Florida State University

From the SelectedWorks of Silvia Valisa

Fall 2009

Interdisciplinary seminar "Nation, Gender and Literature"

Silvia Valisa, Florida State University

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/silvia_valisa/9/
Gender, Literature and Nation: Writing Nations, Writing (and Reading) Subjects
GNSS 1960F S01

Professor: Silvia Valisa
Advanced undergraduate and graduate seminar
Meets: THURSDAY from 4pm to 6.20 pm - Smith-Buonanno Hall 206

Gender shapes our public identity as much as our private one. It shapes the imagined community we belong to as much as the way we tell stories. Yet the ideological (non-referential) impact of gender is often invisible, or overlooked – especially at the political level.

Why are countries often represented as women?

How can we understand gender as a founding category of our linguistic, cultural and political competence? Why are notions of femininity and masculinity so fluid and open to negotiation, and at the same time so rigidly codified in art, culture and politics?

In this course we will consider the extent to which gender informs the political and narrative realities that surround us. We will use the ideological knot created by gender, nation and language to decipher the trajectory of countries as linguistic, literary and national realities. Our discussion will focus on Italy as an example of a “belated” state drawing from a pre-existing national and literary tradition, but will expand to different national realities according to the participants’ interests.

We will read excerpts from Dante’s early works and from Petrarca’s *Canzoniere*. We will discover letters by mystic writer and political activist Catherine of Siena, and will discuss the gender ideology at work in Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Prince* and in Veronica Franco’s poems. We will then move on to the makings of modern Italian identity and nationhood by looking at the gendering of Italian Risorgimento and modernity in literature and politics.
This undergraduate/graduate seminar is conducted in English.
It is designed to develop the students’ competence in several theoretical and cultural themes; more specifically, it guides the students through a thematic analysis of the concepts of gender, nation and literature as seen through the specific example of Italy. The seminar is organized trans-historically, and each primary reading is accompanied by secondary (i.e. critical) readings meant to help and expand the students’ understanding of the primary material.

Texts:
Unless otherwise specified, texts will be available on the course site or on a linked website.

Texts to be purchased (S suggested; R required):

S - Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (Verso, 2006 - revised edition)
R - For Niccolò Machiavelli, choose one of the two below: you can buy The Prince alone, or you can get it with a good selection of other writings by Machiavelli (price difference is minimal):
2) Niccolò Machiavelli, The Essential Writings of Machiavelli (Modern Library Classics, 2007) (Peter Constantine and Albert R. Ascoli)

R- Madame de Stael Corinne, or Italy. (Oxford World's Classics, 1998) (Sylvia Rafael, John Isbell)
S- Ugo Foscolo, The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis
TIMETABLE
NB: This program may change to reflect the interests of the class.

Nation, Gender, Language: preliminary definitions

Week 1
Thursday September 10
Introduction
Italy, nation – etymology and definition
.Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (intro)

Week 2:
Thursday, September 17
.Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (chapters 2-3-5)
.John Dickie, “Imagined Italies”
.Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination”

Dante's World and the Gendering of Language

Week 3
Thursday, September 24
Vita Nuova, chapter 25
Convivio (Book 1. and Book 4 (only I-VI);
Albert R. Ascoli, Dante and the Making of a Modern Author, chapter 3

Optional:
Gary Cestaro, Dante and the Grammar of the Nursing Body, chapters 1 and 2.

Week 4
Thursday, October 1
Catherine of Siena, selection of letters.
Jane Tylus, Reclaiming Catherine of Siena, chapter 3: “Vernacular Voices of the ‘Donna’: Pisa.”
For reference: Dante Alighieri, Divine Comedy, canto II, Inferno.

on France: Lori Walters; "Christine de Pizan, Primat, and the ‘noble nation françoise’")

Nation and Gender: Italy (and Fortune, and Venice) as a Woman

Week 5
Thursday October 8
[Durling-Martinez edition; on ereserve through Josiah/OCRA.]
(optional: J. Schnapp, Introduction to Purgatorio, Cambridge Companion)

Petrarch, Canzone 128, “Italia mia” +
Petrarch, selection of lyric poetry [Durling edition]
Nancy Vickers, “Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme”

**Week 6**
**Thursday, October 15**
N. Machiavelli, *Il principe*
H.F Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman* “Fortune” 109-137 {Chapter One, “Autonomy”}

Machiavelli, *Lettera al Guicciardini*
B. Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies*; excerpt from “Pandora’s Box”


**Week 7**
**Thursday 22**
Movie: *Dangerous Beauty*, 1998 – (streaming)
Veronica Franco, chapters 11 and 12, Poems in terza rima (Rosenthal and Jones eds).
David Rosand, *Myths of Venice. The Figuration of a State* (1-46)

First written essay (or position paper) due

**Week 8:**
**Thursday, October 29**
Giacomo Leopardi, “To Italy” and “On Dante’s Monument”
Ugo Foscolo, selections from *Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*
J. Luzzi, *The Ghost of Italy*. Chapter 7, “Italy as a woman and a wound, Dante to Leopardi” (163-194).

Towards the Modern Nation:
The South of Europe – the South of Italy

**Week 9**
**Thursday November 5**
Madame de Staël, *Corinne ou de l’Italie* (selections)
The Empire of Stereotypes. Gemaine de Stael and the Idea of Italy, selections.

Second written essay due (5 pages)

**Week 10**
**Thursday November 12**
Nelson Moe, *The View from the Vesuvius.*
“Terra Vergine. Picturing the South in Illustrazione Italiana” (187-223).
H. Bhabha, “Introduction – Narrating the Nation” (*Nation and Narration*) and “Dissemination. Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” (*The Location of Culture*, excerpts)

**The Nation in the Novel**

**Week 11**
**Thursday November 19**
Manzoni, *The Betrothed* (selections)
T. Brennan, “The National Longing for Form”, *Nation and Narration*  
(final paper draft deadline to be set)

**Thursday, 26**
**Thanksgiving Holidays –no class**

**Week 12:**
**Thursday December 3**
Movie: *Rome, open city*

**Final Paper: 1 page outline (with annotated bibliography) due**

**Thursday December 10**
Final Essay due (10 pages undergraduates)  
(25 pages graduates)