



The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Syllabus

The Smell of the Other: Sensing Women and Minorities in Italian Literature - 45241

Last update 26-12-2023

HU Credits: 2

Degree/Cycle: 1st degree (Bachelor)

Responsible Department: Romance Studies

Academic year: 0

Semester: 1st Semester

Teaching Languages: Hebrew

Campus: Mt. Scopus

Course/Module Coordinator: Dr. Chiara Caradonna

Coordinator Email: chiara.caradonna@mail.huji.ac.il

Coordinator Office Hours: Tuesday, 16:30-18

Teaching Staff:

Dr. chiara Caradonna

Course/Module description:

In 1889, the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche stated that “the sense of smell is one of our most delicate instruments”, and encouraged his readers to start using it as a research tool in philosophy. Nietzsche was reacting to the fact that, up to that point, the sense of smell had rarely been taken into serious account in the history of Western thought, and was instead mostly either devalued or ignored. But smell is indeed a unique tool that allows us to detect, among other things, otherness and differences. Recent research has shown that smell is an important marker for defining both the ingroup and the outgroup in social interactions, and plays a major role in the formation of personal identity. Smell is also the hardest sense to put into words – which makes it an exemplary case for studying literature’s creative strategies to deal with what evades human language, or in other words, to deal with its “other”. In this course, we will get acquainted with selected works from the emerging field of olfactory studies in the Humanities, and explore smell’s relation to language, literature, power relations and politics – in its gendered, ethnic and national aspects. We will discuss these insights by reading major works of Italian literature from Dante Alighieri to Ludovico Ariosto, Elsa Morante, Italo Calvino and Elena Ferrante, in which smell plays a prominent role. We will examine the way in which these writers have used expressions of smell, and discuss the following questions: which kind of otherness does the use of smell in literature bring forth? Why is it mostly related to women and minorities? What is the unique role of smell in Italian literature compared to other literatures? And how, if at all, does it help us to better understand otherness and others?

Course/Module aims:

Learning outcomes - On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

On successful completion of this course, students will be acquainted with the major arguments in the research of smell in the humanities, acquire tools for critical thinking and critical reading of literary texts as well as of social and political situations. They will also have knowledge of Italian literature and history, and will be able to analyze texts critically through tropes of smell and other senses.

Attendance requirements(%):

100

Teaching arrangement and method of instruction:

Course/Module Content:

1. 02.01.24 - Introduction: Who is the Other?
Olfaction and Smell in the Humanities and in Italian literature
2. 09.01.24 - How to talk about the body? - Bruno Latour
3. 16.01.24 - Smell and Society
Anthony Synnott, "A Sociology of Smell"
4. 23.01.24 - Matilde Serao's *La Virtù di checcchina* - קקינה של המידות טוהר

Midterm Assignment

5. 06.02.24 - Smell and the Limits of Language
Italo Calvino's "Il nome, il naso" - "The Name, The Nose" - "השם", "האף" (from: *Sotto il sole giaguaro* - Under The Jaguar Sun)
6. 13.02.24 - Constance Classen, "The Odor of the Other"
7. 20.02.24 - Smell and the City: Anna Maria Ortese, *Il mare non bagna Napoli*, "La Città Involontaria" (1953)
8. 27.02.24 - Smell and Ethnicity/Gender - Elsa Morante's *La Storia* - History: A Novel - תולדות אלה (selections)
9. 05.03.24 - Smell, Chemistry, Racism and Antisemitism - Primo Levi (selected texts)
10. 12.03.24 - Smell and Gender in Contemporary Literature
Elena Ferrante's *I giorni dell'abbandono* - The Days of Abandonment - הנטישה ימי
11. 17.03.24 - Conclusions and research outlook

Required Reading:

Calvino, Italo. "Il nome, il naso", in: *Sotto il sole giaguaro*. Milano: Garzanti, 1986.

קלווינו, איטלו. "השם, האף", תחת שמש היגואר (1986), תרגם אריאל רטהאוז, ספרית פועלים, 1999.

Classen, Constance. "The Odor of the Other: Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories." *Ethos* 20, no. 2 (June 1992): 133-66.

Ferrante, Elena. *I giorni dell'abbandono*. Roma: E/O: 2002. (Excerpts)
פרנטה, אלנה. ימי הנטישה. תל אביב: הקיבוץ המאוחד, 2007. (בחירה)

Hsu, Hsuan L. "Literary Atmospherics." *Literary Geographies* 3, no. 1 (2017): 1-5.

Keller, Andreas. *Philosophy of Olfactory Perception*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 117-123 (optional: 123-131).

Latour, Bruno. "How to Talk About the Body? The Normative Dimension of Science Studies." *Body & Society* 10, no. 2-3 (June 2004): 205-29.

Levi, Primo. "I mnemagoghi", in: *Storie naturali*. Torino: Einaudi 1966.

Levi, Primo, "The Mnemogogues", in: *The Sixth Day and Other Tales*. Trans. by Raymond Rosenthal, Summit Books, 1990.

Levi, Primo. *La tregua*. Torino: Einaudi, 1997. (Excerpts)

פרימו לוי, ההפוגה, תל אביב: עם עובד, 2002 (בחירה)

Levi, Primo. *Se questo è un uomo*. Torino: Einaudi, 2015. (Excerpts)

לוי, פרימו. הזהו אדם? תל אביב : עם עובד, 2012. (בחירה)

Levi, Primo. "Il linguaggio degli odori", in: *L'altrui mestiere*. Torino: Einaudi, 1985.

לוי, פרימו. מקצועות של אחרים, תרגום יונתן פיין, הספריה החדשה, 2021

Majid, Asifa, and Niclas Burenhult. "Odors Are Expressible in Language, as Long as You Speak the Right Language." *Cognition* 130, no. 2 (February 2014): 266-70.

Morante, Elsa. *La storia*. Romanzo. Torino: Einaudi, 1974. (Excerpts)

אלזה מורנטה, אלה תולדות, תל-אביב: הקיבוץ מאוחד, 1995. (בחירה)

Morante, Elsa, *History. A Novel*. Trans. by William Weaver. London: Penguin Books, 2000. (Excerpts)

Ortese, Anna Maria. "La Città Involontaria", in: *Il mare non bagna Napoli*. Milano: Adelphi, 2008.

Ortese, Anna Maria. "The Involuntary City", in: *Evening Descends Upon the Hills. Stories from Naples*. Trans. By Ann Goldstein and Jenny McPhee, London: Pushkin Press, 2018.

Rindisbacher, Hans J. *The Smell of Books: A Cultural-Historical Study of Olfactory Perception in Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992. (Excerpts)

Serao, Matilde. *La virtù di Checchina*. Catania: Giannotta, 1884.

מטילדה סראו, טוהר המידות של קקינה (ישראל 2018)

Synnott, Anthony. "A Sociology of Smell." *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie* 28, no. 4 (1991): 437-59.

Students are welcome to read the texts in whichever language they prefer, and to raise questions of translation during the course.

Additional Reading Material:

Armiero, Marco, and Salvatore Paolo De Rosa. "Political Effluvia: Smells, Revelations and The Politicization of Daily Experience in Naples, Italy." In Methodological Challenges in Nature-Culture and Environmental History Research, ed. by Jocelyn Thorpe, Stephanie Rutherford, and L. Anders Sandberg. Routledge Environmental Humanities Series. London ; New York: Routledge, 2017.

Barwich, A. S. Smellosophy: What the Nose Tells the Mind. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020.

Ciani Forza, Daniela, and Simone Francescato. Perfume and Literature: The Persistence of the Ephemeral. Padova: Linea, 2017.

Grading Scheme:

Essay / Project / Final Assignment / Home Exam / Referat 60 %

Active Participation / Team Assignment 10 %

Submission assignments during the semester: Exercises / Essays / Audits / Reports / Forum / Simulation / others 30 %

Additional information:

The course is taught together with Ms Tal Yehezkely, tal.yhzkly@gmail.com

Students will be asked to write a paper of 10 pp. based on a topic that was discussed during the semester to be handed in by 1 March 2024.