

Only candidates for the Ph.D. degree will be admitted to the program, but the department will, upon request, offer the M.A. and the M.Phil. degrees to students who have completed the general Graduate School requirements for those degrees (see Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations).

Program materials are available upon request to the Director of Graduate Studies, Italian Language and Literature, Yale University, PO Box 208311, New Haven CT 06520-8311.

COURSES

ITAL 530a, Dante in Translation  Christiana Purdy Moudarres
A critical reading of Dante’s Divine Comedy and selections from the minor works, with an attempt to place Dante’s work in the intellectual and social context of the late Middle Ages by relating literature to philosophical, theological, and political concerns.

ITAL 560a, Age of Disenchantment  Giuseppe Mazzotta
This course focuses on the literary debates, theological arguments, and scientific shifts taking place between the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1437–38) and the Council of Trent and beyond, by reading key texts by Valla, Cusa, Pulci, Luther, Erasmus, Ariosto, Campanella, Bruno, Galileo, and Bellarmine. It examines issues such as the crisis of belief, the authority of the past, the emergence of new freedom, new aesthetics, and the effort to create a new theological language for modern times.

ITAL 590a / CPLT 916a / FILM 830a, Literature into Film  Millicent Marcus
When watching a film based on a book we have read and loved, the usual response is one of disappointment, if not outright anger at the liberties taken in adapting a text to the screen. This course aims to challenge that approach by vindicating the filmmaker’s freedom to interpret the textual source, and to question the thinking that places literature above cinema in the hierarchy of artistic forms. Our curriculum involves case studies of adaptations that pose ingenious solutions to the problem of transforming written texts into audiovisual spectacles. With one exception, we screen films on Monday evenings and do a comparative study in the Wednesday class period, developing an overall approach to the filmmaker’s adaptive strategy and making extensive use of video clips to do detailed visual analysis of scenes in the light of their corresponding textual sources. Rather than develop a general theory of adaptation, we apply methodologies on a case-by-case basis, taking each literature-into-film example as a response to a sui generis set of requirements. In the process, we use a variety of analytical tools, including those deriving from psychoanalysis, feminism, ideological criticism, historiography, genre study, semiotics, etc. There are two papers—a shorter one of a critical nature (approximately 5 pages) and a final research paper (approximately 20 pages). Conducted in English. Texts are available in Italian and English, and all films are subtitled.

ITAL 691a or b, Directed Reading  Christiana Purdy Moudarres

ITAL 701b, Romantic Quarrels  Giuseppe Mazzotta
The course examines the extraordinary intellectual and political feverishness that characterizes Italian history between the time of the French Revolution and the achievement of the national unity of the country (1861). Radical literary theories, terrorist political practices, epoch-making literary works, and passionate debates about aesthetics mark this period. Its vitality and contradictions emerge from a reading of selected works by Cuoco, Alfieri, Foscolo, Leopardi, Mazzini, Manzoni, Rosmini, and De Sanctis. They all in varying degrees explore the nexus between the idea of a “country,” the sense of secret revolutionary action (the so-called Risorgimento), the value of the classical heritage, and the need for the emergence of a new sense of history and a new philosophical discourse that would be addressed also for Europe. In Italian.

ITAL 720a / CPLT 684a / ENGL 574a / RNST 684a, Renaissance Epic  David Quint and Jane Tylus
This course looks at Renaissance epic poetry in relationship to classical models and as a continuing generic tradition. It examines epic type scenes, formal strategies, and poetic architecture. It looks at themes of exile and imperial foundations, aristocratic ideology, and the role of gender. The main readings are drawn from Vergil’s Aeneid, Lucan’s De bello civili, Dante’s Purgatorio, Tasso’s Gerusalemme liberata, Camões’s Os Lusíadas, and Spenser’s Faerie Queene.

ITAL 780b, Il romanzo del Novecento  Millicent Marcus
No literary form is better suited to gauging the convulsive changes wrought by Italy’s entrance into modernity than the novel. Infinitely permeable to the forces of historical circumstance, the novel counters these external forces with its own version of the evolving Italian subject in all of its personal richness and complexity. We study the evolution of this literary genre throughout the course of the twentieth
century and, in the process, adopt a variety of approaches, including, but not limited to, semiotics, psychoanalysis, narratology, gender, ideological criticism, and “la questione della lingua.” In Italian.

ITAL 940b / CPLT 715b, 1492: Before and After: Geographical and Linguistic Itineraries  Jane Tylus
Not simply the date of Columbus’s landing, 1492 also marks Lorenzo de’ Medici’s death, the banishment of Jews from Spain and Sicily, the election of a Borgia pope—Alexander VI, celebrated by Machiavelli—and the birth of Pietro Aretino. We briefly consider the shared cultural and religious history of Italy and Spain, even as most of our attention will be focused on Italy’s role as precursor: the Florentine Vespucci was the first to use the phrase “nuovo mondo,” and Columbus was inspired by the stories of Marco Polo and travels of Italian pilgrims to the Holy Land. We start with Columbus and his contemporary Savonarola and move into the “new worlds” of the early sixteenth century as represented by four topics: the rise of print; the burgeoning pastoral genre; the (brief) reaffirmation of the Florentine republic with cameo appearances by Michelangelo, Leonardo, and Machiavelli; and the otherworldly (but also very much of this world) romance of Ariosto. We spend time in the Beinecke Library with maps, Savonarola’s sermons, and early sixteenth-century Sienese pastoral plays, and also spend an afternoon at the Metropolitan Museum of Art with Renaissance paintings. In English.