

***Giallo & Subversive: The Neapolitan Novels and the Onset of “Ferrante Fever” in Brazil / Giallo & Subversivo – A série napolitana e a fabricação da “Febre Ferrante” no Brasil***

*Andreia Pagani Maranhão\**

**ABSTRACT**

With several bestsellers under her belt, Elena Ferrante is one of today’s most influential writers, albeit anonymous. Her work is an example of what we could call transitional literature, as it indicates mutations, residues and signs of the present, emphasizing displacements and margins in sociopolitical metamorphoses as well as civilization and ethical conflicts of living. In this essay, we intend to explore some elements of the ‘pop hybridism’ of her work, highlighting aspects that shaped her reception in Brazil and her feverish readership. What she calls ‘demargination’ is presented as potency: it allows a reconnection to the past and the knowledge of its implications in the identity, behavior and ethics of common people. Political action imbricate in historical experience: the narrative makes possible – in the present time – alterations of routes, previous ruptures, resistances, and blockages.

**KEYWORDS:** Elena Ferrante; Mass literature; Historical Criticism; Hybridism

**RESUMO**

*Com diversos best sellers no currículo, Elena Ferrante é uma das escritoras mais influentes da atualidade; não obstante, é anônima. Sua obra é exemplo do que chamamos literatura de transição, pois indica mutações, resquícios e sinais do presente, enfatizando deslocamentos e margens nas metamorfoses sociopolíticas, bem como conflitos civilizacionais e éticos do viver. Neste ensaio, pretende-se explorar alguns elementos do ‘hibridismo pop’ de sua obra, evidenciando aspectos que conformaram sua recepção no Brasil e a adesão febril aos seus escritos. O que ela denomina ‘desmarginação’ é apresentado como potência: permite a reaproximação do passado e o conhecimento de suas implicações na identidade, conduta e ética das pessoas comuns. Ação política munida da experiência histórica, a narrativa possibilita – no presente – alterações de rotas, rupturas prévias, resistências, bloqueios.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Elena Ferrante; Literatura de massa; Crítica Histórica; Hibridismo

---

\* Centro Universitário INTA – UNINTA, Centro de Ciências da Saúde, Departamento de Educação Física, Campus Sobral, Sobral, Ceará, Brazil; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8030-0043>; [andreiapagani@gmail.com](mailto:andreiapagani@gmail.com)

## Introduction

Contrary to the hypothesis that there would have a general lack of interest in reading and that fiction would not be something socially needed anymore, the writer Elena Ferrante is acknowledged by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 most influential people in the world (BRUNA, 2016). In the *World Cat* catalogue, her *oeuvre* amounts to 380 works in 1613 publications, translated to 26 different languages, available in 23624 catalogued libraries.<sup>1</sup> The tetralogy *The Neapolitan Novels* is the author's biggest hit; the first volume, *My Brilliant Friend*, was published 160 times in 20 languages between 2011 and 2018.

The present study aims to explore some “pop hybridism” elements in her works, pointing out few aspects that corroborate her reception in Brazil, and the feverish following to her writings. Having the perception of a Bestseller Project as a starting point, solely for the intents of coveting her writings, enticing curiosity and identification with the author. *The Neapolitan Novels* were published by Globo Livros in Brazil, aware of its certain success. The tetralogy encompasses almost fifteen hundred pages (1,500), and the reading of it borders the interface called *giulla* (more specifically, oral, popular, and romanticized), which makes the text light and fast paced, even though it also brings forth the singularities of points of view, social class positions, and a strong action ethics that builds identities through overlays of subalternities, exploitations, and oppressions. While this novel can be considered a great marketing move, how can one value the ethics and political resistance order that its structure and contents take, which are so beautiful and diffuse? Which resistances are possible in Ferrante's perspective?

### 1 Globo's Best Seller Project – Contemporary *Giallo* Hybridism

In 2015, Elena Ferrante's works arrived in Brazil, published by the Blue Library seal of Globo Livros. Its reception had been carefully built since the year before, with several news, strategic posts in blogs, reviews, criticism, and specialists' comments regarding the world phenomenon surrounding her books, the awards, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-nr96044668/>

controversies about her identity. The country's main newspapers published essays and reviews on the novel, and most of them presented positive feedback on the novel.<sup>2</sup>

In an extremely short time, there were fan groups, book clubs, interpretative theses, such a dense cultural movement that was called by Giacomo Durzide as “Ferrante Fever.” In his documentary, specialists, fans, intellectuals, critics, and booksellers dialogue about the permeability of Ferrante's work, pointing out to the subjective and anonymous intimacy that makes her so particular and enchanting, reinforcing the idea that the translation and diffusion Project in Brazil was a sure bet.

Her first novel – *Troubling Love* (translated into English in 2006),<sup>3</sup> from 1992, winner of the Arturo-Elsa Morante Award, indicated to the very prestigious *Strega* award, and translated to the cinema, under the direction of Mario Martone, running in the 48th Cannes Festival. The narrative about her professional trajectory in the last 27 years is marked by notable works, and legions of admirers, and her choice for anonymity is controversial: some critics consider it a media strategy.

Indeed, she is not the first, and will not be the last writer to resort to pseudonyms, which is common practice in earlier literature, and even in modern one, being a political practice in Italy and in all Europe in the period between wars. However, Ferrante steps beyond, and speaks with subtlety about a sociological delicate issue – the right and the duty of an author's anonymity.

*Frantumaglia – os caminhos de uma escritora* (in English, published and translated in 2012 as *Fragments*),<sup>4</sup> published in Brazil by Intrínseca, in 2017, is a book written to work exactly this theme. In this book, the author rebuilds hybrid elements between the personal and the *persona* Ferrante, through a span from 1991 to 2016. It contains letters, interviews, reflections about the writing craft, identity, editing, inspiration, and specially, the role of the literary work in the multimedia context, and screenplay of the text.

---

<sup>2</sup> It is not the intent of this paper to map all the processes involved in the release of Ferrante's translated works in Brazil. It is enough to say that all the positive reviews had a relevant role, as well as massive television propaganda. In order to dwell into this discussion, two texts bring the general tone of curiosity and controversy: AGUILAR (2015) and CASARIN (2014).

<sup>3</sup> FERRANTE, E. *Troubling Love*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions UK, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> FERRANTE, E. *Fragments: Elena Ferrante on Writing, Reading, and Anonymity*. Edited and translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions UK, 2012.

She explains with a lot of panache that her so-called disappearance must force readers to face the texts, to interpret them, and uncover them as “self-sufficient organisms,” as plants that break plaster and insist on breaking out slowly and continuously, season after season, blooming, not looking for “the frail flesh and bones of the author’s face”, but the “naked physiognomy that remains in each efficient word” (FERRANTE, 2016, p.67).<sup>5</sup>

Her books please readers of amenities, but also intellectuals and scholars, internationally. Professor James Wood published a rigorous, but very kind review in the *New Yorker* that contributed a lot to trivialize the reception of the novels in the United States (WOOD, 2013). In 2016, researchers Grace Russo and Stephanie Bullaro published a more substantial collection entitled *The Works of Elena Ferrante – Reconfiguring the margins*, where they map the main influxes of criticism and research on Ferrante’s works, emphasizing the concept of “demarginalization” (RUSSO; BULLARO, 2016).

Brazilian researcher, Fabiane Secches, in her master’s thesis, analyzed the relations between literature and psychoanalyses in the *oeuvre* of Ferrante, and she writes systematically about the author. However, in Italy, Ferrante was only regarded worthy when she became international smash success. Her first success was an international fabrication, American, and enticed the Italian curiosity regarding her identity (CORTELAZZO; TUZZI, 2017, p.13). Research themes in Italian universities are largely related to their identity and family novels (GAMBARO, 2014; CORTELAZZO; TUZZI, 2017).

## 1.1 Bildungsroman – Coming-of-Age Novel

*The Neapolitan Novels* are a tetralogy originally published by the Italian publishing company E/O, between 2011 and 2014, and, in conceptual terms, the text is built as a genre of difficult indexing. Initially, it could be considered a *bildungsroman* – a coming-of-age novel, in which the life of the protagonist and the narrator of the story mix themselves with the modern *italianess* and the Southern conflicts that subsist.

---

<sup>5</sup> FERRANTE, E. *Frantumaglia – A writer’s journey*. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions, 2016.

The growth of the character Lila is filled with issues regarding the conflicts and metamorphoses of Naples throughout post-fascism and World War II, building subjectivity and a unique narrative interface in the scope of social structure.

As a novel, it draws the marking of time, in different moments of the narrator's and protagonist's story, representing self-knowledge aspects and knowledge of the world, internalizing the historic dimension, and distinguishing itself from an autobiography by the abstraction of the analyses of what is real, what values human's universality, the anthropological-literary typologization already present in Ginzburg, in the beginning of the 1970s.

Referring to a dated model, *The Neapolitan Novels* are considered very contemporary, because they reestablish humanism, not necessarily liberal, in the context of fight for survival. Besides that, it is a text open to the mutations pertinent to the historic time, being a tool for depicting the current cultural and literary circumstances (cf. FLORA, 2009).

The rhythm is paced through the periods of life, with distinct nuclei and parallel stories. In Volume I, *My Brilliant Friend*<sup>6</sup> shows the beginning of a "new era," with the backdrop of the political and economical rebuild of the country in post-fascism time and World War II. The negative to establish a historical "parenthesis," metaphorically speaking, through the disappearance of a social figure and "the entire life and she had left behind" (FERRANTE, 2012, p.23) is the starting point to activate memory and resistance, evident in the prologue, entitled *Erasing the traces*.

The anachronical persistence of fascisms and archaism in modern Italy is the key to understanding the girls' childhood, whose center is the story of *Dom Aquile*. Teenage years coincide with the beginning of the 1960s and with the subjective-social demargination phenomenon, "that on those occasions the outlines of people and things suddenly dissolved, disappeared" (FERRANTE, 2012, p.89). The *Story of shoes* talks about mutations of the body, of relationships, and the awakening of an awareness of being part of an era, with its difficult continuities: "was already there before us [...]; and so, without knowing it, they continued it, they were immersed in the things of before, and we kept them inside us, too" (FERRANTE, 2012, p.163).

---

<sup>6</sup> FERRANTE, E. *My Brilliant Friend*. Neapolitan Novels, Book One. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York, Europa Editions, 2012.

In Volume II, the time of youth brings forth, in *The Story of a New Name*,<sup>7</sup> the main character's wedding, Lila's, recently called Solara. Her character starts to get shaped from diverse social situations, which produce a supposed social well-being in the onset of the Republic. The idea of entrepreneurship allied to a great will of liberalization provides impetus of self-entrepreneurship to the shoemaker Cerullo and his family. Lenu, the narrator, on the other hand, enjoys another dimension of social well-being, presented by the possibility to deepen her studies and to follow a career at the university, where she accesses new political and theoretical references. Lila, with her new house in a new neighborhood, is becoming aware of rebelliousness and a community memory that gives new meaning to the definition of territory and class struggles.

The themes of sexual freedom and new ways of living come up as stratified contents in the classes. Lila's passion for Nino and the openly extramarital affair lived by the protagonist could be read as a counterculture nucleus, redeemed by its secondary place that the affair takes in the social life. Her husband refers to the lover and to her father with disdain: "tell your papa that he was wrong to write that he didn't like the way the store looked. When you take money, you have to write that everything's great, otherwise no more money" (FERRANTE, 2013, p.279).

The more intellectualized militancy is vehemently criticized, at the same time that in university circles the idea of recomposing the revolutionary march and social relations were in vogue in Italy and in general in Europe (FERRANTE, 2017, pp.334-336). Economic power and the persistence of archaism in daily relationships seem to define time as a setback, maintaining the order. The definition of social place after graduating was for Lenu a distinct mark of the old Italy in the new world of work. "Pietro was treated as if he had already tenure, and I was treated as a normal brilliant student [...] Simple like that. Shame, shame, shame. This overconfidence that had grown in me, this ambition to be like Pietro" (FERRANTE, 2013, p.428).

In Volume III, dedicated to a narrative interlude, adulthood takes place for the character and the narrator, demonstrated by the change in the point of view of Lenu in relation to Lila. The story of *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*<sup>8</sup> is unified by the

---

<sup>7</sup> FERRANTE, E. *The Story of a New Name*. Neapolitan Novels, Book Two. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York, Europa Editions, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> FERRANTE, E. *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*. Neapolitan Novels, Book Three. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York, Europa Editions, 2014.

absences. Ferrante reclaimed the present time narrative and opens a painful route identifying absences, from a time when “against all predictions, it didn't collapse, on the contrary, it started running lightly” (2014, p.365).

The last encounter with Lila comes to light and with it the attempt to rebuild years of life in separation, repairing hiatus and stories that had been kept open. Even though the flow of events and outcomes is very intense, it can be perceived that this volume is the most psychological and sociological of them all, because the evaluation of each character's destinies is done meticulously. Society and the will to change the world are also mocked, as if no one there had gone through changes, choosing to remain the same, or yet, that history had been told without the facts.

I had thoughts in my head that I'd even want to formulate, I feared that the facts would adapt magically to the words. But I couldn't erase the phrases, I felt in my head its syntax all ready, and I was scared, I was fascinated by it, it caused me horror, it seduced me. My training to find an order to establish connections between distant elements had taken me by the hand (FERRANTE, 2014, p.302).

Volume IV is set during the mature years, because it is about an ending without an outcome. *The Story of the Lost Child*<sup>9</sup> is made up by two parts and it starts when the narrator comes to an epiphany regarding her obsession towards the protagonist. The old age is represented in the *Story of spite*, when each concept was already well established to be resignified. Two married and separated women reconnect in order to live in communion, a southern substance – resilience and resistance – bound them together and made it possible to live together and be friends, in spite of so much pain each brought upon the other.

We can consider that the lost child is the new man, love, and new way of living, which would be possible due to a permanent revolution, the aura of defeat, uncertainty and angst. Pietro analyzes Nino, and it is emblematic of this perspective of foreseeing the autocratic overthrow of the new left, at the same time the elitism of ruling layers perseveres. “Sarratore is intelligence without traditions [...] That he's no one. And for a person who is no one to become someone is more important than anything else. The result is that this Signor Sarratore is an unreliable person” (FERRANTE, 2015, p.61).

---

<sup>9</sup> FERRANTE, E. *The Story of the Lost Child*. Neapolitan Novels, Book Four. Translated by Ann Goldstein. New York, Europa Editions, 2015.

As a whole, the novels are an example of literature of transition, because it worries about the mutations, remnants, and signs of time. In this last volume, the theme is set at the margins of a sociopolitical metamorphosis in which Ferrante rewrites the terms of a social contract in which some forms of living are validated and others denied.

Similar to a child who gets lost, the social defeat is very painful. Soon, this discomfort brought upon the absence, the end of love appears as observation lenses to see the Western world. The end of an era is narrated as mourning that encompasses all categories which no longer describe the senses of time. “We, who wanted to enact the revolution were the ones who, even in the midst of chaos, were always invented an order and pretended to know exactly how things were going” (FERRANTE, 2015, p.64).

It is possible to observe that the direction of movement has changed, for the deromanticized analysis of the new ruling class, expressed in Pietro, points to “a petty professor with no imagination, highly praised only because of his surname and his obtuse activity in the Communist Party” (FERRANTE, 2015, p.218). The collapse of this organizational model is shown by radical Nino Sarratore’s transformism. He ends up defending, through left-wing views, positions of the old right wing, and building a party as “anything other than a distributor of favors in exchange for support” (FERRANTE, 2015, p.219).

To sum up, in the epilogue, *Restitution* does not give meaning back to history, except in the symbolic dimension, due to the acidity and ill manners derived from it. Thus, the child has already been lost; there is only the old doll left, the resignation towards the end.

## 1.2 Multitextualities

The novel titled *giallo* (yellow) consists in an Italian literary and cinematic genre, which was originally a thriller or police genre, very widespread in the post-war years. The name comes from Pulp Fiction magazines, published since the end of the 19th century as fast entertainment. It had no great artistic pretensions, and the chapters were published weekly. The styles varied between adventure, fantasy, science fiction, police novel, soft porn, and horror.

Although it was considered sub literature within specialized circles, *giallo* became very important for the popularization of reading and serialization of writings, known as “newspaper serials.” Plots consisted of mysteries, unbridled passions, murders, and the books were printed in large scale, using newsprint paper, thus, very accessible to general population.

The text was light and the covers were very appealing, so Italian editor Alberto Mondadori, in 1929, had the idea of standardizing the edition of the volumes so as to make them cheaper and easily identifiable. At that moment, the glued edition with board paper covers and yellow embossing started to be used. It was such a huge success that between 1929 and 1941 the average printing of the Yellow Books became biweekly.

This format allowed the coinage of the term *giallo*, which became a concept, known by any person and able to express synthetically the typology of a book. In English, the expression *thrillers* is not enough to name mystery, detective, crime or spicy books. In French, the *noir* novel brings out a literary tradition of crime and mystery, but it is also not enough to encompass the concept of *giallo* (AGNELLI; BARTOCCI; ROSELLINI, 1998).

Currently, *giallo* is in series and imagetic format, using support from other media besides the book (FUSILLO, 2018). There is a script; a sequence of photos with precise descriptions, frames that are composed and metamorphosed, coming to life with speed. They could easily be pictured in *Stories* by Instagram®, in street theater sketches, or in comic books with no loss. They are imitations of the trivial and disorder of life; they are inconclusive frames, with distinct temporalities.

It can be noticed that behind all that there is a refined complex process, because they are stories designed to speak for themselves, dismissing any presentations or explanations, and that is why it can be considered somewhat scientific. Besides that, it can be considered experimental, since it is empirical and, above all, produces a narrative fixated in historical aspects that replace interpretative boundaries or margins, and lead the readers to understand small signs of a historical time in flashes.

It is noteworthy to point out that Ferrante does not speak of a phenomenon circumscribed to a post-World-War-II Italy. Since it deals with current issues, the 20th century drama created very deep roots, with new rhizomes and hybridisms that are presented as new phenomena of conservatism, violence, and intolerance. The author leads

the reader to a heretic or dissident interpretation regarding the specters that mold time, disturbing inconclusive historic premises, breaking the parenthesis of invisibility of the specially catastrophic periods in Italian and world history.

Today, we are concerned specially with differences, their contaminations, border dynamics, idiomatic aspects; and it is becoming clearer to us that real sense is none other than the inexhaustibility of meaning, the scattered, confused, and infinite meaning; in other words, the vertiginous movement of exchange, of meaning's transport and plurality (LARROSA; SKLIAR, 2011, p.8; my translation).<sup>10</sup>

Her text is very clear, so the ideas become understandable to any one, and in some way, authorizes anyone to talk about what he or she understood, to interpret and establish relations between her texts and others, the time of the narratives and the present time. Besides that, the text enables and authorizes young people to create book clubs and discuss in detail or identify social types. It also allows *youtubers* and *booktubers* to analyze the books through reviews, and intellectuals may do their theme presentations.

Differently from literary texts that are considered *cult*, which present academic boundaries or linguistic structures that make them inaccessible and much harder for people who do not attend college, Ferrante's literature has a *giallo* interface that potentializes its mainstream appeal: it is a place where a unique political aspect resides, an unprecedented capacity to talk about thorny issues without the compromise of being decisive.

Usually the author's works are hybrid products, oscillating between written, oral, imagnetic textualities: hypertexts, sitcoms. In this sense, they are made for this generation of consumers, interpreters, and interlocutors. The virtual interface is inescapable, and agreeable to Brazilian readers. The sitcom is also broadcast by HBO TV channel, and the texts are imbricate in such a way that a reading flow becomes hybrid and serialized.

Looking at it as unique, through the vulnerable frailty of an outlaw, the author seeks to affirm and expand herself in other places where life can spring up – in small portraits of family and community life, sensibilities, understanding, sorority, and

---

<sup>10</sup> From the original: “Hoje nos preocupam, sobretudo, as diferenças, suas contaminações, suas dinâmicas fronteiriças, seus aspectos idiomáticos; e cada vez é mais claro para nós que o próprio sentido não é outra coisa senão o inesgotável do significado, o disperso, o confuso e infinito de significado ou, dito de outra forma, o movimento vertiginoso do intercâmbio, do transporte e da pluralidade de significado.”

discoveries of new social spaces where life can unfold itself, in its own place. It feels like the poet and writer Almeida Garrett, leaking the soul on the paper without leaving his land, filled with introspection, self scrutiny, and dissection.

The controversies of the nation's formation, political unity, and territorialization keep on being reviewed by some of the Italian intellectuals. Linguistic issues are old and, at the same time, current. The identification and unfamiliarity between official and mother tongue, the rupture between language and reality remain. The confrontation between Italy's general condition and neighboring countries are reflexes of specificities and regionalisms that cross the Roman empire, Christianization, unification, fascism, and post war era. These are mottoes of modernity without a balance between the internal and international forces, class strata, productive systems, and political directions.

In Ferrante's text, there is a nexus between "coordination and subordination," the exhibition of the normalization of the regime of exception, of the failed resolution of the most important problems in social life, and a healthy growth of Italian populations. These are deep and crucial issues pertaining to the moral and intellectual reform that Gramsci spoke about, as a substrate of the rebuild of a cultural life (GRAMSCI, 1971).<sup>11</sup>

According to Gramsci (1971),<sup>12</sup> irony is fair in literature; it brands the artist of the sentimental contents of his creation. And in the case of history, irony takes the shape of 'in love' sarcasm, which aspire new ways of being and living. It is a transitory form of expression, which takes the reader to new concepts regarding historic development, and how events took place. Sarcasm is, thus, controversial regarding popular convictions, seeking to encompass and renew them; giving them a new meaning, a new taste, a new language (GRAMSCI, 1971).<sup>13</sup>

In this sense, Elena Ferrante is very crafty, because, as immigrants, we are taken to roam that imaginary Naples, survival of so many brilliant girls that – who would know – would be forgotten in *Storia*. Each character fought for a Picture of the city, according to their way of perceiving changes. Nino's Naples was "at peace and heading toward good

---

<sup>11</sup> GRAMSCI, A. *Prision Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 11.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 11.

government; Lila's was taking revenge on all the predators, it didn't give a damn about Communists and Socialists, it was starting over from zero" (FERRANTE, 2012, p.35).<sup>14</sup>

In which city did they live? This Naples and, especially, the neighborhood are the explanation of an existential territory, of a universe of reference in which the agencies are conditioned, creations are germinated, fermented, and cared for as a part of a world system of ways and regularities of life that were still shifting and adjusting to mutations, exceptionalities, and the underground wars that characterized post-World War II.

The texts – as well as the stories they tell – are fragmented. Unfinishedness, chaos, disorder, and nonsense are assumed as philosophical premises, open story, and *becoming*. The Elenas (Ferrante and Greco), using the artifice of metalanguage, speak openly of the multiplicity of analysis of their work, the points of view that are more explored, and the possible new interpretations. These very same aspects did not *piaciono* (pleased) the Italian readers, who considered the writer not epic, without poetry, being very simple, even shallow. For Torino's Book Club, the serialization of the texts, and the publishing company's exploits, importing television valid formats, made the novels repetitive and redundant (CLUB DEL LIBRO TORINO, 2017).

## 2 Ethics Resistance + Aesthetics Creation

Alfredo Bosi (1996) explains, in an essay, that resistance when intertwined with narrative art expresses itself in two fields, viz., as a theme or as an inherent process to writing. According to the author, "the translation to the ethics sphere is possible [...] when the narrator explores a catalyst force of life in society: its *values*" (BOSI, 1996, p.13; italics in original; my translation).<sup>15</sup>

Hence, in Ferrante's tetralogy we see resistance as a mark of ambivalence. Memory is situated at the time of resistance, a reference to fascism and the war that comes from a "before," being the present of the story this very same construction of the "after" that marks the consolidation of a new project of society. As a theme, rebuilding is a sign

---

<sup>14</sup> For reference, see footnote 6.

<sup>15</sup> From the original "a translação da esfera ética para a estética é possível [...] quando o narrador se põe a explorar uma força catalisadora da vida em sociedade: os seus *valores*."

of a literature of resistance, as well as the search for life flow, the fabric of a modern realism, whose language interacts with the reader's reception.

In the aesthetics sphere, there are three predominant elements of resistance. The first one is the overcoming of the individualistic project. Differently from the classic coming-of-age novel, Ferrante's individual is not a character, but a social type, a collective being, a fusion of narrator and narrated, an invention of a historical time.

It can be noticed that community is the starting point, a collective subject, since it admits the possibility of skewing and even narrowing the domestic view. A reflection on the reality emerges from the text, adopting a very unique aesthetics and form of narration. Ferrante starts with the family nucleus, as a plural and contradictory unity that represents basic aspects of social life, bringing forth a unique point of view towards the narrative. The main character is the narrator's best friend, and in *Wonderful Years*, along with the narrator, the protagonist experiences major events in her life, making her story surpass oblivion.

The neighborhood is presented as an imaginary device to provide meaning to existence, similarity, and difference – all that perpasses us and embraces the characters in the text. The way they perceive themselves and the world around them is a door through which we are invited to cross and engage in the story – not as an expressed truth –, but as the way we are transported to the conflicts presented in the narrative and translate them into the present time.

*Elena Greco* – Lenu. The narrator is also a character who is always in exile, uprooted from childhood, the time when she sees herself as incomplete and biased. It is the second *persona* of her childhood that studies to escape the inexorable logic of her social status. She opens herself up to permanently wander the world, which leads her to adopt cultures and also lose something that is not very clear: the city, the country, the dialect, smells, tastes, and neighborhood habits, friendship, secrets, ties shared by everyone – but one. Elena's education seems like a long interlude, something that turns past into future (the before into now). Her human condition is presented as foreign, out of place, displaced, in disarray. Nevertheless, there is a social cognisance of signs and behaviors.

*Raffaella Cerullo* – Lina. She represents the time where everything is in its place, and there is a place for each one. It is the ethics of what is coming to be: work, hospitality,

creation. She does not testify. Her pain is spewed only when her friend narrates. Lina represents transgression of validated meanings, resistances that pulse in the events, the individual of action and, at the same time, the community that Greco designs for his novel through imagination. She is the inspiring muse that becomes an *other* insofar as Lenu's perspective steps away, fading without the oxygen of familiarity.

The second element of resistance conformation is the validation of the symbolic and dialectal as a universe of historic overlapping, which acquires meaning as they are being shown. This way, there is polyphony over the standard Italian, when traces of orality come to light as a sign of realism. It attributes political traits when it shows the dialect as a mechanism of coping and of affection, translating the language of a multiple Italianess built upon dialectical bases

The novel does not intend to be a sociological text, but it deals with a few social problems of the time, using strategies that accommodate a metanarrative that contributes to a double function of giving meaning to the reality of the imaginary Naples and creating a climax that corresponds to characters' existential problems. The dialectal structure comes into Ferrante's text as a rediscovery of the subject's humanization; the emotional voice, the southern passion, the metaphor and allegories are symbols of a time and a direction of change.

The symbols of that generation are devices that conform and produce metaphorical sceneries of a daily history, heirs of initial lexical devices of Natalia Ginzburg, whose meaning is shared only by family or community, for example, mineral, vegetable, animal. Stupid! (cf. GINZBURG, 2018).<sup>16</sup>

In Ferrante's writings, symbology is fruitful and it can be viewed as of two main types: initially, the community symbols, shared by the friends, by the families in the neighborhood, and by a class stratum. By extension, the symbols can also be seen by the readers who follow the story; doll, needle, menstruation, sex, Cerullo shoe (cf. FERRANTE, 2015a; 2015b), book, trip, daughter, computer (cf. FERRANTE, 2016a; 2016b).

Overlapping them, there emerge a set of temporal symbols, characteristic of an inescapable exile, which are more denotative, such as the bankruptcy and decay of lifetime idols, evidenced at times by Nino Sarratore opportunistic vulgarity, and at others,

---

<sup>16</sup> GINZBURG, N. *Family Lexicon*. Translated by Jehnny Phee. New York: Main Editions, 2017.

by Lina's limiting esteem for her writing skills in her mature years (FERRANTE, 2016a; 2016b). There are signs of frailty in social relations and economic centralization, revealed during marriage dissolutions, and the financial twists and turns that weaken small business people, while great fortunes experience exponential growth. There are signs of residues or permanent returns to fascism that escape through the violence that were felt and quieted.

These are elements that provide keys and routes to the labyrinths of the story's micro universe; irregular aspects, with distinct levels of density and comprehension. At the same time, there is irony, a fast pace and fluidity in the narrative, which is intimate, and yet depersonalized. It is popular and adapted to the public at large, exactly because it is repostable. Many stories can be overlapped to the characters', and they reflect something very original and contemporary, since the writing as one speaks, language from oral narrative is easily understood and translated to the written form, translatable also to other artistic interfaces, such as cinema, theater, and poetry.

Ferrante speaks of neopolitics not as an agenda, but as a method, working citizenship as a place of struggle – social rise, and facing historic poverty as ways of living a dignified life. Therefore, the author “reconfigures the margins” of class struggle in the Naples of the golden years through brutal politicization, which is both archetypical and insurmountable.

The change in times and the permanent resistance during this fascist period impose a transitory vitality to the idea of history, once time is a living thing. *Macunaíma*, the main character of a Brazilian novel,<sup>17</sup> plays this game of “passing” time and returns, hides and transmutes, leaving behind unfinished chunks, unrolled threads, in a general feeling of loss.

Longing is the key to a dialectal structure of writing, translated at times from the Italian to Neapolitan (by Lenu), at times from Neapolitan to Italian (by other characters in the neighborhood, when they want to show off their culture) and allows the story of humanisms and selective understandings to be told – when Lenu wants to emphasize the truth, for example: “if you don't understand that I'm here running the risk that at any moment my mother might show up and start hitting me because of you, then it means

---

<sup>17</sup> ANDRADE, M. *Macunaíma*. Translated from the Brazilian Portuguese by E. A. Goodland. New York Random House, 1984.

that you're thinking only of yourself, that I don't matter to you at all" (FERRANTE, 2013, p.15). The dialect trace is the long writing, filled with sentences, the use of subjunctives, and oral forms of communication, violence, or mockery as a method.

The dialect appears as an interface to come and go into the neighborhood and family life, and the Italian language reflects the entrance in social life. The same structure is used by Lina, inversely: "and only when she uttered that expression in the dialect, shit men, *uommen'emmerd*, did she notice that she had broken the barrier of her husband's measured tones. A second afterward, Stefano struck her in the face with his strong hand" (FERRANTE, 2013, p.24).

The origins, the nexuses of a sham italianess are also registers of a life filled with overlapping, of stories and more stories that accumulate in the basements of memory, and alternate subjects, configuring and disfiguring each and every one of the characters.

Lenù marks the awareness of this difficulty ascribed to peripherals, while demonstrates the distance that separated people who had formal education from the others, feeling ashamed beforehand of the presence of Lila in a social event. "Contrary to what she had been doing, she began to utter a profusion of overexcited sentences, sometimes kneading in the vocabulary of the dialect, muttered that she mustn't ever be distracted" (FERRANTE, 2015, p.100). It can be noticed that the author resorts to Italian, because she knows that it is socially accepted, but she shows that the dialect has a unique beauty and originality, precisely what gives life to Italian. And she goes on, demonstrating the fear of comparison: "if she merely opened her mouth, everyone would be hypnotized by her intelligence and Professor Galiani herself would be entranced" (FERRANTE, 2013, p.100).

The third element of Ferrante's resistance is the marking of a time pertaining to the subaltern's story, another moral that, in the author's life, makes the work gain centrality and speak for itself. The text acquires the status of work in an ontological sense for being a human self-realization. The production of Ferrante's *persona* is a new way of inventing a new subject, to overcome the methodological personalism and individualism distinctive of bourgeois literature. It is the planoptic strategy that was reappropriated by underground guerilla movements, such as Anonymous, Black Blocs – seeing without being seen.

The friendship between Elena Greco and Rafaella Cerullo is a mirror and measure of the two *personas* of contemporary times, two kinds of unique geniality, who are irreducible, inseparable, co-determined. Simultaneously, the narrative of desacralization of friendship and of all of the millennial human values is also noticed. At that time, there are new forms and possibilities of living and the dream of changing values juxtaposes with dignity and melancholy. There is a new stratus rising, especially regarding entrepreneurship of commerce and the process that begins financing.

The lives and deaths of each character reveal traces of permanence or extinction of social types. *Dom Aquile* and *Manoela Solara* die and with them the old molds of fascism and community economy; the archaic predominance gives way to a stillborn imperial mission of their children. Alfonso dies revealing mutant fascisms, sexist violence, and body control. Rino, on his turn, dies launching the era of overdoses.

Lina's disappearance calls attention to the vanishing – not necessarily death – of a social type, a pure and sublime perception that matter, nature and people's character were mutating. The end of old age brings no forthcoming possibilities, but only a cycle that closes. Ginzburg's "before," as a century that drags itself beyond its limits, to the strange 20th century that does not end or vanish, dilutes itself as an oil stain on hot ground, as Magri's holographic.

The Southern aspect reveals itself to go beyond the dialect, bringing about the diffuse idea of global subalternities: as Lenu, too intelligent for the community and too unpolished for the university. The *Neapolitan Novels* are autobiographical of a generation whose emphasis, more than time and history, is expressed by its rites, failures, discretely alluded to medial positions, to the *quasi*, which is the Italian way to translate politics: semi-communism, semi-Marxism, semi-feminism, semi-anarchism, semi-Freudism (FERRANTE, 2016b, pp.275-277), through the unattainable progress and the shallowness of social mobility, through the tendency to primeval egalitarianism. It is an ode to Southern intelligence and to these subjects' protagonism.

Ferrante presents 'cognitive hooks' that entwine readers in the fluid perception of being a subaltern. Their stories have merit for being retellings that "revisit the social parable from down low, from the point of view of those to whom social ascension was

not a sociological definition, but a junction between life and survival” (COLOMBO, 2014; my translation).<sup>18</sup>

Identity devices are built without the pretention of a point of view. They create intimacy with the narrative and the vision of a person whose social importance broadens it, but unfamiliarity and child clarity/rudeness remain, forging identifications, affection, contradictions, and controversy.

They are small life stories, narrated on the flow of discontinuity and out-of-rhythm continuity, gently capturing the *becoming* of reality, without asphyxiating it. Moreover, there is the turn, the *svolta* that aims to look at the unique, the peasant, the subaltern urban from the countryside with a hint of vanguard, the one who does not have shelter, classification, or a simple tag. Using this mechanism, Ferrante changes what is private into common, in a way that people feel that those unique traces belong to them, being allowed to connect to very different people in space and time.

It is not just storytelling or sentimental marketing; it is a fine mode of communication that enters a unity of meaning of the present time with geniality and fluidity. They are juxtapositions, micro texts, fragments that compose a kaleidoscope that brings together different historical times through similarities and particularities.

### 3 Grudges. Near the End

This text tried to show the badges that allowed and produced the huge success of Ferrante’s tetralogy, starting from the idea of pop hybridism. The first element of this configuration is a grand Project of Sales, built from the partnership of great publishing companies. The contemporary *giallo*, as presented, has a wide strategy of diffusion that pervades multireferentiality (textual, oral, imagetic, multimedia), and the construction of a social imaginary that goes beyond academic discourse (fan clubs, review channels, and interpreters), and the feedback from consumer channels (bookstores, Internet, cinema, TV channels).

Specifically regarding Ferrante, anonymity is used in an ambivalent manner, because it feeds popular curiosity and mythical atmosphere. The success of the

---

<sup>18</sup> From the Italian original: “ripercorre quella parabola [sociale] dal basso, dal punto di vista di quelli per cui l’ascensore sociale non era una definizione sociologica ma il confine tra la vita e la sopravvivenza.”

*Neapolitan Novels* reveals, among other issues, the permanence of the subjective identification with subalternities, the popular types. It also shows that the southern conflict, when properly and artistically translated, has a global impact, dialectal resonances that resignified migrations, memories, and the partial constitution of citizenship for the majority of the world population.

Meanwhile, the place of the coming-of-age novel is also contradictory, because it refers to a classic model in literature and, at the same time, rebuilds meanings of social life and possibilities of action in the present time. Ferrante's characters, as Secches (2018, p.01) points out, are bordering and experiencing crisis or moments of psychic disorganization: they march on the edge of madness, between existence and inexistence. It is the present of a historical disjunctive, an open moment in which everything is not determined beforehand.

Even if the novels have the merit of removing the reader from the status of a mere consumer, demanding an interpretation, a position, the place of discourse is always the margin, a reclusion. The first element can be localized through this point of view, and it configures resistance in its narrative. Ferrante reinvents the subject, breaks with the bourgeois individualism of the coming-of-age novel and presents collective, subjects who are hybrid or co-determined in the center of the action. The narrator is, by force of character, only the object of narration, in which all characters are submersed in a setting of strong existential delimitations.

Resistance appears as the underlying theme, of past-present in the life and destruction of the social fabric as a flow of the inconclusive binomial: fascism and war. As a commendation to simple friendship ties, the author demonstrates that deterritorialization, as a permanent process, acculturates and darkens memory, alters the nature of people, removing them from the margins. This process is also a power that allows invented actions: the reapproximation of fascist times, and the knowledge of its implications in people's identity, conduct, and ethics, making possible route alterations, previous ruptures, resistances, and blockages as well as the unprecedented historical moment, the advantage of experience, and the care of the warning.

Ferrante cleverly points to a junction, a "margin" of the popular taste for serialized novels, of long historical themed nucleus novels, imagetic texts, and acid criticism against

the common-sense society, which is revisited, experimented, and fertilized with germs of a new form of social life.

As an aesthetic reinvention, the author values the dialect and the symbolic dimension, replacing the need to deal with millenary human values within families and communities. She introduces readers to the “family lexicon” of Greco and Cerullo, speaking to 99% of population, the sabotaged percentage.

At last, Ferrante leaves a message about longing, feminism, friendship, extinction, because she demonstrates that everything is light, subtle, transitory, and that care, attention and the capacity for renewal are needed, since we are at the margin, at the edge of disappearing, but we are alive, lucid, and we are many.

## REFERENCES

AGNELLI, T.; BARTOCCI, U.; ROSELLINI, A. *Nascita, morte e resurrezione del libro giallo in Italia: breve storia e catalogo orientativo dei principali collane edite in Italia dal 1903 al 1948*. Perugia, 1998. Disponível em: <http://www.cartesio-episteme.net/cap1.htm>. Acesso em 13/08/19.

AGUILAR, A. Elena Ferrante: A obsessão de Lena com coerência é um pecado capital contra a verdade. *El país*. Disponível em: [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/11/05/cultura/1446727025\\_558899.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2015/11/05/cultura/1446727025_558899.html). Acesso em 13/08/19.

BENJAMIN, W. *Magia e técnica, arte e política: ensaios sobre literatura e história da cultura*. Sérgio Paulo Rouanet. Prefácio de Jeanne Marie Gagnebin. 3. ed. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987.

BOSI, A. Narrativa e resistência. *Itinerários*. Araraquara – SP, nº 10, 1996. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.fclar.unesp.br/itinerarios/article/view/2577/2207>. Acesso em 13/08/19.

BRUNA, M. Elena Ferrante tra le 100 persone più influenti al mondo per “Time”. *Corriere de la Sera*, 22/04/2016. Disponível em: [https://www.corriere.it/cultura/16\\_aprile\\_22/elena-ferrante-time-f6a470ce-0862-11e6-bb7c-24926a577cc5.shtml?refresh\\_ce-cp](https://www.corriere.it/cultura/16_aprile_22/elena-ferrante-time-f6a470ce-0862-11e6-bb7c-24926a577cc5.shtml?refresh_ce-cp). Acesso em 13/08/19.

CASARIN, R. Escritora italiana que vive no anonimato será publicada no Brasil em 2015. *UOL*, 25/11/2014. Disponível em: <https://entretenimento.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2014/11/25/escritora-italiana-que-vive-no-anonimato-sera-publicada-no-brasil-em-2015.htm>. Acesso em 13/08/19.

CLUB DEL LIBRO TORINO. *L'Amica geniale*. Edizione di 30/09/2017. Disponível em: <https://clubdellibrotorino.wordpress.com/2017/10/02/32-lamica-geniale-elena-ferrante/>. Acesso em 28/10/19.

COLOMBO, A. Quando la realtà si “smargina”. *Il Manifesto*. 14.11.14.

- CORTELAZZO, M.; TUZZI, A. Sulle tracce di Elena Ferrante: questioni di método e primi risultati. In: Giuseppe Palumbo (a cura di). *Testi, corpora, confronti interlinguistici: approcci qualitativi e quantitativi*. Trieste, EUT Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2017. p.11-25.
- FERRANTE, E. *A amiga genial*. Tradução Maurício Santana Dias. Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 2015a.
- FERRANTE, E. *História do novo sobrenome*. Tradução Maurício Santana Dias. Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 2015b.
- FERRANTE, E. *História de quem foge e de quem fica*. Tradução Maurício Santana Dias. Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 2016a.
- FERRANTE, E. *História da menina perdida*. Tradução Maurício Santana Dias. Rio de Janeiro: Globo, 2016b.
- FERRANTE, E. *Frantumaglia: os caminhos de uma escritora*. Tradução Marcello Lino. Rio de Janeiro: Intrínseca, 2017.
- FLORA, L. Bildungsroman. In: CEIA, Carlos. *E-Dicionário de termos literários*. 2009. Disponível em: <http://edtl.fcsh.unl.pt/encyclopedia/bildungsroman/>. Acesso em: 11/08/19.
- FUSILLO, M. Sulla smarginatura – Tre punti-chiave per Elena Ferrante. *Allegoria*. Ano XXX, Nº 77, Jan- Jun 2018. In: <https://www.allegoriaonline.it/index.php/i-numeri-precedenti/allegoria-n-73/128-il-libro-in-questione/73/926-sulla-smarginatura-tre-punti-chiave-per-elena-ferrante>. Acesso em: 11/08/19.
- GAMBARO, E. Il fascino del regresso. Note su L'Amica geniale di Elena Ferrante. *Enthymema*. Nº XI, 2014.
- GRAMSCI, A. *Quaderni del carcere*. Torino: Einaudi, 1975.
- GINZBURG, N. *Léxico familiar*. Tradução Homero Freitas de Andrade. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2018.
- LARROSA, J.; SKLIAR, C. Babilônios somos. A modo de apresentação. In: LARROSA, J.; SKLIAR, C. (orgs.). *Habitantes de Babel*. Políticas e poéticas da diferença. 2. ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2011.
- RUSSO, G.; BULLARO, S. V. L. (eds.). *The Works of Elena Ferrante*. Reconfiguring the Margins. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016.
- SECCHES, F. *Vulcões iminentes: as personagens limítrofes de Elena Ferrante*. *Valkírias*. 26 set. 2017. In: <http://valkirias.com.br/personagens-limitrofes-elena-ferrante/>. Acesso em: 11/08/19.
- WOOD, J. *Women on the Verge*. The fiction of Elena Ferrante. *New Yorker*. Jan 2013. Disponível em: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/21/women-on-the-verge>. Acesso em: 11/08/19.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My great gratitude to professors Gisleuda de Araújo Gabriel for the revision of the text and Adriane Ferreira Veras for the English version.

Translated by Adriane Ferreira Veras – [adriveras@gmail.com](mailto:adriveras@gmail.com)

*Received June 11, 2019*

*Accepted July 26, 2020*