

## The F-Word: Feminism in Italy (1300-Present)



### Course Overview

What is feminism? How are feminist ideas expressed in different modes? Does the meaning of feminism change across countries and time periods? Can “feminism” exist before the word itself comes into use? And, as our world becomes increasingly globalized, do national borders still matter for feminism? This course explores these questions by analyzing feminist thought in Italy from writings of the fourteenth century to Instagram posts of the twenty-first. We won’t isolate the study of feminism to women’s rights struggles of particular decades; instead, we will explore the genealogies of feminist thought and their relationship to the present by pairing texts and images from various time periods. Through letters, poetry, novels, theoretical essays, and film, we will explore what kinds of media have been considered “feminist” or “feminine” and why. This will allow us to analyze themes in feminist thought more broadly, such as sexual difference, the woman writer, and the tension between political activism and literature/theory. Italian feminism, although studied less than its French and American counterparts, offers a rich history through which to explore these issues. Using Italy as our point of departure, we will draw connections with our own experiences in diverse national and cultural spaces and read authors from a variety of traditions.

This class requires intense reading and writing. Sessions will include short lectures and discussions of the materials assigned for the week. Course taught in English.

**Instructor:** Alyssa Granacki

**Email:** alyssa.granacki@duke.edu

**Office Hours:**

### Course Objectives

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- Identify and explain trends in feminist and proto-feminist thought
- Identify an author’s thesis and evaluate how well they support their argument, particularly regarding theories about sex and gender
- Describe and analyze the use of varying genres and writing styles, including literature, in the expression of feminist thought.
- Distinguish between competing definitions of “Feminism” and develop your own definition of the term.

### Format and Procedures

The class will be built around weekly lectures, readings and discussions. You should complete the readings before the session for which they are assigned. Actively participating in discussion is essential to developing your knowledge and your success in the course. During class time, we will work through the learning objectives outlined above as they present themselves in the texts assigned for that week. In your

written work, you will demonstrate your ability to do the same, particularly your close reading and analytical skills. Note that the deadlines for the response papers are flexible in order to allow you to choose what texts interest you the most and what fits best with your schedule. Please plan accordingly. I recommend scheduling an appointment with TWP Writing Studio for help with grammar and organization in your response papers. You are also always welcome to come to office hours or schedule an appointment with me to discuss readings, response papers, leading class discussion, or any aspect of the course.

### Course Readings

You should purchase your own copy of Elena Ferrante's *The Days of Abandonment*, a text we will be working through together in the first six weeks of the course.

All other readings will be available on Sakai.

### Assignments

- I. **Participation (20%).** As we build a collaborative community and undertake intellectual inquiry together, you will actively participate in class discussion with comments and questions for your classmates. Please keep our assigned texts in mind, but feel free to bring in outside material.
- II. **Lead class discussion on a text (15%).** You will choose one lesson (one text) for which you will be responsible for leading the class through discussion. Since everyone will have already read the text, this should not be a presentation. Rather, you should develop 4-6 questions that will open discussion and guide your peers through the most important issues in the text. This is your chance to become an expert on one particular author and their method of argumentation, or one work of fiction and its historical and cultural context. This can be a great starting point for a response or a final paper.
- III. **Short Responses (2) (40%).** You will choose one text from the first half of the course, and one from the second half, and write your own response (2-3 pages double-spaced), analyzing the text. You should pay careful attention to how the author constructs their argument (if a secondary source/theoretical texts) or the way it portrays women/men and uses gendered language (if a novel/short story). You should pay careful attention to language, context, and connections across the text or to other texts. While you may incorporate outside material, the goal of these responses is to articulate your own perspective rather than to summarize others'.
- IV. **Final Essay (25%)** A 7-8 page essay expanding one of your previous responses, including at least two of the texts we discuss in class. The specific topic will be developed in consultation with the instructor.

### Academic Integrity

Duke University is a community dedicated to scholarship, leadership, and service and to the principles of honesty, fairness, respect, and accountability. Citizens of this community commit to reflect upon and uphold these principles in all academic and non-academic endeavors, and to protect and promote a culture of integrity. You are expected to uphold the [Duke Community Standard](#):

- I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors;
- I will conduct myself honorably in all my endeavors; and
- I will act if the Standard is compromised.

### Accommodations for students with disabilities

We welcome all students with differing abilities and are happy to provide accommodations as needed. Please visit one of the two centers during the semester: the [Academic Resource Center](#) (in the Academic Advising Building on East Campus) or the [Student Disability Access Office](#) to seek documentation that will inform your professor of any needed accommodation. Check with the ARC or SDAO regarding deadlines and requirements for accommodations.

### Inclusivity Statement

We understand that our members represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Sometimes, we will be confronting sensitive topics in this course. The Romance Studies Department is committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- share their unique experiences, values and beliefs
- be open to the views of others
- honor the uniqueness of their colleagues
- appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community
- value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner
- keep confidential discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature
- use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in this course and across the Duke community

### Preferred Contact

Please do not hesitate to contact instructor via email ([alyssa.granacki@duke.edu](mailto:alyssa.granacki@duke.edu)) with any questions or comments. Expect a response within 24 hours (or one business day) of email delivery.

### Tentative Course Schedule (*May change to accommodate guest presenters & student needs*)

Week	Topic	Readings
1	<b>Thinking Through <i>genere</i> – Genre and Gender</b>	
1		Elena Ferrante in <i>The Guardian</i> <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/14/elena-ferrante-male-story-sex-women-love-poems-porn">https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/14/elena-ferrante-male-story-sex-women-love-poems-porn</a> Rita Felski, "Introduction," in <i>Literature After Feminism</i> (2003)
2	<b>Identities in Question</b>	Elena Ferrante, <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> , pp. (2008) La compiuta donzella – the first Italian poetess (1300?)
2		"The 'Unmasking' of Elena Ferrante" in <i>The New Yorker</i> (2016) "Elena Ferrante, Art of Fiction no. 228" in <i>The Paris Review</i> (2015)
3		Elena Ferrante, <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> , pp. (2008) Letters of Abelard and Heloise, excerpts (1100s)
3	<b>Women Writers</b>	Toril Moi, "I am not a Woman Writer." (2008) Christine de Pizan, <i>Book of the City of Ladies</i> , excerpts (1405)
4		Elena Ferrante, <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> , pp. (2008) Gaspara Stampa, <i>Poems</i> , excerpts. (1554)
4		Simone de Beauvoir, "The Woman Destroyed" (1967)

5		Elena Ferrante, <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> , pp. (2008) Virginia Woolf. <i>A Room of One's Own</i> , excerpt (1929).
5		Cixous, Helene. "The Laugh of the Medusa." (1976)
6		Elena Ferrante, <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> , pp. (2008) Giovanni Boccaccio, <i>On Famous Women</i> excerpts (1365) and <i>Decameron</i> excerpts (1348)
6		Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" (1977) Laura Cereta, Letters, excerpts (1485)
<b>First Short Response Due</b>		
7		Film Discussion: <i>The Days of Abandonment</i> Article, Laurie Penny "Maybe you should just be single," in <i>The New Statesmen</i>
7	<b>Bodies at Play: Sex, Sexuality, and Sexual Difference</b>	StoryLab: The First Female Gondolier (2014) Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp. Introduction to <i>Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader</i> . (1993)
8		Adriana Cavarero, "Toward a Theory of Sexual Difference" (1977)
8		Moderata Fonte, <i>On the worth of women</i> , excerpts (1600) Gloria Anzaldúa - "Entering into the Serpent" in <i>Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza</i>
9		Luce Irigaray "This Sex Which is Not One" from <i>This Sex Which is Not One</i> (1977)
9		Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," in <i>Gender Trouble</i> (1990)
10		Giovanni Boccaccio, <i>Decameron</i> excerpts (1347)
10		Chiara Ferragni (Instagram) and Body Positivity Movement Nancy Bauer, "Lady Power" in <i>How to do things with pornography</i>
11		Simone de Beauvoir, "Introduction" and "Myths" in the <i>The Second Sex</i> (1949)
11		Melissa Panarello Scandal (articles) Arcangela Tarabotti, <i>Paternal Tyranny</i> , excerpts (1654)
12	<b>Feminism Between Literature and Politics</b>	Film Discussion: Vogliamo anche le rose [We want roses too] (2007) "Introduction" in <i>Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader</i> (1993)
12		"Introduction" in <i>Sexual Difference: A Theory of Social-Symbolic Practice</i> by Milan Women's Bookstore Collective (1989)
<b>Second Short Response Due</b>		
13		Demau and Rivolta Femminile [Feminine Revolt] in <i>Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader</i> (1993)
13		bell hooks, "Theory as Liberatory Practice" (1991)
14		Ni una menos and Non una di meno, Lecture by Rita Segato Freedda Media (Website/Instagram)
14		Final discussions and wrap up