

## SYLLABUS: ITALIAN CONVERSATION AND CULTURE

Generally, in each class we will take turns reciting and discussing a Racconto or Novella from the book assigned for that day and from a newspaper article sent to you, usually the week before the class. In some cases we will skip one of these recitations to leave time for general discussion or a short skit. We may not be able to finish each reading each day but you should try to read the entire text for that day in advance at home and practice pronunciation with at least part of it. I have listed the stories for each class below.

There is a separate subsection in this syllabus for each class date, containing a short English language summary of the story, selected vocabulary, and some comments or questions. So, in the following pages of this syllabus, you can scroll down to the appropriate date and find the material for each class.

In addition, I will send to you by email one or more articles selected from a current issue of La Stampa during the week before the class of that date and, in some cases, other notes pertaining to that class.

March 2:	Il Camionista	(Moravia)
March 9	La Mosca	(Pirandello)
March 16	Il Naso	(Moravia)
March 23	La Rallegrata	(Pirandello)
March 30	Il Pagliaccio	(Moravia)
April 6	Non è una Cosa Seria	(Pirandello)
April 13	Non Approfondire	(Moravia)
April 20	Pensaci Giacomino	(Pirandello)
April 27	Il Pensatore	(Moravia)
May 4	La Tragedia di un Personaggio	(Pirandello)

## SYLLABUS CONTINUED: STORIES ASSIGNED FOR EACH DAY

March 2: *Il CAMIONISTA* (Moravia)

I (the narrator) have a slight build, the antithesis of a truck driver's. My employer paired me up with a certain Palombi, a big strong guy who was an ideal truck driver. We worked the route between Rome and Napoli, hauling all sorts of cargo including newsprint, metal junk, and even a herd of sheep. I was so happy to pick up a hitchhiker named Italia, who became a frequent companion on the road between Rome and Terracina. She was not beautiful, but was a provocative girl, who, sitting next to me, would hold my hand even while I was driving. I became accustomed to this treatment and Palombi did not seem to notice. I fell in love with her. One time we had orders to return from Naples the same night and so were not able to pick up Italia the next day for the return to Rome as usual, but between Naples and Terracina I fell asleep at the wheel and we lost most of the cargo and had to stop in Terracina for assistance. While in Terracina we noticed that Italia was working in an osteria with a hunchback man whom she appeared to treat as a husband. After that Palombi told me that he too had become friends with Italia and became engaged to her. I concluded then that Italia had tricked both me and Palombi into giving her free rides and saving train fare. But what really convinced me to stop being a truck driver was that she started a restaurant for truck drivers on that same route.

INDOLENZIRSI become indolent SALVADANAIO piggy bank PASCOLO pasture  
ATTILLATE spruced up STRAFORO stealthily GRUGNITO grunt

INFOLTIRE thicken

### Comments and questions

**Is there any significance to the fact that Moravia named the character Italia?**

**Why does Moravia make it seem that Italia is married to a hunchback (gobbo)?**

**Why does Italia's opening up a restaurant induce the narrator to quit truck driving?**

March 9: LA MOSCA (Pirandello)

The Tortorici brothers, Neli and Saro have come to the house of Doctor Sidoro Lopiccolo to get him to go to care for their cousin Zanu', who seems to be dying in Montelusa, seven miles away. The doctor, who has seven small children and an invalid wife agrees to go with them riding a mule. Neli, a strong, handsome 20 year old is engaged to Luzza and Zanu' is also engaged. When they arrive at Montelusa they find Zanu' near death. He reminds Neli that they had planned to get married on the same day. The doctor diagnoses anthrax and explains that it has developed probably from an insect bite. Zanu recalls that he had been bothered by a fly the previous day and notices a fly on the wall, possibly the same one that afflicted him. That fly lands on Neli's cheek and makes its way to his chin, where there is a small cut (like an insect bite) that Neli got earlier in the day when getting a shave. Zanu', at this point is delirious and thinks that his dear cousin will have the same fate as himself and seems to alert him of the fly. At that point both brothers and the doctor go outside of the barn where Zanu' had lain and he thinks they have abandoned him. The story ends with no further comment.

TRAFELATI breathless ANSANTI wheezy CASUPOLA hovel

SCOSCENDIMENTO abrupt stop AFFOCATO drowned FLOSCE floppy

LACERI ragged BRONCIO pout SMALLARE to shell?

VOCIARE shout STENDARDO flag AFFANNATO out of breath

ESIMERSI free ABBACCHIATO sad OMERO humerus

CANTILENARE speak in monotone SGOMENTI shocks AVVINGHIARE grasp

### Comments and questions

This is about the abject poverty in parts of Italy. Even the local medical doctor, with seven small children and a bedridden wife, is having trouble coping. An uncommon disease such as anthrax, inflicted by a fly can take the life of a hard working peasant in one day. Family ties mean a lot, and a young man travels across country fields with a doctor on a mules to help his dying cousin in rural Sicily.

March 16: IL NASO (Moravia)

Silvano and I were sitting on a park bench reading about the death and funeral of a rich resident of the Parioli neighborhood. The important point was that this man had asked to be buried wearing his emerald ring. Silvano wanted the two of us to break into his apartment, where his body was lying, and steal the ring. I told Silvano that this would not be possible, but why does he not do the job himself and avoid sharing the loot. By the way, Silvano's nose is a huge multicolored part of his face, a true wonder. Well Silvano left me in the park, and I promptly decided to steal into the dead man's apartment in Parioli. I got in by fashioning a key that would fit the lock on his back door, found the body, took off the ring but, in the dark I realized that someone had also broken in, It was Silvano, who correctly accused me of possessing the ring. I hid in a closet. He caught up with me, we fought but made so much noise that the police showed up. Later, at the police station, I realized there was nothing I could have done. With a nose like that, this was inevitable. (???)

CICCA butt PANCHINA bench SCALOGNATO unlucky TRANELLO booby trap

BATTOCCHIO eye blink ACCHITO lead-off ABBAINO dormer RANNICHIARE cringe

STRATTONE wrench DAVANZALE windowsill RIPOSTIGLIO storage room

SUPPELLETTILI furnishings COMIGNOLO chimney pot

### Comments and questions

The prominent nose of the dead person seems to have nothing to do with the storyline. Is there any similarity to the short story (The Nose) written by Nicolai Gogol in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the opera by Shostakovich in the 1920s?

Is there a moral to this story or is it just an excuse for using a funny title?

March 23: LA RALLEGRATA (Pirandello)

Nero has just arrived at a new stable and is tired of listening to his companion Fofò criticizing the other horses in the stable. He does not understand where he has been sold to away from his former home in the stable of the aged Princess. This new stable is not a bad place but not nearly as comfortable as his old one. He, and his old companion Corbino had been sold off by the young Prince, as the old Princess no longer needed their services. The talkative Fofò told Nero that their jobs consisted primarily of hauling a very heavy box from various buildings to another building situated in a well manicured grassy campus. Fofò also did not understand the true nature of their work, which was in funeral processions. On this day, the procession was waiting outside a building that turned out to be the home of the Princess, who was to be carried off to the cemetery in one of those heavy boxes. Nero started rearing up and prancing and did not calm down until an old servant from that home came out, recognized Nero, and reassured him. At that point Fofò suddenly understood that he and Nero were to pull the Princess to the cemetery (and that this was the nature of the job of the stable where they worked.)

RALLEGRATA cheered up MANGIATOIA manger GREPPIE manger cribs  
DIFATTI indeed COGITABONDI thoughtfull TANGHERO tango dancer  
BRIOSO rollicking CASTRONE gelding PAREGGIARE to clip

SPEDIZIONE shipment BECCHEGGIO LURCHING SBIGOTTITA awe struck

March 30: IL PAGLIACCIO (Moravia)

I (the narrator) have been making the rounds of various restaurants and osterie as a guitar player for my friend the singer known as Milone. He was typically dressed as a clown and performed not so much as a singer but as someone who acts as a comedian with a cute voice and feminine gestures. I felt that Milone's antics were vulgar but the clients of the restaurants enjoyed the performances. I sometimes thought that Milone was making fun of women and questioned him about it, but Milone would say he had nothing against women and this was simply part of his act. Milone in any case seemed to play the role with passion and often was unable to speak at the close of his songs. One evening after one of Milone's performance, a young blond man steps forward and proceeded to sing a dramatic song in a way in which I considered truly artistic. Milone developed a bitter look on his face as the young man concludes his song and announced "That's the way a song should be sung". Milone said nothing as we leave the restaurant and headed home. The next day when I dropped by to see him in a room which he rented I looked in the window and saw his feet and ankles suspended in mid air. Milone had committed suicide

TORVA round ABBOZZARE sketch GHIGNO grin STOMACHEVOLE repulsive

CUPO sullen POSTEGGIATORE parking attendant SBRACATO slovenly

AFFANNARE wheeze LAZZI jokes BIS encore

CANTERANO dresser TENERE A PIGIONE to rent

### Comments and questions

The tragic ending of this story seems to invite comparison with the short opera "I Pagilacci" by Leoncavallo. What are the similarities and differences between that opera and this short story by Moravia?

April 6: Non E' UNA COSA SERIA (Pirandello)

In this story of comic absurdity, Perazzetti had the habit of bursting out in laughter during a conversation with no indication of what provoked it. Apparently it was the result of someone's behavior with another situation. People would think he was insane and this behavior would often get him into trouble, especially if he fell in love, which he did often and got engaged about 20 times. Finally he actually got married, to everyone's surprise. However he noticed that his wife's brother resembled his wife and became very friendly with him but at some point he began to dislike his wife apparently because she resembled her brother. Perezetti no longer slept with her or had dinner with her. He had a sword fight with his brother in law and even got stabbed. He told his friends he did not want to take a wife. When they objected "But you already are married' He said "oh that marriage?..... it is not to be taken seriously." .....

Perezetti had gotten married to protect himself from the danger of taking a wife!!!

ADUNCHE hooked ANATRA duck GUAZZARE ? to paint? URTATI bumped  
STIZZA tantrum

TORCERE wring IMBIZZARRIVA ?? GUIZZI lunges

SCATTARE spurt, go off FITTIZIE fictitious ACQUATTARE squat FORMICHIERE  
ant eater

BORIA arrogance SCHIATTARE to burst SBIGOTTIMENTO consternation  
ESCOGITARE contrive GIACCHE' since SVOLAZZANTE flitting

### Comments and questions

Is there a point to this story or is it just like theater of the absurd?

Is Perezetti mentally sick or is he just a person who is not afraid to express his true feelings about the opinion of others and does not care about what they think of him.

April 13: NON APPROFONDIRE (Moravia)

Agnes, my wife could have at least told me she was leaving instead of just going away that morning. I had just returned from grocery shopping and buying some lace for the window shades. I went into the living room and noticed that there was an inkwell there and a pen and some ink had spilled onto the carpet. I thought, how sloppy of her to leave it like that. I promptly cleaned up the mess but then I saw her letter saying that she had left me after two years of marriage. Why did she do this. I have been the perfect husband, always willing to help with housework, do the shopping and cooking, willing to accompany her everywhere she went, always there if she needed money to buy things. She even asked me what I would do if I fell in love with another woman. I would always say that would be impossible and that I would be with her till the end of my life. I asked my father why he thought she left me and he just would say non approfondire (don't ask such deep questions). I even once dropped by her mother's house and she was there but did not want to see me, and I asked her mother the same question. Without knowing it I rearranged a decorative object that was not quite in the very center of the table and her mother said to me "Very well, son, now that you have arranged the table you can just leave."

CREPA leak    SOPPIATTO stealthily    FRANGIA fringe    CALAMAIO inkwell  
SCIATTONIA slatternly    AZZITIRE to silence?    A MALAPENSA with difficulty  
SVISCERARE eviscerate    TRAFELATO out of breath    SORNIONA squeaky

### Comments and questions

Compare the narrator's father's reaction to the narrator's wife's flight to the attitude of the narrator's mother in law.

Were they both aware of the problem with the marriage? Was the narrator aware?

Compare this Moravia story with Moravia's "Pignolo" which we read last semester.

Compare it to Pirandello's "Con Altri Occhi"



April 20: PENSACI GIACOMINO (Pirandello)

Prof. Agostino Tot, age 70, taught natural science in the Liceo. He lived with his wife Maddalena, age 26 and a two-year-old son, Nini'. For the last three days life in his little household had become unhappy and Maddalena would frequently break out in tears for reasons which Toti did not appear to understand. He would often take walks with Nini' but the neighbors would sometimes make fun of him..... How could a man of 70 have a 2-year-old son? He decided to take a walk with Nini' to visit Giacomino, a young man, and favorite student of his who had been living part-time in Toti's house, but now had gone to live with his sister. Apparently Giacomino was the real father of Nini', and Toti had no problem with the arrangement and wanted Giacomino to come and live with his little family. Toti felt more comfortable playing grandpa than father. When Toti arrived at Giacomino's house he was greeted by Giacomino's sister who told him Giacomino was not home, but Toti knew this was not true and insisted on seeing him. Giacomino knew that Toti had come to get him to come and become the father in the family. When he came to meet Toti he was in tears, pleading with Toti to leave, all the while expressing his gratitude to Toti for his help and kindness. Toti asked him why he would not come and why Giacomino was so cruel to him, whereupon Giacomino said he has engaged, at which point Toti realized why Maddalena had been in such grief in the last three days. Toti insisted that Giacomino come to live with his family and said that if Giacomino persisted in his position, he, Toti was capable of getting him fired from his job at the bank and moreover, showing up at his fiancée's house with Nini and ruining things for everyone. He went out the door with the words "Pensaci Giacomino".. Think it over, Jimmy.

#### VOCABOLARIO

LUSINGARSI: to dare to hope, BIDELLO: janitor, SCAPOLO: bachelor,  
VISTOSO:: gaudy

SFACCENDAO:: lazy, MENSOLETTA:: shelf , SCHIVARE: to move aside,  
SBIGOTTIRE: to stun

#### COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

At what point would you say that Toti decided on this scheme to create a little family for himself as the Nonno? Before his marriage? When he introduced Giacomino to Maddalena? When Nini' was born, clearly not his son?

How realistic, how likely to succeed was his scheme?

April 27: IL PENSATORE (Moravia)

I (the narrator) am a waiter in the characteristically Roman restaurant called "Marforio" Over the years I have become like an automaton, repeating the customer's words ordering food, e.g. "Spaghetti al Sugo". I decide one day to change this habit into just thinking what the a customer says, but saying something else. For example thinking "spaghetti al sugo" but saying "che faccia da burino" in sotto voce. If the customer accuses me I typically would say "I did not say anything". I started saying these things clearly within earshot of the customer. I became more and more impolite to customers. One evening they call and complain to my boss, and I insult the boss, calling him "beccamorto". Ultimately I get arrested for affronting an officer and spend the night in jail. The next day I almost get run over by a car and the driver yells out to me "morto di sonno" (death by dozing off?).

INCRESPARSI gather ECHEGGIARE resound CAPRONE mountain goat

INVEIRE scold IMPERMALITO offended

AVVENTARSI throw oneself at SBADIGLIARE yawn GIUNCO a type of plant

### Comments and questions

This story reflects the frustration of low wage, low status workers who have to deal with customers, generally of the upper classes, who expect them to put up silently with their lack of respect. (Waiters in a posh restaurant, golf caddies, and servants of different kinds come to mind.) The workers sometimes rebel and lose their jobs when their boss sides with the customers and fails to defend them. This may be an every day experience in Parioli, a traditionally high class section of Rome.

Did you ever feel it was happening to you or someone you knew?

#### May 4: LA TRAGEDIA D' UN PERSONAGGIO (Pirandello)

Pirandello, writing here in the first person (as himself) holds an audience with his characters on Sunday mornings. They come to him to discuss their roles, to receive advice and often to complain about how they are treated as characters in his novelle. He seems to consider many of them to be of bad character, In this story he tells of his conversations with some of them, primarily with one named Dr. Fileno, who has invented a way to look into the future but even to look at the present as if it were history. Dr. Fileno also claims to be the author of a book "The Philosophy of Distance" and seems particularly dissatisfied with his lot and naturally blames Pirandello, who has given him the name of an imbecile and made him marry a ninny, Graziella. Fileno wants Pirandello to rescue him from this fate because, after all, Fileno is the author of a philosophical book. Pirandello suggests that Fileno find some other novelist to make him immortal, because he, Pirandello, will not do that. Fileno is too ambitious and Pirandello prefers to deal with his other characters.

#### VOCABOLARIO;

INGARBUGLIARE: entangled INDOLE: temperament IMPUTIRSI: blame

ADOMBRARE: overshadow ORBENE: well then FRASTORNATO: stunned

AMMAESTRAMENTO: training MESTIZIA :sorrow ANNODARE: to tie, knot

SCOMPIGLIO: jumble GREMBO: lap IRTA: upright

#### COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

Does the absurdity of Pirandello's conversations with his literary characters echo the events in his famous play "Six characters in search of an author"?

Can this novella be easily converted into a play? Is that how Pirandello's play "Six Characters in Search of an Author" developed



