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**Local Flavour vs Global Readerships:
The Elena Ferrante Project and Translatability**

ABSTRACT

Through an analysis of the novels written under the pen name Elena Ferrante and of the paratextual elements that surround them, this article examines the portrayal of Naples and its periphery in these narratives, and how the specific geographical and cultural context is rendered and translated for different audiences. It argues that the concealment of the author's identity has enhanced the perceived authenticity of the texts, and that the emphasis on marginal backgrounds and subaltern characters entails a contradiction not dissimilar to the phenomenon that Huggan (2001) describes as 'staged marginality' in the context of postcolonial narratives. Ferrante's cultural specificity can therefore be read as a highly ambivalent discourse that entails both resistance to and complacency with the mechanisms of a global market. Ultimately, the article examines how the stress on dialect influences the process of translation for diverse readerships, showing the relevance of the 'Ferrante project' within world literature debates.

Attraverso un'analisi dei romanzi pubblicati sotto lo pseudonimo 'Elena Ferrante' e degli elementi paratestuali che li circondano, il saggio esamina la descrizione di Napoli e della sua periferia ed esplora come la rappresentazione della 'napoletanità' vari nelle edizioni rivolte a lettori appartenenti a diverse comunità linguistico-culturali. L'occultamento dell'identità dell'autrice ha incentivato il senso di autenticità suggerito dalle narrazioni, mentre l'enfasi su ambienti marginali e personaggi subalterni comporta una contraddizione non dissimile dal fenomeno che Huggan (2001) descrive come 'messa in scena della marginalità' nel contesto delle narrazioni postcoloniali. La specificità culturale di Ferrante può perciò essere letta come un discorso ambivalente che comporta sia resistenza che compiacenza nei confronti delle dinamiche del mercato culturale globale. In ultima analisi, il saggio indaga come l'enfasi sul dialetto influenzi il processo di traduzione, dimostrando l'importanza del 'progetto Ferrante' nei dibattiti sulla letteratura mondiale.

Keywords:

Elena Ferrante; Naples; Translation; Authenticity; Audiences; Dialect

Elena Ferrante; Napoli; traduzione; autenticità; lettori; dialetto

Local Flavour vs Global Readerships:

The 'Elena Ferrante' Project and Translatability

Introduction

Quando si accorsero che Antonio, il figlio di Melina la pazza, il servo semianalfabeta e violento dei Solara, il mio fidanzato dell'adolescenza, non mi aveva mandato in dono niente di bello, niente di commovente, niente che alludesse ai tempi andati, ma soltanto un libro, sembrarono delusi. Poi videro che io invece cambiavo colore, che guardavo la copertina con una gioia che non riuscivo a controllare. Non era un libro qualsiasi. Era il *mio* libro. Era la traduzione tedesca del mio romanzo, sei anni dopo la sua pubblicazione in Italia. Per la prima volta mi succedeva di assistere allo spettacolo - uno spettacolo, sì - delle mie parole che mi ballavano sotto gli occhi in una lingua straniera.¹

The reaction of Elena Greco in *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* as she holds the German edition of her first book underlines her surprise at the transformation that the text undergoes in the process of translation and circulation, a process of which, as author, Elena has little knowledge or control. This episode can be read as one of the many moments of *mise en abîme* present in the tetralogy *L'amica geniale*: like Elena Greco's first novel, the texts published under the pen name 'Elena Ferrante' are experiencing an afterlife in translation, but unlike Greco's book, which in the narrative sells very few copies abroad and is soon out of print, the *Neapolitan Novels* have become best-sellers in the UK, the US, France and Germany.

This article examines how the Neapolitan setting has been used to market Ferrante's books nationally and internationally, with particular attention to the series *L'amica geniale*— known in English as the *Neapolitan Novels*. Through an analysis of the texts and of the paratextual elements that surround them, I consider the way in which Naples and its periphery are portrayed in the novels, and how this geographical and cultural context is rendered and translated for different readerships. Expanding Gérard Genette's definition,² I consider paratext as the liminal devices that surround a text and that turn it into a product, whether physical or digital: titles, forewords, epigraphs,

commentaries, interviews and book reviews. While for Genette paratextual elements are bound to authorial intentions, my focus is on the creative refractions that novels undergo in the process of translation. My methodology is thus in line with the approach of scholars such as Sehnaz Tahir-Gürçaglar, Richard Watts, and Valerie Pellat, who have explored the translation of paratexts and underlined its ideological implications.³ The second part of the article considers how the concealment of the author's identity has enhanced the perceived authenticity of Ferrante's narratives, and suggests that the emphasis on degraded Neapolitan suburbs and subaltern characters, which is not limited to the narratives but extends to 'Ferrante's' biography, entails a contradiction not dissimilar from the phenomenon that Graham Huggan describes as 'staged marginality' in the context of postcolonial literature.⁴ Ultimately, the article examines how the stress on the vernacular in Ferrante's narratives backs the illusion of cultural specificity, and reflects on how the novels' style contributes to their translatability. Although Elena Ferrante famously compared her books to 'the gift of the befana,'⁵ claiming that, once books are published, they have no need for their authors and enjoy a life of their own, I argue that public recognition is inseparable from the construction of authorship and the process of legitimization negotiated by the agents involved in the editorial process.

The Neapolitan Setting

The books signed under the pen name 'Elena Ferrante' all have something to do with Naples. *L'amore molesto* (1992) and most of the tetralogy *L'amica geniale* (2011-2014) take place in Naples and its surrounding area. In both *I giorni dell'abbandono* (2002), which is set in Turin, and *La figlia oscura* (2006), which takes place in an anonymous southern Italian resort, the protagonist is a woman of Neapolitan origins who, despite her

elevated social position, continues to be troubled by memories related to the experience of growing up in a poor Neapolitan neighbourhood. In all these narratives, Naples is conjured as a site of poverty, violence and abuse, against a background of an entrenched patriarchal mentality and fierce class struggle.

In *I giorni dell'abbandono*, Neapolitan ghosts visit Olga, who has settled in Turin, at the climax of her emotional crisis. In these moments she is haunted by the memory of a woman who was driven crazy after having been abandoned by her husband, and to whom the neighbours referred condescendingly as *la poverella*— an image that recurs in the character of 'Melina la pazza' in the tetralogy *L'amica geniale*. Their common Neapolitan origin is the main emotional thread that unites Leda and Nina, the two protagonists of *La figlia oscura*. In this book, the two women are initially characterized as opposites: Leda is highly educated, Nina has abandoned her studies to marry; Leda is independent, Nina is submissive; Leda expresses herself in a polished Italian, Nina communicates mainly in dialect. This dichotomy, however, dissolves as both are unveiled as women of intense emotions capable of irrational reactions.

The Neapolitan setting is particularly emphasized in the series *L'amica geniale* (2011-2014), which begins in post-war Naples in the 'spazio compresso del cortile, delle palazzine, del rione'.⁶ This neighbourhood functions as a microcosm with its own history, development and power struggle. The characters that we get to know in the first volume as Elena's classmates come to represent all aspects of society. There are intellectuals, like Nino and Elena; people with prestigious positions such as Gino's parents, who own a pharmacy; fascists like Gino; communists like Pasquale; working-class people like Carmela and her family; migrants like Antonio; *camorristi* such as the Solara brothers;

etc. On the other hand, Elena and Lila's neighbourhood is characterized as marginal within the city. It is situated, symbolically, at the outskirts, and its boundaries are continuously emphasized. 'Che cosa c'era oltre il rione, oltre il suo perimetro stranoto?' wonders Elena in the first volume. 'Passavano treni di continuo oltre la campagna, passavano auto e camion su e giù per lo stradone, eppure non riesco a ricordare nemmeno un'occasione in cui chiedo a me stessa, a mio padre, alla maestra: dove vanno le auto, i camion, i treni, in quale città, in quale mondo?'⁷

Throughout the narrative, the neighbourhood or *rione* is often compared and juxtaposed to wealthier areas such as Piazza Amedeo, Corso Garibaldi, Via Tasso, and others. In turn, there are moments in which this highly defined space extends to the whole city: 'Mi sentii come se il rione avesse inglobato tutta Napoli, anche le vie della gente per bene', comments for example Elena in *L'amica Geniale*, after a brawl that takes place in via Chiaia.⁸ In the second and third volume of the tetralogy, Naples and its surroundings are characterized in terms of difference in relation to cities such as Pisa, Florence, Bologna and Genova, where Elena moves later on or where the family of her husband lives. These cities are depicted as predictable, wealthier, less constraining and oppressive, but also as lacking in friendship and solidarity.

Elena's narrative spans over six decades: she begins to tell her and Lila's story as they are in the first year of elementary school. Lila disappears, we are informed in the prologue, at the age of 66. Throughout this time, the *rione* follows its own evolution, but it remains relatively stable compared to the social changes that Elena describes as occurring in the rest of Italy and Europe. Elena's squinting and limping mother, Immacolata, whose body bears the marks of the hard life to which she has been

subjected, is often portrayed as an embodiment of the lingering tribal, patriarchal mentality. Throughout the first three books, Elena feels disgust and hatred towards her mother, and is terrified when she develops an injury in her right hip that she connects to her mother's limping.⁹ The narrative does not emphasize the spaces in which women continue to hold a power position even within patriarchal societies: the only alternative that is proposed is that of Elena, who escapes to the north and adopts a 'foreign' way of living. The *rione* is a world in which people do not change their ways of thinking, cycles repeat generation after generation, and children turn into the mirror image of their parents. Overall, it can be defined as a site of cultural, social and linguistic specificity only partially permeable to the influence of the outside world. It is significant that the series concludes with what the narrator describes as 'l'irruzione dell'esotico'¹⁰ and the transformations brought by migration. Even then, the *rione* is not destined to become just like any other space, but rather incorporate diversity into its particular way of being: 'Il vecchio dialetto aveva subito accolto, secondo una consolidata tradizione, lingue misteriose, e intanto stava facendo i conti con abilità fonatorie diverse, con sintassi e sentimenti una volta molto distanti. La pietra grigia delle palazzine aveva insegne impreviste, vecchi traffici leciti e illeciti si mescolavano ai nuovi, l'esercito della violenza si apriva a nuove culture.'¹¹

Paratexts in Translation

If for Italian readers the choice of Naples as a setting conjures specific history and cultural and linguistic traditions, seen from afar Naples is the city that most symbolizes Italy's contradictions: prestigious past, touristic appeal and current political and economical crisis. Readers spanning from Spain to France to Germany, from the US to

Canada to Australia may not be familiar with Naples' complex history, but most of them will recognize images popularized by the tourism industry and by the media: the view of the gulf with the Vesuvius, Neapolitan pizza, the Camorra and the city's issues with the garbage collection crisis. All these topics find room in Ferrante's series. As a setting, Naples combines touristic familiarity with a darker reputation, Mediterranean charm with imagery of crime and corruption. In addition, the Neapolitan background and the choice of a Neapolitan protagonist are in line with books and films that have received international acclaim in the last decade, such as Roberto Saviano's *Gomorra* (2006), Matteo Garrone's cinematic adaptation (2008), and John Turturro's *Passione* (2010).

At first sight, Naples does not appear to play a relevant role in the paratext of Ferrante's first three novels. The images selected by the Edizioni e/o contribute to frame the novels as female narratives of introspection: a red dress for *L'amore molesto*, a painting of a female nude at the mirror for *I giorni dell'abbandono*, a ceramic doll with a torn dress for *La figlia oscura*.¹²

While the Neapolitan setting is prominent in *L'amore molesto*, the city is not portrayed on any of the covers designed by the Edizioni e/o nor on any of the translated editions. For example, the Hungarian publisher Magvető (*Tékozló Szeretet*, 2009) opted for an image of a cloth, while the Turkish publisher Yayincilik Literatür selected a woman's body wrapped in a sensual red dress (*Belalı Aşk*, 2007). These photographs echo not only the theme of clothing, which is an important thread throughout the novel, but also the image chosen to advertise Mario Martone's film (*L'amore molesto*, 1995), in which the close-up of the red dress highlights, in contrast to the stylized drawing of the Edizioni e/o, the materiality of the female body. In this context, the choice of the German

publisher List (*Lästige Liebe*, 2006) addresses the experience of its target audience: by featuring the image of a deserted beach, the book cover ignores the city's urban setting while establishing a link with southern Italy as a place of vacation and tourism. Since the beach is out-of-season and the umbrellas abandoned, the image indicates that the narrative will take the reader out of the ordinary holiday.¹³ The Btb edition of *La figlia oscura* (*Die Frau im Dunkeln*, 2010) follows a similar visual strategy: it displays a beach as it would look in the early morning, with closed umbrellas and deckchairs ready to host the bathers.

The Neapolitan setting does not, therefore, feature prominently in the images selected for the first editions of the early novels, either at home or internationally; however, it plays a relevant role in the book's summary and in the back-cover blurbs. In the 1992 Edizioni e/o version, *L'amore molesto* is introduced in the back-cover comments as a 'thriller domestico' in a 'Napoli plumbea che non dà tregua'. The reviews quoted on the back cover include Franco Cardelli's praise 'Il grande libro su Napoli l'ha scritto Elena Ferrante' and Antonio D'Orrico's description of Ferrante as 'La massima narratrice italiana dai tempi di Elsa Morante' – a statement that inscribes Ferrante in the high literary tradition by establishing a connection with a female writer famous for her descriptions of the Italian South.¹⁴ The summary printed on the back cover of *I giorni dell'abbandono* emphasizes the contrast between 'la tranquilla Torino' and 'I fantasmi della sua [Olga's] infanzia napoletana' and interprets the story as a modern version of the Greek tragedy *Medea*.¹⁵ A connection is then established between this mythical intertext, the author's background and her writing style, as the novel is described as exuding 'l'incandescenza di un temperamento tutto mediterraneo, una forza che sale direttamente

dalle viscere'. *L'amore molesto*, *I giorni dell'abbandono* and *La figlia oscura* all share the same bibliographical note, according to which Ferrante is a female author who has lived in Naples and in Greece. This information, in turn, reinforces the association with the 'Mediterranean temperament' of the novels.

References to Naples abound in the paratext of *Cronache del mal d'amore* (2012), the collection published by Edizioni e/o that, following *Lumen*'s publication of *Crónicas del desamor* in Spain (2011), gathers Ferrante's first three novels. Here the critical appraisals reported on the dust jacket and back cover comprise quotes from Italian feminists such as Luisa Muraro and North American novelists such as Alice Sebold, thereby celebrating Ferrante as a feminist writer who has achieved international visibility. In addition, the dust jacket includes a reference to the Ferrante mystery: 'chi era questa scrittrice che si firmava Elena Ferrante e che dichiarava di avere vissuto molto tempo a Napoli e poi in Grecia?' The introduction to the three novels is a translation of Edgardo Dolby's essay, originally titled 'El enigma Ferrante' and published in 2011 by *Lumen*. In this text, after comparing Ferrante's writing to international, canonical authors such as Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf and Henry James, Dolby characterizes the Neapolitan protagonists of the three novels as 'donne moderne, che si portano dietro un mondo ancestrale, cattolico (nell'accezione peggiore del termine), fatto di pettegolezzi e bisbigli, di pregiudizi e crudeltà, di violenza sorda ma anche di una forte, vera e solida cultura popolare che ormai non esiste più nel Norditalia [sic] europeo e cosmopolita'.¹⁶ While Dolby's view of Italian southern society is not entirely negative, it underlines the immobility of the 'ancestral world' and its peculiarity within a European context, and it essentially describes the region not so much as permeated by a different culture, but as a

mirror of what northern Italy was in the past. Most importantly, however, these types of reviews ignore the fact that the locations and events described in Ferrante's novels are, after all, places of the imagination.

The attention to the Neapolitan setting grew with the series *L'amica geniale*. The cover of the first volume by Edizioni e/o (*L'amica geniale*, 2011) shows a bride and a groom viewed from the back and followed by three young girls as they are walking towards the Gulf of Naples. More than illustrating Lila's wedding, the closing episode of the book, the image fulfills the function of informing readers that this will be a Neapolitan story. The covers of the second and third volume present a more indistinct background: two adults embracing each other in *Storia del nuovo cognome* (2012), and a young woman holding a child at the beach in *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (2013). The reference to Naples returns in the fourth volume, *Storia della bambina perduta* (2014), which foregrounds two young girls at the beach, contemplating one of Naples' most famous monuments and a prominent tourist attraction: the *Castel dell'Ovo*.

Europa Editions, the North American publishing house co-founded by Sandro and Sandra Ferri, the owners of Edizioni e/o, retains for all editions the same image as the Italian covers. In addition, Europa underlines the Neapolitan background by changing the title of the series, *L'amica geniale*, into *The Neapolitan Novels*. In contrast with the German and French case, all of Ferrante's translations into English are assigned to a single translator, Ann Goldstein, thereby highlighting the literary status of Ferrante as an important author who can count on her own translator.

Other publishers choose to give a face to the 'brilliant friend'. The Spanish edition by *Lumen* features a close-up of a stunning bride, while the title, *La amiga estupenda*

(2012), indicates the translator and the publishers' choice to underline Lila's beauty over her sharpness. In so doing, *Lumen* sacrifices the reciprocity of the Italian title: in the narrative, it is Lila who refers to Elena as her 'amica geniale'. In addition, the Spanish publishing house renders *Storia del nuovo cognome* as *Un mal nombre* (2013) and *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* as *La deudas del cuerpo* (2014), choices that, together with the sensual nude selected for the cover of the third volume, inscribe the series in the genre of the erotic novel. Gallimard selected a close up of two faces, one of which is blurred, for the first book cover of *L'amie prodigieuse*, which appeared in 2014 in the series *du monde entier*. The image suggests an interpretation according to which Elena and Lila can be seen as the projection of one another, and could refer to any time and context, especially since the girls have green eyes and fair skin. When the book was reprinted in 2016 in the *folio* edition, the cover image was replaced by an old photograph of two girls playing on the street in front of an Italian shop, an image that underlined the temporal distance, but that still does not specifically refer to Naples. The Danish publishing house C&K similarly chooses a black and white portrait (*Min geniale veninde*, 2014), while the Polish edition by Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga (*Genialna przyjaciółka*, 2014) features a photograph of a young blond woman dressed in a contemporary fashion, with features obliterated in a manner reminiscent of the posters of *L'amore molesto*. The German edition by Suhrkamp, published in 2016, echoes the theme of doubling as it features a stylized image of two women of equal height, wearing dresses with the same pattern, looking at a mountain that could represent Vesuvius as well as Mount Fuji.

The attention on the Neapolitan setting therefore grew progressively from 1992 to 2014 in the Edizioni e/o, culminating in the tetralogy, and was further underlined in the

North American editions. In Spain, the emphasis on the Neapolitan setting as distant in space and time culminated in the 2011 edition of Ferrante's early novels by Lumen, but lessened in the series *L'amica geniale*. Overall, the emphasis on Naples and the fascination with the margins, in the tetralogy, appears increasingly proportionate to the distance between the source and the target culture. *Neapolitanes* is more relevant for the US, less for France and Spain and for countries with smaller readerships such as Denmark and Poland, which prefer to establish a connection with different aspects of the stories, such as the relationship between the two girls or the sensuality of the narrative.

The Symbolic and the Real

The success of Ferrante's novels in Anglophone countries is an exceptional phenomenon in a market that devotes little attention to translated books. In the UK, she features next to Karl Ove Knausgaard and Haruki Murakami as one of the foreign authors driving book sales.¹⁷ The success enjoyed by the series in Anglophone countries creates a ripple effect for subsequent translations for other readerships: as of 2016, Ferrante's novels have been translated in 40 countries, and translation rights for the Neapolitan novels have been sold in another 10¹⁸. A closer look at the critical apparatus that surrounds Ferrante's works – constituted by the body of interviews and critical opinions, and also by the debate around the concealed identity of the author – suggests that the focus on Naples and the aura of authenticity conjured by the editorial project played a key role in this reception.

In Italy's literary and academic circuits, Ferrante's books have provoked mixed reactions. Ferrate's writing has been praised by the critic Goffredo Fofi and by feminists such as Marina Terragni and Luisa Muraro, but she has also been sharply criticized by

cultural journalists such as Paolo di Paolo, Cristiano de Majo and Frederika Randall, who have described her books as feuilleton, underlined the lack of humor and criticized the use of a pseudonym as a marketing strategy.¹⁹ Elena Ferrante was already well known in Italy and in Spain when her books received international acclaim. In 1992 her first book, *L'amore molesto*, received the *Premio Procida Isola di Arturo Elsa Morante*, as well as the *Oplonti d'argento* prize, and was shortlisted for the *Premio Strega*. In the next few years, the cinematic adaptations by Mario Martone (*L'amore molesto*, 1995), and Roberto Faenza (*I giorni dell'abbandono*, 2005) contributed to her popularity. However, it was with the series *L'amica geniale* that Ferrante became a best-selling author. In fact, by the time Roberto Saviano nominated the fourth volume, *Storia della bambina perduta* (2014), for the *Premio Strega*, the fact that *l'amore molesto* had been shortlisted two decades earlier had already been forgotten, as 'Ferrante' pointed out in an open letter published in *La Repubblica*.²⁰ The peak of Ferrante's fame in Italy therefore ran parallel to, rather than preceding, the success of her books among Anglophone audiences.

In the US, Ferrante's books have received unanimous acclaim. Her books began to be inscribed into world literature circuits after the literary critic James Wood, in a now famous 2013 article, reviewed *The Days of the Abandonment* and the first volume of the tetralogy in *The New Yorker*.²¹ Wood praised Ferrante as an exceptionally gifted author with a 'shockingly candid' style, describing her writing as marked by second-wave feminism and celebrating her choice to hide under a pen name as an anti-capitalist stance. In the same text, he suggested a comparison between the background of 'poverty, ignorance, violence, and parental threat' of *L'amica geniale*, 'Giovanni Verga's short stories about Sicilian poverty' and 'the neorealist movies by De Sica and Visconti'. In

referring to milestones of the Italian literary and cinematic traditions, these statements provide a cultural frame of reference familiar to international readerships; however, in likening Ferrante to artists active in the late 19th century and in the post-war period, they also reinforce the image of the Italian South as belated and trapped in time.

In the same year in which James Wood's article appeared, Nikil Saval and Dayna Tortorici published a reflection on World Literature in the New York-based literary magazine *N+*.²² In this article, they mentioned the 'feminist' and 'reclusive' Elena Ferrante among the authors who, by producing literature grounded in local issues, challenge a dominating globalized aesthetic. In their view, writings such as Ferrante's offer a healthy alternative to the uniform narratives encouraged by global capitalism. They described Ferrante as a 'local' author who offers an authentic perspective from the margins, and who seeks to 'create taste' rather than satisfying the expectations of 'an international middlebrow audience.' In a response to this article, James Wood noted that the line between 'local' and 'international' writers was a blurry one, but acknowledged: 'Who wouldn't choose a "thorny internationalism" over the "smoothly global", untranslatable felicities over windy width – and Elena Ferrante over Kamila Shamsie?'²³ Two years later, Dayna Tortorici dedicated a long article to Elena Ferrante, in which she focused on the sense of marginality conjured by the novels and called for a comparison with the Canadian Nobel prize winner Alice Munro, whose short stories often feature female protagonists from the working classes against the background of poor towns in northern Ontario. The piece emphasized the degradation of Lila's and Elena's neighbourhood, describing it as 'a site of poverty, madness, and casual violence, associated always with images of poison, muck, dirt, odor, grease, lavas of water and

sewage and garbage and bacteria that fester in an enervating heat'. In Tortorici's reading, the *rione* functions as an allegory: 'More than a place, the old neighbourhood is shorthand for the generations who never escaped it: women "with tight lips and stooping shoulders," chewed up by men, pregnancy, children, poverty, beatings, and sadness; men ruined by violence and the corruption of neighborhood gangsters, monarcho-fascists with ties to the Camorra who bleed the city dry'.²⁴ A 2015 review of the fourth volume of the tetralogy, published in *The London Review of Books*, instead reads and interprets the neighbourhood as a real place: 'Are Elena Ferrante's four Neapolitan novels even books?' wonders Joanna Biggs. 'I got so confused about what was real and what was not while reading Ferrante on a train that I kept on forgetting that I *hadn't* missed my station. The usual distance between fiction and life collapses when you read Ferrante'.²⁵

In an academic article published in 2014, Tiziana de Rogatis identified the neighbourhood in which Ferrante's narratives are set as Rione Luzzatti, located on the eastern outskirts of Naples²⁶. The following year, the American journalist Ann Mah, in an article published in *The New York Times*, went as far as using Ferrante's novels as a tour guide to Naples and placed on the map of the city most of the places mentioned in the texts: the street where Lila buys her wedding gown, the piazza where her father works as a porter, Elena's high school, etc. The focus of her trip was not the historical centre, but the Rione Luzzati, which she described as a place with 'a dangerous, dirty reputation' where one should not venture after dark.²⁷

In a conversation with Scott Esposito for the Two Voices Salon, organized on March 19, 2015, by the Centre for the Art of Translation at Two Lines Press in San Francisco,²⁸ Ann Goldstein, Ferrante's English translator, and Michael Reynolds, the

editor in chief at Europa, characterize the *rione* as a place that is at the same time symbolic and real. Like Tortorici, Goldstein and Reynolds stress an interpretation according to which the *rione* stands for ‘any place one needs to escape from’. However, in the same conversation they note that Ferrante’s fiction reflects accurately the feeling of Naples, its ‘sense of place’. Significantly, Reynolds recalls his experience as a tourist and his excursions in ‘infamous neighbourhoods’ to confirm the accuracy of the novel’s background.

In an article in *The Paris Review*, in which the Ferris published (in English) an interview allegedly conducted in person with Ferrante, we find again the familiar oscillation between the *rione* as a real place and as a place of the imagination. Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola narrate their visit to Naples from the perspective of outsiders and address with familiarity their audience of readers/ potential visitors:

Our conversation with Ferrante began in Naples. Our original plan was to visit the neighborhood depicted in the Neapolitan novels, then walk along the seafront, but at the last moment Ferrante changed her mind about the neighborhood. Places of the imagination are visited in books, she said. Seen in reality they may be hard to recognize; they are disappointing, they might even seem fake. We tried the seafront, but in the end, because it was a rainy evening, we retreated to the lobby of the Hotel Royal Continental, just opposite the Castel dell’Ovo.

From here, out of the rain, we could every so often glimpse people passing along the streets and imagine the characters who have for so long occupied our imaginations and our hearts.²⁹

If the way in which the interview begins invites the readers to give up on the idea of looking for Lila and Elena’s neighbourhood, directing them to more familiar location such as the Hotel Royal Continental and the Castel dell’Ovo (particular attention is dedicated to the food enjoyed at each spot), the answers provided convey the opposite message. In this text, Ferrante confirms the information given in the biographical notes

with comments such as ‘for years I had in my mind stories about the periphery of Naples, where I was born and grew up. I had in my minds cries, crude family acts of violence I had witnessed as a child, domestic objects’³⁰ Just like the interviews released by Ferrante throughout the years and gathered in the collections *La frantumaglia*, these statements overlap with the episodes described in the early novels and in the tetralogy – the seamstress mother, the story of *la poverella*, and so on – creating a thick network of correspondences between Ferrante’s fiction and its authorial construction.

Authenticity

In the tetralogy, the character of Raffaella, also called Lina or Lila, hardly leaves Naples and its surrounding and remains anchored to the *rione*. In contrast, Elena, or Lenù, studies at the most prestigious institution in Italy (the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa), becomes a successful writer and travels through Italy, Europe and the United States. It is Elena who, in the fiction, narrates the evolution of her friendship with Lila throughout the years, from childhood to maturity and old age. This character shares several traits with ‘Ferrante’s’ biography, according to the information provided by her publishers and by letters contained in *La frantumaglia*: her first name, the Neapolitan upbringing, the background as a Greek scholar, her career as a novelist. Even her last name, *Greco*, echoes Greece, the place that the publishers claim to be Ferrante’s current residence.³¹ Similarly to Ferrante’s books, Elena’s second novel, in the fiction, is received as ‘una sorta di autobiografia, una sistemazione in forma di romanzo dell’esperienza che avevo avuto della Napoli più povera e violenta’.³² Particularly in her second novel, Elena combines her childhood experience in the *rione* with what she has learned in Pisa, Florence and Milan. Like Ferrante’s *L’amore molesto*, reviewed as a

‘thriller domestico’ in a ‘Napoli plumbea che non dà tregua’, Elena’s novel is described as ‘una storia ambientata a Napoli inedita, dai colori rosso sangue’³³. Originating in personal experience, the story is reworked from the perspective of an outsider, and just like the last books of the tetralogy it betrays a fascination with the margins. As in the tetralogy, in this novel, the marker that characterizes the lower classes is the Neapolitan dialect. When Elena revises her novel in Naples, one of the aspects that she keeps changing concerns the use of multilingualism: ‘Nella prima versione – mi dicevo – ho messo troppo dialetto. E cancellavo, rifacevo. Poi mi pareva di averne messo troppo poco e ne aggiungevo’³⁴. At the end of the tetralogy, we learn that Lila is writing her own book, whose subject is ‘Napoli nella sua intrezza’³⁵ and of which she talks ‘mescolando dialetto, lingua italiana e citazioni coltissime’³⁶.

All novels in the tetralogy present a warning that all facts, characters and dialogues mentioned are the fruit of the imagination of the author, and that any reference to reality is purely coincidental. In negating any reference to reality, these statements underline the suspicion, confirmed in Ferrante’s interviews, that the neighbourhood does indeed exist or at least existed, that the stories narrated stem directly from the author’s experience and that she has witnessed first-hand the abuse that she describes in the novels. In line with this, Europa chooses to quote on the front cover of *My Brilliant Friend* praise by Alice Sebold (‘Elena Ferrante will blow you away’), thereby establishing a connection between the mysterious novelist and another author famous for her description of degraded suburbs, whose novels elaborate on the experience of the violence that she suffered as a young woman. The strong sense of authenticity is also reflected in the numerous articles that, in the last few years, have compared the novels of

Elena Ferrante to the books of Karl Ove Knausgaard, characterizing both authors as ‘autobiographical writers’.³⁷

In the conversation at the Two Voices Salon, as well as in numerous other interviews, Anne Goldstein and Michael Reynolds expressed no doubt that Ferrante is a female writer who grew up in Naples and now lives on a Greek island, as stated in the biographies on the books’ covers and in the interviews released through her publishers at Edizioni e/o, Sandro and Sandra Ferri. At the same time, they released hints that thickened the Ferrante mystery— such as Goldstein’s acknowledgement that she asks the advice of Domenico Starnone, Anita Raja’s husband, when she needs to translate specific Neapolitan expressions.

As Ferrante became increasingly known, articles speculating on her identity multiplied in the Italian and foreign press: suspects ranged from the Neapolitan writer Domenico Starnone to the critic Goffredo Fofi to the professor Marcella Marmo to Starnone’s wife Anita Raja. In 2016, Claudio Gatti, an Italian journalist for *Il Sole 24 ore*, demonstrated that the compensation for Anita Raja, translator from German for Edizioni e/o, increased considerably by 2014-15, when the tetralogy became an international bestseller. Raja’s biography, as Gatti pointed out, had little to do with the details described in the collection of interviews gathered in *La frantumaglia* and with the story portrayed in the novels, as the translator ‘has no sisters, only a younger brother, and although she was born in Naples, she moved to Rome with her family at the age of three and has lived there ever since.’³⁸ The fact that Raja’s mother was born in Germany, into a family of Polish Jews, spoke Italian with a strong German accent and had no knowledge of Neapolitan dialect particularly challenged the correspondence between the novel’s

narratives and the fictional biography constructed around Ferrante. The unmasking, however, left many details unanswered, such as the question of whether the novels are or not the fruit of a collaboration with Raja's husband, Starnone. Moreover, it did not put an end to the Ferrante fever and to the sense of authenticity conjured by the narrative. In an article published on the same day, Gatti made up for the discovery by tracing a new correspondence between the novels and the author's biography, shifting the focus from Anita Raja to her mother, Golda Frieda Petzenbaum, who in Gatti's view shared many features with Lila, the 'brilliant friend'.³⁹ Authenticity thus continued to function as a corollary to these narratives.

Ironically, the image selected by Edizioni e/o for the cover of the autobiographical volume *La frantumaglia* is a re-elaborated version of Nathan Altman's portrait of Anna Achmatova, an artist famous for the way in which she meticulously shaped her public image. On the cover, Achmatova's portrait is headless, a carefully constructed image without a face.

Staged Marginality

In an essay on authenticity, Virginia Richter underlines that authenticity and postmodernity seem at first sight incompatible concepts, since postmodernity is characterized by an awareness of the mediated nature of all representations, while authenticity involves 'a nostalgia for pure origins'.⁴⁰ This is, however, only the case for writers whose identity is unmarked, and whose authorial position already gives them a certain authority. As Huggan argues, authenticity remains instead an important category for evaluating books written by women or narratives by writers from ethnic minorities.⁴¹ Constructing an authorial voice pretending to belong to a marginalized group is often

seen as unethical appropriation, as a gesture which exploits an affiliation with vulnerable communities for the sake of visibility. As famous examples, Huggan quotes the cases of Benjamin Wilkomirski and Mudrooroo, who constructed authorial figures as a Holocaust survival and as an Aboriginal writer respectively.⁴² In emphasizing Naples's marginality and subalternity, and in stressing the network of correspondences between the author's biography and the stories taking place in the novels, the agents involved in the Elena Ferrante project may be suspected of weaving a similar strategy. However, as Huggan notes, 'staged marginality', which he defines as 'a process by which marginalized individuals or social groups are moved to dramatize their "subordinate status" for the benefit of a mainstream audience', is not necessarily a diminishing practice, and that in certain contexts 'it may, and often does, have a critical or even a subversive function'.⁴³ In the case of Elena Ferrante, the emphasis on the margins and the staged authorial construction contributed to the novels' visibility in Italy, notwithstanding the fact that they are published by a small independent publisher, and to their popularity in markets that traditionally pay little attention to translated books such as the UK and the US.

Dialect and Translatability

The fact that dialect is constantly mentioned, but never quoted in the text, is one of the unifying stylistic features in Ferrante's novels. Scholars such as Laura Benedetti, Stefania Lucamante, and Stiliana Milkova have written extensively about the use of dialect in the books that precede the tetralogy. Benedetti notes that Ferrante subverts the conventions according to which dialect is seen as the language of authenticity and affection, and uses it instead as an instrument of oppression, obscenity and violence.⁴⁴ Lucamante adds that Neapolitan dialect is a marker of *napoletanità*, an index of 'atavistic, southern woman

pathos’;⁴⁵ Milkova underlines how dialect ‘becomes disgusting in its extraordinary capacity to articulate the revolting’.⁴⁶ In his introduction to Ferrante’s first three novels, Edgardo Dolby emphasizes the clear-cut dichotomy according to which ‘l’insulto, la volgarità, l’oscenità si esprimono in dialetto, che è viscerale, mentre ciò che è ammodo, sereno e razionale si dice in italiano, che origina dalla ragione – ma anche dall’immaginario delle protagoniste’.⁴⁷

Throughout the tetralogy, characters use translation and code-switching from Italian into dialect and vice versa as a way to mark boundaries, establish hierarchies and create categories of belonging, as well as to include or exclude other characters from an emotional sphere. The use of Neapolitan only partially mirrors the characters’ movements within and outside the *rione*. There are marginal characters, like Lila’s parents or her husband, who only express themselves in dialect and never cross the boundaries of the neighbourhood. There are high-class, educated characters like the Airotas who only use a sophisticated Standard Italian. For both categories, the language in which they express themselves is synonymous with a way of life; both set of characters experience difficulties, uneasiness and distress in confronting each other’s worlds. For instance, at the beginning of the tetralogy Lila is characterized as an irksome and violent young girl from whom the other children stay away because of her aggressive use of Neapolitan; she soon distinguishes herself for her elegant use of written and spoken Standard Italian, but continues to resort to dialect whenever she needs a sharper means of expression. In the first volume, Elena complains that only certain types of conversation can be conveyed in dialect: ‘in dialetto era difficile ragionare sulla corruzione della giustizia terrena, come si vedeva bene durante il pranzo a casa di Don Rodrigo, o sui rapporti tra Dio, lo Spirito

Santo e Gesù....'⁴⁸ In the later volumes, she comments on how, just like Ferrante, she has given voice to the world of the *rione* in her writing for a national and international audience, and on how this experience has given her confidence and strength ('mi sentii forte, non più vittima delle mie origini, capace di dominarle, di dar loro forma')⁴⁹. The ability to translate becomes the key to changing social status. However, in the end of the series we also learn that translatability has limits: Lila ultimately chooses dialect as a barrier, and Elena's dialect is reduced to a translation from Italian.⁵⁰

Stylistically, all this is reported in Standard Italian. As Rebecca Falkoff notes, 'The novels seem to perform the Italian aphorism "*tradurre è tradire*": to translate is to betray. They *translate* by rewriting Lila's lost pages, along with the Neapolitan dialect that is continually alluded to but virtually excluded from the tetralogy'.⁵¹ In *L'amore molesto* and *I giorni dell'abbandono*, the contrast between Italian and Neapolitan is constantly emphasized by narrator and characters, but dialect is never used; in *La figlia oscura*, the author uses Neapolitan in a single sentence, as Leda remembers her mother's last words ('sento 'nu poch'e friddo, Leda, e me sto cacanno sotto'⁵²). In the tetralogy, the use of dialect is minimal, limited to a few peculiar expressions and insults reported in dialogue. Curiously, dialect features more often in the letters gathered in *La frantumaglia*.

The novels have, nevertheless, successfully conveyed their vernacular flavour. Thus, referring to the tetralogy, the literary critic James Wood describes the *rione* as a world in which 'a character can be casually described as struggling to speak in Italian' and adds that 'mostly people in this book are using Neapolitan vernacular'.⁵³ Stefania Lucamante, describing *I giorni dell'abbandono*, comments that 'the utilization of neo-

standard Italian and her Neapolitan dialect define the plastic possibilities of Italian language at their best'.⁵⁴ In a talk on Ferrante given in Rome on the occasion of the *Festival della letteratura* in June 2014, Jhumpa Lahiri commented on how she could feel behind Ferrante's words the taste of the dialect. The effect is stronger in translation, especially in the Anglophone context. In fact, since translators from Italian into English have traditionally rendered dialect into plain language, erasing levels of difference within the source text, the Anglophone reader is left with the impression that dialect is directly quoted in the original.

In the conversation that took place in 2015 in San Francisco at the Two Voices Salon, participants from the audience asked Ann Goldstein about the difficulties entailed in translating Neapolitan. As Goldstein acknowledged, there are no difficulties, because Ferrante mostly uses standard Italian, although for most readers who approach the texts in translation this remains impossible to discern. During the same event, the moderator asked about the features that characterize Elena Ferrante as an Italian author. Goldstein and Reynolds underlined Ferrante's status as an outsider in the literary tradition and her controversial treatment of the mother-daughter relationship; they stressed Ferrante's background as a classicist, as shown by the references to the *Aeneid*.⁵⁵ The question of specificity and universality were also frequently addressed.

As Goldstein and Reynold stress, the world of childhood, the development of female friendship, and the issue of poverty are universal themes. However, the novels' cultural frame of reference is an international one: many of the books mentioned (from de Amicis' *Cuore* to Virgil's *Aeneid* to Alcott's *Little Women* to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to Joyce's *Ulysses* to de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxième Sexe*) are world classics that

would be recognized by most readers independently of their geo-cultural location.⁵⁶ Although scholars have frequently pointed out intertextual links to the work of Elsa Morante and Anna Maria Ortese, no text is woven in the narrative in such a way to require knowledge of the Italian literary tradition. The last volume of the tetralogy, which takes place in the Berlusconi years, frequently mentions Italian press – there are, for example, references to *La Repubblica* and *Panorama* – but the reader is never asked to understand the position of these media outlets. And while the series spans half a century, events are hinted at in the background, without indulging in episodes that require specific knowledge of Italian history. Moreover, most of the geographical locations mentioned in the novel – Naples, Pisa, Milan and the specific references to the topography of Naples, such as Via Toledo, Via Tasso, Via Chiaia, monuments such as Castel dell’Ovo, etc. – would be familiar to any tourist or visitor. Lila’s passionate study of Naples, her description of the city and its history come rather abruptly in the end of the fourth book, giving the author the opportunity to expose her encyclopaedic knowledge, almost in response to the relevance given by American critics to the Neapolitan background.

The books underline Naples’ specificity, its particular cultural and linguistic context, but at the same time avoid weaving references in a way that requires an in-depth knowledge of Neapolitan culture or history and stay away from linguistic experimentation. They portray the ‘local’ and the ‘particular’, but remain in line with the tourist gaze. This increases their translatability and facilitates international readerships. The books feature, however, a very tight network of references concerning Ferrante’s novels, her interviews, and the information released her publishers, critics and translators.

The Elena Ferrante project, in other words, is highly self-referential, and the agents involved in its production have been extremely attentive to its reception.

Conclusion

Elena Ferrante has often been praised for her locally-grounded narratives in a literary market populated by global and cosmopolitan literary celebrities. The novels emphasize Naples' specificity and particularity, and describe its outskirts as a place distant in space and time with its own socio-cultural structures. In addition, the paratextual elements that surround the texts and the publishers' insistence on Ferrante as a female author who grew up in the Neapolitan periphery contributed to present the *rione* as a factual, existent place, so skilfully described that, in a similar way to what happens with Elena Greco's own book, it has been taken for real. Some Neapolitan businesses have been quick to embrace this contradiction and to market it to the advantage of the local tourist industry, and have gone as far selling ice creams and pizzas dedicated to Lila Cerullo and Elena Greco.⁵⁷

At the end of the conversation with Ann Goldstein and Michael Reynolds at Two Voices Salon, a member of the audience asks Reynolds whether the publishing house is looking for texts that offer 'access to a universal experience with the frisson of the specific'. Reynolds's answer is 'Yes, that is exactly what we are looking for. It is a philosophy: there are universal things that are better expressed in the specificity of a local culture'. In the same conversation, Reynolds underlines the thoroughness of the publishing house Europa, the literal quality of Goldstein's translation and the fact that the publishing house does not modify the text to tailor it to American readers. The other side of the coin is that this choice entails a process of selection according to which preference is given to translation-friendly texts, works that radiate vernacular flavour but do not

challenge the knowledge or expectations of target audiences. The representation of *Neapolitaness* in terms of cultural and linguistic specificity thus entails both resistance to and complacency with the mechanisms of a global market. Ferrante's novels can be seen as entangled in a complex dynamic according to which local narratives are, as Huggan describes as often happening in postcolonial texts, 'manipulated for the purpose of channelling difference into areas where it can be attractively packaged, and, at the same time, safely contained',⁵⁸ while the author's concealed identity functioned on the one hand as an oppositional stance, a protest against the culture of literary celebrities, and on the other as an effective marketing strategy. Overall, the 'Elena Ferrante project' and the success of these books in translation highlight readers' tendency to see authenticity as bound to the dimension of the local, and a preference for this dimension over the global. However, a close reading of the texts, interviews, editor's statements and of the critical apparatus that surrounds the novels also demonstrates that the discourse of the particular and the universal, as scholars of globalisation note, are closely interrelated, that in the Elena Ferrante project local subjectivity is constructed by 'highly local and highly translocal considerations'⁵⁹ and 'what is called local is in large degree constructed on a global, or at least pan- or super-local basis'.⁶⁰

ENDNOTES:

¹ Ferrante, Elena. *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2011), p. 357.

² Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1987), p.1.

³ See Valerie Pellat, ed. *Texts, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013); Şehnaz Tahir-Gürçaglar ‘What Texts Don’t Tell: The Use of Paratexts in Translation Research’, in Theo Hermans (ed.) *Crosscultural Transgressions. Research Models in Translation Studies II: Historical and Ideological Issues* (Manchester: St. Jerome, 2002); Richard Watts, ‘Translating Culture: Reading the Paratext of Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*’, *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 13. 2 (2000), 29-46.

⁴ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.87.

⁵ Elena Ferrante, *La frantumaglia* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2003) p. 10.

⁶ Elena Ferrante, *L’amica geniale* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2011), p. 54

⁷ Elena Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*, p. 68.

⁸ Elena Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*, p.192.

⁹ For the implication of the mother-daughter relationship in *L’amica geniale* and in the previous novels signed as ‘Ferrante’, see Laura Benedetti ‘Il linguaggio dell’Amicizia e della città: L’amica geniale di Elena Ferrante tra continuità e cambiamento’, *Quaderni d’Italianistica* 33.2 (2012), 175-176. Benedetti argues that the mother-daughter relationship, central in the other novels, becomes a secondary concern in *L’amica geniale*, and underlines how Elena’s hatred towards her mother and her sense of repulsion towards her injured leg go hand in hand with her attraction for Lila, who is described in terms of agility and nimbleness.

¹⁰ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2014), p. 438.

¹¹ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 438.

¹² This image is particularly curious as the torn dress, by exposing the toy’s naked back, suggests violated innocence and abuse—in the narrative Leda instead buys a new dress for the naked doll.

¹³ In the novel, the beach is the location where Amalia’s body is found at the beginning of the story.

¹⁴ The similarities between the pen name Elena Ferrante and Elsa Morante have been noticed by scholars and critics; in the interviews gathered in *La frantumaglia*, Ferrante often mentions Elsa Morante as one of the writers that she most admires. See the 1995 letter to Goffredo Fofi, now included in *La frantumaglia*, pp. 63-63.

¹⁵ See Stefania Lucamante, *A Multitude of Women: The Challenge of the Contemporary Italian Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 37: ‘In the transition from Colchis to the rich and advanced Corinth, from the crime-ridden Naples to industrialized Turin, the situations

appear to be strikingly similar: As in the case made by Wolf about Medea, Olga's boundary can easily become an abyss if the person in question isn't ready or able to conform to her new circumstances, which her hosts think of as superior to and more advanced than her older ones'.

¹⁶ Edgardo Dolby, 'Introduzione', in Elena Ferrante, *Cronache del mal d'amore. L'amore molesto. I giorni dell'abbandono. La figlia oscura*, (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2011), p.13.

¹⁷ For sales records in the UK, see Alison Flood's article, 'Translated Fiction sells better in the UK than English Fiction, Research Finds', *The Guardian*, 9 May 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/may/09/translated-fiction-sells-better-uk-english-fiction-elena-ferrante-haruki-murakami>

¹⁸ For international sales records as of 2016, see Stefan Mensch's article, 'Ferrante-Fieber. Der unbekannte Weltstar' *SpiegelOnline*, 22 August 2016. Available at

<http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/elena-ferrante-der-unbekannte-weltstar-a-1108307.html>

¹⁹ For an analysis of the different reception of Ferrante's books in Italy and in the US, see Rebecca Falkoff's article 'To Translate Is to Betray: On the Elena Ferrante Phenomenon in Italy and the US', *Public Books*, March 15, 2015. Available at: <http://www.publicbooks.org/fiction/to-translate-is-to-betray-on-the-elena-ferrante-phenomenon-in-italy-and-the-us>

²⁰ See Elena Ferrante's article, 'Elena Ferrante: "accetto la candidatura allo strega"', *La Repubblica*, February 24, 2016. Available at: http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2015/02/24/news/elena_ferrante_accetto_la_candidatura_allo_strega-108043390/

²¹ See James Wood, 'Women on the Verge. The Fiction of Elena Ferrante.' *The New Yorker*, January 21, 2013. Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/21/women-on-the-verge>

²² Dayna Tortorici and Nikil Saval 'World Lite: What is Global Literature?' *N+* issue 17 Fall 2013. Available at:

<https://nplusonemag.com/issue-17/the-intellectual-situation/world-lite/>

²³ James Wood, 'On not Going Home', *London Review of Books*, 36.4, 3-8. February 20, 2014. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v36/n04/james-wood/on-not-going-home>

²⁴ Dayna Tortorici. 'Those like us: on Elena Ferrante'. *N+*, 22, Spring 2015. Available at: <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-22/reviews/those-like-us/>

²⁵ Joanna Biggs, 'I was blind, she a falcon', *London Review of Books* 37.17, September 10, 2015. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n17/joanna-biggs/i-was-blind-she-a-falcon>

²⁶ See Tiziana De Rogatis, 'L'amore molesto di Elena Ferrante: mito classico e identità femminile' *Allegoria* 70.2 (2014): 147-82.

²⁷ See Ann Mah, 'Elena Ferrante's Naples, Then and Now', *The New York Times*, January 14, 2016.

Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/17/travel/elena-ferrante-naples.html?partner=IFTTT>

²⁸ The discussion is available as a podcast at <http://twolinespress.com/audio-two-voices-salon-with-michael-reynolds-and-ann-goldstein-on-elena-ferrante/>

²⁹ Sandro Ferri, Sandra Ozzola, 'Art of Fiction No. 228,' *Paris Review*, 212 (Spring 2015): 211-233, p.221.

³⁰ Sandro Ferri, Sandra Ozzola, 'Art of Fiction No. 228,' p. 213.

³¹ See Laura Benedetti, 'Il linguaggio dell'Amicizia e della città: L'amica geniale di Elena Ferrante tra continuità e cambiamento' *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 33.2 (2012), p. 177.

³² Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2014), p. 243.

³³ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 254

³⁴ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 294

³⁵ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 493.

³⁶ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 504.

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- ³⁷ Among numerous examples, see Joshua Rothman's 'Knausgaard or Ferrante?' *The New Yorker*, March 25, 2015. Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/knausgaard-or-ferrante>; or Heather Mallick's 'Elena Ferrante and Karl Ove Knausgaard are writing true life in fiction', *The Star*, April 25, 2015. Available at: <https://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2015/04/25/elena-ferrante-and-karl-ove-knausgaard-are-writing-true-life-in-fiction.html>
- ³⁸ Claudio Gatti, 'Elena Ferrante: An Answer?', *The New York Review of Books*, October 2, 2016. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PAR276961.jpg>
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- ³⁹ Claudio Gatti, 'The Story Behind a Name', *The New York Review of Books*, October 2, 2016. Available at: <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2016/10/02/story-behind-a-name-elena-ferrante/>
- ⁴⁰ Virginia Richter, 'Authenticity: Why We Still Need It Although It Doesn't Exist', *Transcultural English Studies. Theories, Fictions, Realities*. Ed. By Frank Schulze-Engler and Sissy Helff. Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2009. 37-58.
- ⁴¹ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 155.
- ⁴² Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, p. 163
- ⁴³ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, p. 87
- ⁴⁴ Laura Benedetti, 'Il linguaggio dell'Amicizia e della città: L'amica geniale di Elena Ferrante tra continuità e cambiamento', *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 33.2 (2012): 177-187, p.177.
- ⁴⁵ Stefania Lucamante. *A Multitude of Women: The Challenge of the Contemporary Italian Novel* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p.86.
- ⁴⁶ Stilian Milkova, 'Mothers, Daughters, Dolls: On Disgust in Elena Ferrante's *la figlia oscura*' *Italian Culture*, 31.2 (2013): 91-109, p. 93.
- ⁴⁷ Edgardo Dolby, 'Introduzione', Elena Ferrante, *Cronache del mal d'amore. L'amore molesto. I giorni dell'abbandono. La figlia oscura*, p.14.
- ⁴⁸ Elena Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, p. 255
- ⁴⁹ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 244.
- ⁵⁰ Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, p. 258.
- ⁵¹ Rebecca Falkoff, 'To Translate Is to Betray: On the Elena Ferrante Phenomenon in Italy and the US', *Public Books*, March 15, 2015. Available at: <http://www.publicbooks.org/fiction/to-translate-is-to-betray-on-the-elena-ferrante-phenomenon-in-italy-and-the-us>
- ⁵² Elena Ferrante, *La figlia oscura* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 2006), p. 93.
- ⁵³ James Wood, 'Women on the Verge. The fiction of Elena Ferrante.' *The New Yorker*, January 21, 2013.
Available at: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/21/women-on-the-verge>
- ⁵⁴ See Lucamante's *A Multitude of Women: The Challenge of the Contemporary Italian Novel*, p. 91.
- ⁵⁵ For an account of the influence of classical sources in Ferrante, see Tiziana De Rogatis 'L'amore molesto di Elena Ferrante: mito classico e identità femminile', pp.147-82, and Stefania Lucamante *A Multitude of Women: The Challenge of the Contemporary Italian Novel*, pp.86-87. Lucamante reads *I giorni dell'abbandono* as a rewriting Simone de Beauvoir's *La femme rompue*, but also compares its protagonist to the Greek heroine Medea: 'Like Medea, she is a foreigner in another land, and she is just as passionate. They share a Mediterranean origin, a symbolic reference to passion in literature that should not be overlooked' (87).
- ⁵⁶ The reference to Gozzano in *I giorni dell'abbandono* is an exception.
- ⁵⁷ 'Elena Ferrante, arrivano le pizze "dedicate"...' *Il Libraio*, June 18, 2015
Available at: <http://www.illibraio.it/pizze-elena-ferrante-234676/>
- ⁵⁸ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*, p.24.

⁵⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

⁶⁰ Roland Robertson, 'Globalisation or glocalisation?' *The Journal of International Communication*, 18:2 (2012): 191-208, p.192.