**Italian Women’s Writing Week 1: An Introduction to Feminisms**

**Sources and background reading on feminist thought**

Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (London: Sage, 1999).

Sarah Gamble, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Sandra Kemp & Judith Squires, eds. *Feminisms* (Oxford: OUP, 1997)

Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Westview Press, 1998).

Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: a User-Friendly Guide* (London: Routledge, 2006), see Chapter 4

Imelda Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to ‘Post-Feminism’* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

**Feminism definition**: belief that women suffer oppression and injustice because of their sex. Feminism offers a critical perspective on western social and political thought which is seen to exclude, trivialise or marginalise women.

‘Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression’ (bell hooks)

‘Feminism’s agenda is basic: It asks that women not be forced to choose between public justice and private happiness’ (Susan Faludi)

‘Any attempt to contend with patriarchy in its various manifestations’ (Hodgson-Wright)

**Patriarchy**: refers to the system by which society organises itself around the needs and desires of the dominant male group in order to maintain and perpetuate its power. The system of patriarchy is considered to be so deeply entrenched that it is considered natural, normal and inevitable.

‘The term ‘patriarchal’ refers to power relations in which women’s interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take on many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organisation of procreation to the internalised norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on social meaning given to biological sexual difference’ (Chris Weedon)

**Liberal Feminism**

* often associated with first-wave feminism
* moderate, reformist , rather than revolutionary
* demands legal equality and civil rights within existing system
* concerned with the individual not the collective
* focus is on the public sphere
* can be blind to cultural and social influences

**Radical Feminisms**

* associated with second-wave feminism
* developed out of protests of 1960s
* revolutionary as it rejects existing social order as oppressive to women and seeks to overthrow it.
* challenges foundations of political and philosophical thought / or refuses to engage with it.
* decentralised, anti-elitist, no group hierarchy, often separatist.
* sometimes treats men with suspicion: all men share the benefits of male supremacy which oppresses women.
* engages in consciousness-raising activities

**Marxist / Socialist Feminisms**

* views class and capitalism as main origin of women’s oppression
* focus on women as workers: paid and unpaid
* reproductive and domestic labour seen as contributing to stability of capitalist system
* revolutionary as it seeks to overthrow capitalism as means of dismantling male privilege.

**Psychoanalytic Feminisms**

* critique of Freudian and Lacanian theory
* concerned with formation and development of sexed self
* examines psychological impact and origin of patriarchal oppression
* critique of representation of Women as Other / Lack who can only be defined in terms of men
* sexual difference reframed as positive. Women as part of alternative psychological order
* sees father / phallus as cultural symbol of male authority
* focus on language and linguistic structures
* stresses pre-linguistic importance of the child-mother bond. Celebrates the pre-Oedipal state known as ‘semiotic’ (Kristeva) or ‘imaginary’(Lacan) prior to entry into symbolic system of language
* French Feminists – *écriture feminine*

**Postmodern Feminisms**

* rejects fixed identities or notions of core identity
* views gender categories with suspicion
* sees gender and sexual identities as performance
* desconstructs dualism in male/female binaries
* reveals male bias in universalist assumptions and accepted truths

**Lesbian Feminism:**

* challenges heteronormativity/compulsory heterosexuality

**Postcolonial feminism**:

* concerned with questions of race and ethnicity
* reveals biases in western feminist thought

**Post-feminism? Third-wave feminism?**