NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Department of Italian Studies

*Vacationland: The discovery of Italy as a beautiful country.*

_The construction of Italy as a ‘beautiful country’ and the idea of tourism_

**Spring Semester 2018**

**Professor Elena Ducci (Assistant Clinical professor, Dept of Italian Studies)**

Wed 12-2:45  Room TBA

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Casa Italiana  
Office hours: Tue 2-4 or by appointment

**Course Pre-requisites.** Basic knowledge about European history and geography; ability to read and discuss texts about culture and art

**Course Description.** This class examines the origins and development of a crucial idea in Western culture: the imaginary of beautiful lands as ideal and idealized goals for tourism. This idea requires the articulation of a model of a culturally prestigious and rewarding experience. The territory with its people and problems becomes an ideal land, endowed with a promise of enjoyment and cultural improvement. This is why many people decide to travel even today.

In class we will discuss the case of Italy, an area that emerges already at the outset of the early modern period as a privileged destination for travelers and visitors from abroad. We will explore how important in this evolution is the idea not just of a discovery, but of rediscovery. Important episodes of this process include the rediscovery of Rome as a prestigious ruin and as a city of Empire in late Medieval age, the reemergence of ‘Rome’s other population’ (L. Barkan), that is the Classical statues dug out in the generation of Michelangelo, the recuperation of non-Roman and pre-Roman civilization, such as the long forgotten ‘Etruria’, the growing search for traces of a Greek Classical past (Magna Graecia, The Great Greece of Italy), the impact of a sudden discovery at Pompeii on modern imagination, and in the XIX century the consecration of Venice and of Tuscany as respectively the ideal city and the ideal country landscape.

The seminar has no specific language requirements and all the texts and documents discussed (including voices and viewpoints of foreign visitors and of Italians experiencing foreign contact and interaction) will be in English; they will be accompanied by visual material such as art, paintings and drawings, photographs, and cinema. Participants will be able to enhance their critical awareness of the history of tourism as a cultural phenomenon, and of the importance of cultural memory in travel experience and travel narrative. A main aim of the seminar is to invite and empower a discussion on how individual territories are transformed in the collective imagination into exemplary and desirable ‘other places’.

**Course Objectives.** The goals of this class are improving the ability to connect through historical interpretations various sources and resources (e.g. literature, arte, travel narrative, documents, photographs, film, landscape); to offer a starting point for the interpretation of travel and tourism in a cultural context: to introduce the students to aspects of the Classical tradition in the West; to improve the ability to write and report about critical literature. The class is also an ideal introduction to Italian
culture.

Course Structure
Lectures accompanied by class discussion and seminar-style reports: visual material and textual material to be used interactively.

Readings
The short readings required for class on a weekly basis will be introduced and distributed in class, or made available digitally; there is no need for a handbook or a textbook for this class. Basic information about European history and geography will be helpful at every step.

Course requirements
Class preparation and participation are important for this course and will be factored into your final grade. Students must read required texts and articles in advance and be prepared to participate in class discussion. In addition to class participation, students will write two or three brief memos, take one in-class midterm exam, and write a final paper.

Grade structure: Readings 20%, Participation and discussion 30%, Midterm 20%, Final 30%.

Jan 24 2018 Topic of Class 1
Introduction and information about readings (most of them listed below). Selection from S. Melia Hom, The Beautiful Country: Tourism and the impossible state of destination Italy, Toronto 2015. Film. M. Scorsese, My voyage to Italy

Jan 31 Topic of Class 2
Rome today. “We used to be the center of the Empire.”
  • [Short texts: contemporary media, Petrarch and Machiavelli]
  • Film: Roma by F. Fellini

Feb 7 Topic of Class 3
“They were different”: Rome’s other population and the Laocoon
  • [Leonard Barkan, "Rome’s Other Population,” Raritan 1, 991
  • Film: Michelangelo. The Agony and the Ecstasy

Feb 14 Topic of Class 4
In Tuscany. “We have been Etruscan”: the Chimera, Minerva and the Medici
  Film TBA

Feb 21 Topic of Class 5
“They have been Etruscan”: Tuscany, travellers, and the rise of Etruscology
  • Film TBA
Feb 28  Topic of Class 6
Faking the history of Italy: Annio from Viterbo and Curzio Inghirami, Renaissance forgers.
•  Photo and images of Viterbo, Volterra and Etruscan

March 6  Topic of Class 7
•  The Grand Tour and the history of travel.
  •  Readings from Goethe, Stendhal, Henry James. John Singer Sargent. American Women artists in Italy. Film: A room with a view

March 13  Topic of Class 8
In Southern Italy. “They were Greeks” : the discovery of Paestum and Agrigento”
  [Giovanna Ceserani. Italy’s lost Greece, Oxford 2012, selection]
  Film: TBA

March 20  Topic of Class 9
“They had bodies: Pompeii”
  [Simone and Ilaria Marchesi, Live in Pompeii, selection]
  Film: Pompeii

March 27  Topic of class 10
Review and discussion

***SPRING BREAK***

April 10  MIDTERM

April 17  Topic of class 11
Venice. The stones of Venice
  [Salvatore Settis, If Venice dies, 2016]
  Film: Visconti, Morte a Venezia; Lean, Summertime

April 24  Topic of class 12
The Poverty of the South: Carlo Levi and Christ stopped in Eboli
  Film: Christ stopped in Eboli
  N. Ammanniti, I am not scared; Film: G. Salvatores, I am not scared

May 2   Topic of class 13
Looking for the magic of contemporary Italy.
Episodes from movies (Vacanze romane, La dolce vita, La grande bellezza, La vita e’ bella, Il postino) comparing different viewpoints, rediscovering aspects of magic, poetry and wonder in contemporary Italy.

May 9    Topic of class 14
         Concluding remarks, recapitulation, questions, final round-table on the results of the class

FINAL PAPER DUE: May 16 (by email)