10.03 Italian American Literature and Film
3 hours, 3 credits

Exploration of the possibilities for storytelling in the genres of Italian American literature and film. The focus of discussion is character development, structure, and point of view, as well as the conflict between stereotype and anti-stereotype.

**Prerequisite:** Junior standing and satisfaction of all lower-tier requirements in Arts and Literatures.

**Core goals:**

To develop the ability to think critically and creatively, to reason logically, to reason quantitatively, and to express one's thoughts orally and in writing with clarity and precision (9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 21).

To understand the necessity for tolerance and to appreciate individual and social diversity, as well as differences of race, class, and gender (19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 31).

To be capable of integrating knowledge from diverse sources (28).

**Core objectives:**

1. Critical thinking (9)

2. Effective writing: Students will write thoughtful analysis of individual works. They will write analyses in which they compare two or more works in terms of structure, characterization, themes, and language (11).

3. Respect for diversity in areas such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. (22)

4. Students will be able to demonstrate integrating knowledge from diverse sources. (28)

**Outcomes:**

1. Students can recognize and distinguish different kinds of arguments.
2. Students will be able to use writing to reflect on their learning and understand difficult material.
3. Students will discuss controversial subjects regarding such issues as race, gender, sexual orientation, class and ethnicity that involve strongly-held beliefs and demonstrate respectful listening, lack of acrimony, and openness.
4. Given a specific issue, students will locate three discipline-appropriate sources that support his/her position on an issue.
Course outline:

Week 1. The construction of the Italian American as narrative subject, I
Pascal D’Angelo, *Son of Italy* (1922)

Week 2. The construction of the Italian American as narrative subject, II
W.S. Burnett, *Little Caesar* (1938)

Week 3. The invention of the Italian American as stereotype film gangster
Mervyn LeRoy, *Little Caesar* (1929)

Week 4. The invention of the Italian American as immigrant stereotype
Sam Wood, *A Night at the Opera*, (1935)

Week 5. The construction of an Italian American language as a narrative medium
Pietro Di Donato, *Christ in Concrete* (1939)

Week 6. The workers’ epic as an immigrant film saga
Edward Demetryk, *Give Us This Day* (1949)

Week 7. The Italian American Writer as an ethnic hero
John Fante, *Ask the Dust* (1939)

Week 8. The Italian American Writer as an American hero

Week 9. The gangster as god

Week 10. The gangster as king of Hollywood

Week 11. Women and magic
Francine Prose, *Household Saints* (2003),

Week 12. Religion and magic

Week 13. Gender construction
Anthony Giardina, *Recent History* (2001)

Week 14.) Gender deconstructed

Method of evaluation:
Midterm. 20%. Term paper, 30%. Final 30%. Class participation 20%. 
Method of assessment:

1. In-class essays and presentations will allow students to distinguish between varying accounts of ethnic stereotyping in novels, films, and second-order discourse.
2. Response papers and analytical papers will give students the chance to reflect upon varying modes of narrating similar materials.
3. Discussions will engage students in discussions of the construction of racial, ethnic and gender stereotypes in Italian American discourse.
4. Term papers will allow students to draw upon materials in film, in narrative, and in critical discourse.

Bibliography

Possible texts:

**Novels:**
- *Son of Italy*, Pascal D’Angelo
- *Little Caesar*, W.S. Burnett
- *Christ in Concrete*, Pietro di Donato
- *Ask the Dust*, John Fante
- *The Godfather*, Mario Puzo
- *Household Saints*, Francine Prose
- *Recent History*, Anthony Giardina

**Films:**
- *A Night at the Opera*, Sam Wood
- *Little Caesar*, Mervyn LeRoy
- *Give Us This Day*, Edward Demetryk
- *Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino
- *The Godfather, I*, Francis Ford Coppola
- *Household Saints*, Nancy Savoca
- *Mambo Italiano*, Luke Kirby

Background reading:


Mitrano, John R. and James G. “Mammas, Papas, Traditions and Secrets: The Marketing of Italian Americans.” In *Through the Looking Glass: Italian and Italian*


——. “From Italophilia to Italophobia: Representations of Italian Americans in the Early Gilded Age.” Differentia: Review of Italian Thought 6/7 (Spring/Autumn 1994): 45-76.

