

LOS ANGELES ITALIAN COMMUNITY



Marta Ciccolari Micaldi has been teaching American literature in bookstores and cultural centers and organizes tours based on American authors and the locations that were significant in their lives as well as in the books they wrote Photo credit: Elena Dadrino

Book Riders: Literary Tours based on Classes taught by Marta Ciccolari Micaldi

NANCY CASAS

Marta Ciccolari Micaldi has been teaching American Literature classes in Turin, Italy for some time now.

Along with Claudio Morrano and Federico Giacomelli, Marta has been able to take her classes on literary tours to the United

States called Book Riders. Claudio and Federico are the founders of the tour operator XPLOREAMERICA (www.xploreamerica.it) and take care of the technical aspects of the project Book Riders.

This past October, the group toured Southern California searching for *noir* locations and stories and as a result named the entire tour *Californoir*.

It was a 10 day tour that started in LA, stayed two nights in Hollywood around the Griffith Observatory, read works by Joan Didion, then headed to El Monte where James Ellroy's mother was found dead over 15 years ago and his book the *Black Dahlia's* murder scene took place. Shortly after that the group went to Palm Springs to read *Less than Zero* by Bret Easton Ellis. The tour also explored various San Diego beaches and read Don Winslow's books that were based in San Diego.

Marta, how would you describe your literary tours called Book Riders?

The tour was based on four American authors and the locations that were significant in their lives as well as in the books they wrote. It was both a touristic and literary tour and we stayed all together the entire time which was a total of 10 days. The group consisted of 9 people, myself, and my partner Claudio who joined me. We rented a huge van that we used to visit each location. During our time at each location, we used to read a part of the book that was based in that place.

Every tour is in a different state or area in the U.S. Same thing for my classes in Turin.

Every class differentiates and talks about literature from different states in the U.S. It's like traveling through literature by following authors that live in a particular state. I started in Illinois because it was where I stayed for one month, then Southern California, the Pacific Northwest states like Oregon and Washington. The last one was Louisiana because I was there last February. I teach these classes in Turin and whoever wants to join the tour is welcomed to come even if he hasn't read the story because we read them during the tour. It can last one or two weeks depending on how many people want to come.

We started the traveling tour this year in May and in October was our second trip. In this upcoming May 2016 we will be going to the Pacific Northwest to visit Seattle and Portland. We'll read books by Richard Brautigan who was the same age as Kerouac but committed suicide very young and who wrote very psychedelic books, Raymond Carver the author of *Fight Club* and Chuck Palahniuk who lives in Portland. I would like to contact him and hopefully have him be a guest during the tour. Also, Tom Robbins who is in Seattle.

In October 2016, we will go to Louisiana. The authors then will be Tennessee Williams who wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the first movie with Marlon Brando, Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*, Nic Pizzolatto who is American with Italian origins and wrote the book *Galveston* and the show *True Detective*, and finally also Ethan Hawke the actor who wrote a sweet book about a couple who goes on the road.

How did you start your career?

I studied Literature at the university of Turin and received a Master's degree in American studies between Turin and Berlin. Then, I was a teacher's assistant at the university but I did not like that very much. It was too structured and I hadn't enough room to experiment or try anything new. I was also working in a publishing house in Turin and wrote for various magazines. It was two years ago that I decided to visit the U.S. and stayed one month in Illinois. While I was there, I started a blog about American literature and American culture. When I arrived back in Italy, I started teaching American literature not at the university but in bookstores and cultural centers that ended up being very successful. In these classes, I try to combine literature and traveling. Every lesson is like a literary opportunity to travel in the U.S. while we're in Turin. So I figured that if it was so great to have people travel with their imaginations while reading, why not actually go travel in real life? We now have two tours a year. There is a very special atmosphere while we're on the tour and in order to preserve that feeling, we keep the group size small. However, this tour is definitely for everybody and is affordable.

Who are your Italian literary inspirations?

I read American literature all the time and that's not good because I am Italian and I should read more works of Italian writers. Anyway, there is a great author named Paolo Cognetti who likes America just as much as I do. He wrote short stories about New York City and Brooklyn and also wrote a novel called *Sofia always dresses in Black*. We have a lot in common and I love his American style but written in Italian.

Who would be your top American authors?

I would say Bret Easton Ellis. I know he's not writing anymore but *American Psycho* is my favorite book. Then, Jonathan Lethem, New York City based author that wrote *Chronic City*. Also, I can't forget Raymond Carver, he is my third favorite.

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