



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Scholar Discusses Italian Women Writers of the Holocaust

MAHWAH, N.J. – Noted scholar and teacher Stefania Lucamante provided a critical and lucid analysis of the works of Italian women writers in transmitting a gendered perspective on the devastating effects of Italy’s 1938 racial laws and the Holocaust. The program was held at Ramapo College of New Jersey on Thursday, February 23 and was co-sponsored by the Italian Club of Ramapo College. The Morton and Clara Richmond Endowment supported the event, which was attended by 85 students, faculty and community members.

Dr. Lucamante probed the complexity with which numerous literary works by Italian women on the Holocaust validate notions of collaboration and understanding between fictional writing and the (gendered) rewriting of historical events. Her analysis encompassed the work of both Jewish and non-Jewish writers as well as both actual survivors and their descendants. She rejected that notions advanced by some scholars that introducing gender into the discourse on Holocaust literature is a potential distraction. On the contrary, in her view, adding women’s literature as a component not only serves to highlight the unique experiences of women in genocide, but also delivers a composite picture that otherwise would be lacking. In this context, she noted that since literature, including memoirs, is reflective and participatory, it can make a profound contribution to our understanding of historical events.

“This definitely opened my eyes to Italian Holocaust experiences,” said Ramapo College Adjunct Professor Mark Miller, who attended the event. “Almost everything I’ve learned about the Holocaust was focused on Eastern Europeans and I never stopped to think about Western/Southern Europe’s horrors.”

Also new to Miller was the handicap Italians faced in terms of language.

“Not understanding Yiddish gave [the Italian writers] a ‘lower standing’ within the concentration camps inmates,” Miller noted. “Having no understanding of German

meant that the German guards could not communicate their demands and most likely increase the death rate among the Italians.”

Dr. Lucamante was born in Sicily to Apulian parents. At the age of six, she moved to Sardinia, where she grew up and studied before moving to Rome for her graduate studies. She also lived in Milan and Berlin, Germany, before moving to the United States. After a curatorial training at the Smithsonian Institution’s Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, D.C, she studied Comparative Literature at The Catholic University of America (CUA). In 2000, she returned to the CUA after teaching at Georgetown University. Currently, she is Professor of Italian and Comparative Literature, teaching undergraduate courses in culture, literature and film studies.

Her primary research and teaching interests are in the literature and culture of modern and contemporary Italy, with a special focus on Women’s Studies, the genre of the novel, literary and visual representations of the Holocaust, and contemporary critical literary theory. Dr. Lucamante is the author of four books, including *Forging Shoah Memories: Italian Women Writers, Jewish Identity, and the Holocaust* (Palgrave 2014). Among the conferences volumes she has edited are *Elsa Morante’s Politics of Writing: Rethinking Subjectivity, History, and the Power of Art* (Fairleigh-Dickinson UP 2014) and *Italy and the Bourgeoisie: The Re-Thinking of a Class* (Fairleigh-Dickinson UP 2009).

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes viewed as a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.