Prof. Clough Marinaro engages JCU and Italian high school students.

Italy Reads 2013 Interactive Lectures by Prof. Isabella Clough Marinaro, JCU professor of Italian Studies. “Destination Italy: Immigration in a Changing Nation.”

Since many of the issues related to the experience of choosing to leave one’s homeland and migrate to a new land are addressed in the novel selected for Italy Reads 2013 Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake, JCU assistant professor of Italian Studies, Professor Isabella Clough Marinaro, was invited to lead these discussions among Italy Reads participants.

On two separate occasions, 7 and 30 October, a total of 130 high school students from 6 different Italian high schools (Liceo ‘Gaetano De Sanctis’, Liceo ‘Virgilio’, Liceo ‘Morgagni’ and Liceo ‘Farnesina’, Liceo ‘Newton’, Liceo ‘Benedetto da Norcia’ and Liceo ‘Vittoria Colonna’), and their teachers were joined by JCU Italy Reads Volunteers, Italy Reads Book Group members, JCU staff and guests from the general public for a guided discussion of immigration, emigration and migration from an Italian historical and contemporary perspective.

Far from being the typical one-way lecture, these sessions were structured as guided group discussions.

The audience was seated in pods of six, mixing students from different schools.

Historical and statistical information was provided to illustrate the movement of people to and from Italy over the past 150 years.

The evening alternated between moments of contextualization of issues and moments of discussion of key questions within the pods. Following each 10-minute discussion period, within the pods. Considerations were then shared with the entire group.

Professor Clough Marinaro pointed out some of the current challenges being faced by Italy’s second-generation migrants. She also briefly illustrated some of the legislation and the growing number of associations that work to promote inter-cultural living.

The liceo teachers were pleased to see that their students were overcoming inhibitions and interacting in English about current issues.

We paraphrase here what two of the 130 high school students said about these lectures “It was a constructive experience... not just a conference, where often the majority of guys are bored, but a different way to speak English and meet young people of other schools. The topic was very interesting and presented in a way that wasn’t boring and we could understand the difficulties of immigrants ... and some of the reasons why people migrate. (Giada e Alessandro)
14 October 2013 –
Italy Reads Lecture “The Book was Better”: a problem-solving approach to literary adaptation,
by JCU Digital Photography Professor Brian Thomson

A group of high school students from Liceo ‘I. Newton’ and Liceo ‘Vittoria Colonna’ as well as their English teachers and members of JCU faculty and staff joined together in the Aula Magna Regina for a lecture by JCU Professor Brian Thomson, currently teaching Digital Video Production, Video Portfolio and English Composition. Following a brief, specific analysis of The Namesake, Thomson shared several technical ‘tricks of the trade’ providing the following key elements of information for Italy Reads high school students preparing their submissions for the Italy Reads Student Video Contest:

After sparking creative thoughts in everyone, Professor Thomson concluded his talk by showing a video from the Internet illustrating the power of a 3-minute video in communicating a message.

KEY POINTS to remember when adapting a work of literature to the screen:

1. Make it personal, and local; identify the universal truths in the story, seek out the resonances with your world; try to present a new perspective to one of the stories in the novel;

2. Write a screenplay first (if formatted correctly, 1 page screenplay = 1 minute video); You might want to download a very useful and free software: CeltX.com);

3. Keep dialogue to a minimum; do not use dialogue to explain emotion;

4. Pay attention to the Rule of Thirds;

5. Pay attention to sound (environmental, quality, etc...) Digital silence is to be avoided;

6. Avoid hand-held recording movement (a bag of dry lentils can work well as a tripod);

7. Video credits should be functional (a brief scroll of credits) and NOT the equivalent of another contest entry;

8. Last, but not at all least in importance: DO NOT VIOLATE COPYRIGHT LAWS (see YouTube’s royalty free music resources or make and record your own music.) Note: The procedure of video submission to the Italy Reads Contest requires that videos be uploaded to the Internet and the link be sent to Italy Reads. If your video violates copyright laws this will not be possible and your video will not be considered for the prize;

Saturday, 29 November - Video Production Workshop with JCU students, members of the JCU Film, Media and Communication Society are forthcoming. To reserve a seat, write to italyreads@johncabot.edu

Good luck to all competitors in the Italy Reads Student Video Contest!
DEWS:

After your brief reading, Jhumpa, I’ll start with a couple of questions, then, we will want to spend the rest of the simply responding to questions from the teachers, who have studied the book so carefully and have been talking about it with their students. I’m sure they have lots of very interesting questions.

LAHIRI:

Good evening, thank you and Buonasera. Grazie. I’ll begin by reading a brief passage from The Namesake.

p. 290, … He turns to the first story. “The Overcoat.” In a few minutes his mother will come upstairs to find him “Gogol,” she will say, opening the door without knocking, “where is the camera? What’s taking so long? This is no time for books,” she will scold, hastily noting the volume open against the covers, unaware, as her son has been all these years, that her husband dwells discreetly, silently, patiently, within its pages. …

… He leans back against the headboard, adjusting the pillow behind his back. In a few minutes he will go downstairs, join the party, his family. But for now his mother is distracted, laughing at a story a fiend is telling her, unaware of her son’s absence. For now, he starts to read.”

DEWS:

There’s something about ending a book with a character sitting down to read a book, I think it’s a beautiful gesture to end a book in this the way. We’re all teachers and I think we all, as teachers, try to instill the importance and significance of reading. I think many of us have become such because books play an important part in our lives and we want to pass on this respect for them and the understanding of the significance of books to our students.

Jhumpa said something last night [during the Keynote Address] about how “reading in English was, for her, in a way, transgressive.” You [teachers] all teach students English and you’re teaching them and requiring them to read in a language that is different from the one they speak with their families at home.

Can you speak a little bit about what reading in English was like for you growing up and how important it became to you?

LAHIRI:

Yes. As I was saying last night, it was very private. It felt particularly private for me because it was something that I knew my mother and father weren’t a part of. The books I was bringing home from the library, the ones that I was learning from at school, were part of another world. I was very much a part of that world, but they weren’t. Books were also a part of them, but in a different way. So, I felt a sort of tension between my life, as it connected to my family, and my life as a reader. And I think that has remained the case really.
LAHIRI, continued

Even though my parents have lived in the United States for almost 50 years, they still don’t participate in the literary culture in the way I do. But, needless to say, they connected to books and literature. My father was a librarian, and the literature that my mother reads is still by and large Bengali literature.

I think in a way I constructed my own world through literature, and it was all mine. I think children like places that are secret. Young children are always making tents and things with the tablecloth and hiding inside of them and I think that’s a pleasure children find. They find and feel protected in their own little universe and I think reading was that for me.

I think recently I had a second form of what feels perhaps not really ‘transgressive’ in the same way, but certainly a new element has been added. I haven’t really read any books in English since I decided about a year and a half ago to read only in Italian. So, in a certain way, I feel another level of departure. While it’s not the same kind of betrayal I felt when I was reading English as a child, when I felt a more personal, familial, more primordial sense of betrayal. Now, I feel just a kind of detachment from my own language in a fundamental way.

I am motivated now to read in a third language because it a rediscovery of the pleasures of reading. I enjoy that feeling of satisfaction in acquiring the knowledge, rediscovering each book, that pleasure that a child feels when she finishes reading a book. It’s nice.

QUESTION:
What are you reading now?

LAHIRI:
I’m reading primarily works from the 20th Century. Elena Ferrante, Pasolini, Moravia, poetry, Ungaretti... a book he wrote while touring the U.S...

QUESTION:
How do you feel when you return to India?

LAHIRI:
For me, traveling to India is not a return. It is so for my parents, who return regularly. The character Ashima reflects more of my mother’s experience than mine.

QUESTION:
How was it for you to grow up in a country where your first language wasn’t spoken?

LAHIRI:
For Italian high school students, it is artificial to read in a second language, at least at the beginning. Bi-lingual children play in the language in which they are growing up; their friends from school speak the second language. So, they grow up learning that at home one language is spoken, and outside the home another language is spoken.
QUESTION:
Do you ever think about The Namesake and why the protagonist is a young man and not a young woman?

LAHIRI:
Actually, once I have finished a book, it’s not mine anymore. I no longer consider it much. I don’t read reviews. I move on. That’s how I can continue to write other stories.

I can tell you that Gogol was actually the name of a boy who lived next door to my cousin in India when I was a child. I remember hearing his name called out when I was there visiting. I made a note “A boy called Gogol.” That was the seed for my novel, but it took years to grow.

QUESTION:
Can you tell us something about your writing process? You make it look so easy, so natural!

LAHIRI:
Well, The Namesake was written from a series of notes, concentrated paragraphs kept in separate notebooks. After about two years, I tried to put together the scraps and bits into a story.

This project was abandoned for another writing project, which I also abandoned. After more than a year, I completed a concentrated version of The Namesake. I later expanded upon it. This was my first novel and there was a lot of trial and error.

QUESTION:
I’d like to hear about the parental figures. The Namesake, the mother and father are warm and protective. During class discussions, my students have commented on what seems to be a more important generational conflict in the book as compared to a cultural conflict.

LAHIRI
I think this reflects a more universal conflict of growing and moving away from the nuclear family in which one is born.
**QUESTION:**
Are any parts of the novel autobiographical?

**LAHIRI:**
Not really. There are parts that reflect stories that I had been told or that I became aware of. The train accident, for example, was very similar to an accident that happened to a cousin of my father’s. During the writing process I wanted to put the accident and Gogol together in some way to convey this incredible aspect of how one survives in the world. It takes a long time to put the pieces together.

**QUESTION**
Can you tell us your thoughts about your identification with a language, your connection with a language? What do you consider your native language, your mother-tongue language?

**LAHIRI**
I grew up with two languages. Initially, I spoke only Bengali. Then, English became my dominant language. However, I do not feel that English is my first language. Your first language is a part of your being. I don’t feel that attachment to English.

When my first child was born, although I had been born and raised in the U.S. and English was my dominant language, I just couldn’t speak to my child in English. Bengali came instinctively. A friend from New York visited me recently and, while we were having lunch, asked me if I had read a certain article in *The New Yorker*. Why no, I hadn’t read it. I haven’t read anything in English for the past year. So, I am not participating in my linguistic past for the time being. I’ve made a choice to detach from my first language for the sake of full enjoyment of this new language that I am exploring, Italian.