The success of Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan novels is astounding, not only because of the record-breaking sales, but also because of the strong emotions they thematize and arouse. In this course we will read novels, interviews, and essays by Ferrante, asking how her work compels passionate reading. We will consider the political and aesthetic implications of ugly and opaque emotions like irritation, envy, disgust, and shame. We will also study major influences—including writers Ferrante cites frequently in interviews: Adriana Cavarero, Carla Lonzi, the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, Elsa Morante; as well as those she tends to refrain from naming: Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann. Class discussion will be conducted in English; texts will be available in English and Italian.

Students who wish to complete the readings in Italian are invited to enroll in an additional two-credit course, “Il filo giusto di un racconto,” which will be dedicated to a reading and discussion of Ferrante’s latest novel, published Italian on November 7, 2019.