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 why her work inspires such passionate reading, and whether there is political efficacy in all this affect. Engaging with Sianne Ngai, Elspeth Probyn, Lauren Berlant and others, 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, Luisa Muraro, and Elsa Morante; as well as those she tends to refrain from naming: Christa Wolf and Ingeborg Bachmann.

Reading knowledge of Italian is suggested but not required. Class discussion will be conducted in English; texts will be available in English and Italian.