

Prof. Gabriela Dragnea Horvath
Fall Semester 2007
M. T. Th. 8:30 – 9:30 a.m

ITALIAN JOURNEYS: REAL AND IMAGINARY (ENG.466)

Course Description

Protagonists of an important experience abroad, the students will be solicited to reflect on the journey in its archetypal, metaphysical and aesthetic dimensions, in a discourse aimed at answering intriguing questions like: is there an art of travel? How do our expectations cope with reality? Do we know how to face danger of the unknown, relate ourselves to the other, taste adventure and welcome love if it crosses our way? In what way are we different from the travellers of antiquity, premodern and early modern times?

How is Italy linked historically and culturally to the topic of the journey? What did Ulysses experience on the Italian shores almost 3000 years ago? How do we interpret Aeneas' underworld trip? What did hell and Satan look like for a medieval mind and the moon for a Renaissance writer? What did 'headless' or 'dog-headed' humans stand for in the European imagination? Why was the New World called America and not Columbia? The discussion frame is built by literary and real discovery journeys whose protagonists are mostly Italian.

Course Breakdown

The course is articulated in three units:

1. Our cultural itinerary sets out from a conceptual analysis of the journey, considering aspects like time-space relation, the significance of the center, the journey as initiation, its religious and existential dimension, crossing cultural and metaphysical borders. The interplay of reality and imagination in real, mental and sentimental journeys, will be illustrated by the myth of the wandering Jew, Shakespeare's imagined Italy and Goethe's diary of his Italian journey.

2. After completing this general approach to the journey, we will start travelling in the past, joining Homer's Ulysses in his adventures with the Cyclops, the Lotus-Eaters and the seducing Circe. Virgil's Aeneas will reveal us the significance of love in the heroic journey and the mysteries of the underworld. Passing to Christian culture, we will consider the centrality of Jerusalem and its mythical coordinates in pilgrimage and cartography, the anthropology of the *homo viator*, and Dante's spiritual journey from hell through purgatory to paradise. The flight, one of the most enduring imaginary journeys of humanity, a privilege of fairy-tales heroes and magicians, will be approached in excerpts from Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*.

3. The analysis of these famous imaginary journeys and their relation to reality will find its counterpart in a survey of two great historical enterprises of the past and their transposition to words and images: Marco Polo's Far-East travel and the discovery of America. We will explore the impact of the imaginary world on these extraordinary experiences, touching on the mythology of phantastic animals and monstrous races, the pursuit of the golden age, the religious prophecies which inspired Columbus in his expedition of conquest.

Students will have thus the opportunity to complete their Italian experience with knowledge about the contribution of this cultural space to mapping the globe and shaping the continents of our imagination. Last, but not least, they will become familiar with the fascination exerted on Europeans by the Far-East and the New World and explore their fabulous representations.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students are expected to be able to:

- manifest an increased awareness of the intellectual and emotional value of their experience abroad.
- evaluate in a comparative perspective contemporary approaches to cultural difference versus ancient, medieval or Renaissance treatment of otherness.
- analyze the transposition of reality into word and image and detect real motivations of phantastic reports
- complete their direct knowledge of Italy and of their own country with their literary pre-modern and early modern representations.
- develop their critical faculties, including self-criticism
- follow the development of cultural ideas in time, connecting the literary *topos* to popular mentality, philosophical and religious concepts.
- conduct a research in the field, using current scholarly investigations and their own creative thinking





