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# Staging a Word: Overcoming and Recovering Familial Bonds in Elena Ferrante's *Neapolitan Novels*

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Elena Ferrante's tetralogy, also known as the Neapolitan novels (2011–2014), is a story of female friendship: Elena Greco narrates the life of her best friend, Lila Cerullo, who has deliberately disappeared.<sup>1</sup> “Lila,” writes Elena, “voleva non solo sparire lei, adesso, a sessantasei anni, ma anche cancellare tutta la vita che si era lasciata alle spalle. Mi sono sentita molto arrabbiata. [. . .] Ho acceso il computer e ho cominciato a scrivere ogni dettaglio della nostra storia, tutto ciò che mi è rimasto in mente.”<sup>2</sup> Elena starts writing in response to her friend's self-destructive decision: “Puntavo a riafferrarla, a riaverla accanto a me.”<sup>3</sup> The four books cover sixty years both of Italian history and of the two protagonists' lives from 1950 to 2010. Set in one of Naples' poorest neighborhoods, the first volume, *L'amica geniale* (2011), narrates the two friends' childhood, ending in their teenage years with Lila's early marriage. The second volume, *Storia del nuovo cognome* (2012), is about their youth, Lila's first pregnancy, and Elena's departure from Naples to go to the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. The third book, *Storia di chi resta e di chi fugge* (2013), focuses on their separation during adulthood. Finally, *Storia della bambina perduta* (2014) is about their old age, Elena's return to Naples, the kidnapping of Lila's daughter, and Lila's eventual disappearance.

The first volume opens with an index listing the main families of the saga. Among them are “la famiglia Cerullo” and “la famiglia Greco” to which Lila and Elena, the two protagonists, respectively belong.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the tetralogy immediately presents itself as a familial saga, where violence permeates every corner of familial and public life. “Non ho nostalgia della nostra infanzia,” says Elena, narrating in the first person, “è piena di violenza. Ci succedeva di tutto, in casa e fuori, ogni giorno [. . .]. Far male era una malattia.”<sup>5</sup> Because of its relevance to the Neapolitan novels, the question of violence is particularly significant in this paper; as a product of the patriarchy, it prevents the creation of healthy familial bonds and perpetuates itself through the family because of mechanisms that include imitation, social influence, and genetic inheritance. The first section of this article deals with Julia Kristeva's concept of the maternal abject to show how the patriarchal stereotyping of gendered individuals produces violence and compromises familial bonds. The subsequent section on transgenerational

transmissions of violence combines Giuseppe Montalenti, Nicolas Abraham, and Maria Torok's genetic and psychoanalytical theories, respectively, and explores Ferrante's depiction of the patriarchal family as a means for the perpetuation of violence. Finally, the last section illustrates the attempts on the part of Ferrante's characters to resolve such violence; it focuses further on Abraham and Torok's theories and on Luisa Muraro's *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (1991) to investigate concepts of acknowledgement, testimony, and the restoration of the authority of the mother as possible solutions.

#### CONSTRUCTING AND CONSTRAINING THE SELF: A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Ferrante's tetralogy exposes the patriarchal organization of society as the primary cause of violence. The narrator, Elena, depicts her city as chauvinist in the first pages of the book when the figure of Donato Sarratore appears for the first time.<sup>6</sup> The neighborhood considers Donato's kindness and his willingness to help his wife in domestic duties as "cose anomale," as signs of Donato's lack of virility: "tutti i maschi delle palazzine [. . .] lo consideravano un uomo a cui piaceva fare la femmina, tanto più che scriveva poesie e leggeva volentieri a chiunque."<sup>7</sup> It is a society that imposes rigid gender roles on men and women, exploiting and victimizing them.

Elena realizes that every woman around her seems to have been physically conquered and emotionally consumed by her own husband: "Vidi nitidamente le madri di famiglia del rione vecchio. Erano nervose, erano acquiescenti. [. . .] Si trascinarono magrissime, con gli occhi e le guance infossate [. . .] Erano state mangiate dal corpo dei mariti, dei padri, dei fratelli, a cui finivano sempre più per assomigliare."<sup>8</sup> As Elena notes, these women seem manipulated by their male relatives, whom they come to resemble. This resemblance indicates women's total loss of subjectivity and control over their own images. In particular, Lila and her relative Melina provide perhaps the clearest examples of how patriarchal violence acts on women, as they both end up losing their minds. Emblematic in this sense is the picture of Lila as a bride, whose public exposure sparks an argument between the Solara brothers and Stefano, Lila's husband, in the second volume of the tetralogy.<sup>9</sup> Lila herself affirms that her husband views her as "merce di scambio."<sup>10</sup> Even Franco, Elena's first cultured boyfriend, sees his girlfriend as "una possibilità di espandersi al femminile, di prenderne possesso [. . .] la dimostrazione che sapeva essere non solo un uomo al modo giusto ma anche una donna."<sup>11</sup> In other words, Ferrante displays "l'invenzione della donna da parte degli uomini," and Elena becomes fully aware of this in *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, when she gets involved in feminist discourses thanks to her mother-in-law Adele, and reads Carla Lonzi's *Sputiamo su Hegel* (1970).<sup>12</sup> In this work, Lonzi analyzes how patriarchy has shaped the thought systems of canonical authors and thinkers such as Hegel, Marx, Engel, and Freud, whose philosophies have "deprived [woman] of power, of history, of culture, of a role of her own," thus of her power to define

herself, forcing her into “self-sacrifice” via the only social role available for her: motherhood.<sup>13</sup> On the one hand, the way in which Ferrante depicts wives as being subjugated by their husbands perfectly reflects Lonzi’s reflections on the expropriation of female power. On the other hand, Ferrante also hints at a social construction of an image and role for women, which women themselves introject. For example, the repulsion that Elena feels towards her mother reflects the social association of the mother and the female subject with the Kristevian abject, which thus compromises social and familial bonds.

In “Approaching Abjection” (1982), Kristeva describes the “primal repression” or rather, “the abjection of the maternal” as an essential process in the primary formation of the self: in order for the self to become a functional self, it must enter the “Symbolic order,” the rational order of the Father, and “release the hold of *maternal* entity,” thus separating itself from the “Semiotic” order of the Mother.<sup>14</sup> This is because the profound bond, which links the mother’s and the child’s identity, compromises and threatens the latter’s autonomy. In other words, according to Kristeva, the formation of one’s autonomous subjectivity consists of identifying the maternal as an abject, which is dangerous for the integrity and singularity of identity, and consequently rejecting it. In these terms, Elena’s rejection of and fear of becoming like her own mother reflects the Kristevian child who pursues “a reluctant struggle against what, *having been the mother, will turn into an abject*. Repelling, rejecting; [. . .] Ab-jecting.”<sup>15</sup> For example, Elena’s mother’s limping and her crooked eye repulse Elena, who perceives these traits as a threat to her identity, and says: “da me sarebbe spuntata davvero mia madre, zoppa, con l’occhio storto, e nessuno mi avrebbe voluto più bene.”<sup>16</sup>

Kristeva’s concept of the maternal as abject, as other or extraneous, repulsive and threatening, is the result of a patriarchal society where woman and mother are actually perceived as threatening, passive, repulsive, and thus excluded and marginalized.<sup>17</sup> While women, deprived of control over their own image, are the abject(ed), patriarchal society is the Kristevian subject that strays and abjects—the deject. In these terms, Elena’s deep fear of becoming like her mother reflects the negative social construction of the female maternal subject as abject. It also recalls Luce Irigaray’s considerations on the fact that patriarchy negatively affects women’s relationships with their mothers; it imposes the rejection of the mother and therefore does not allow “the daughter [. . .] to control her relationship with the mother.”<sup>18</sup> Ursula Fanning has underlined Elena’s matrophobia in wanting to reject her mother.<sup>19</sup> In fact, on the one hand, Elena has internalized the common social attitude which marginalizes woman, the maternal. On the other hand, her behavior derives from the fact that she wants to abandon her passive female condition; she wants to be a subject, rather than the abject(ed).<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that Elena’s fear of becoming like her mother is not unjustified; the destiny and personality of many people, male and female, around her seem to gradually align with those of their parents.

THE INHERITANCE OF BLOOD: TRANSGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSIONS  
OF VIOLENCE

Elena's fear of becoming like her mother stems from her realization that those around her increasingly begin to resemble their relatives, especially their parents, as time passes. Throughout the four volumes, a series of episodes surrounding Melina and Donato's relationship exemplify this transgenerational behavioral resemblance. After becoming a widow, Lila's relative, Melina, falls in love with Donato and interprets his collaborative relationship with his wife—unusual for a man of the neighborhood—as an injustice towards him. Therefore, as is always the case in Elena's community, even this small anomaly becomes a source of violence. Melina wants to vindicate Donato through continuous spiteful acts against his wife Lidia.<sup>21</sup> Violence germinates throughout the neighborhood and spreads quickly, moving horizontally amongst the inhabitants and vertically across different generations. Lidia's and Melina's hostilities are inevitably passed onto their relatives, specifically onto Lila, and Lidia and Donato's daughter, Marisa. One day Marisa, imitating her own mother, calls Melina “a whore,” and Lila slaps her in response.<sup>22</sup> Imitation is one of the main tools of social education in the neighborhood, although blood and familial bonds play an even more important role in the construction and characterization of the individual in the saga, forming an inescapable link. Lila and Melina's connection stands as one of the earliest examples of genetic inheritance in the novels. Melina's love for Donato gradually compromises her psychological stability and causes her unconventional behaviors, such as eating soap. During one of these episodes in the first volume, Elena notices that Lila, while walking towards the widow, is “ferma dentro ciò che la parente di sua madre stava facendo [. . .]. Aderente. Tutt'uno con Melina.”<sup>23</sup> It is especially in these increasingly frequent moments of madness that Lila's connection with Melina seems more obvious to Elena. In *Storia del nuovo cognome*, for example, Melina gets lost and is found fully dressed and wet in a pond, after one of her “attacchi di pazzia.”<sup>24</sup> Lila, looking at her mother's relative, “pareva commossa [. . .] ma anche ferita, anche atterrita, quasi che se ne sentisse dentro lo stesso scombinio.”<sup>25</sup>

As the narrative progresses, the bond between Melina and Lila emerges as something much deeper than their shared condition as women in a patriarchal society: it seems to be genetic. In the second volume, Ferrante references a conference on Charles Darwin held by Giuseppe Montalenti, which greatly affects Lila, who states: “Non me ne voglio dimenticare più.”<sup>26</sup> In addition to his studies on Darwin, some of Montalenti's greatest contributions to science were essays such as “Frequency of Microcythemia in Some Italian Districts” (1950) and “Further Data on Genetics of Microcythemia” (1952) in which he elaborates a thesis demonstrating that individuals can be genetically modified by their surroundings.<sup>27</sup> Ferrante seems, therefore, to appeal to the Darwinian theories which Montalenti re-evaluated in the 1950s and 1960s, the period in which

the Neapolitan novels are set and during which Montalenti was a professor of genetics at the University of Naples.<sup>28</sup> Ferrante thins the distance between social and genetic influence and applies this concept to her characters in relation to violence; violence seems to have caused a genetic modification of people's DNA, which they transmit to their sons and daughters. This is the reason why Lila, who always seems to have a deep understanding of social dynamics, does not welcome her own pregnancy in the second volume. She sees it as an emptying of herself and an "insediarsi" of something wanted by Stefano, her husband, "una forza sempre più pressante che la stava sgretolando."<sup>29</sup> Pregnancy is the ultimate means by which men conquer, infest, and ravage women's bodies and essence. Pregnancy and blood ties, then, are also the means through which people like Lila inherit their relatives' violent behaviors or trauma, such as Melina's psychosis, which is caused by Donato's subtle seduction and abandonment. After her marriage, Lila also feels "una sempre più grande, più sgovertata infelicità," which torments her, provoking the first manifestations of her later madness, described as "un male [. . .] dietro agli occhi."<sup>30</sup> She jumps from one topic to another while talking and laughs hysterically. Through Lila and Stefano, and many other unfortunate couples in the novels such as Elena and Pietro, Michele and Gigliola, and Pinuccia and Rino, Ferrante also criticizes a society where people are forced to marry early in order to escape their miserable condition. Those unions cannot but lead to further desperation. For example, Stefano will engage in an adulterous relationship with Melina's daughter Ada, whose jealousy makes her behave irrationally, like her mother before her did towards Marisa.<sup>31</sup> Social and genetic factors intertwine to create an inescapable web of violence. Melina's son, Antonio, has also inherited her mental instability and suffers from a nervous breakdown when he is forced into military service.<sup>32</sup> While in the army, he remembers a game that his father used to play with him when he was a child: "si disegnavano con la penna occhi e bocche sulle cinque dita della mano [. . .] e poi le faceva muovere e parlare come se fossero persone."<sup>33</sup> One day, Antonio "aveva avuto l'impressione che la mano di suo padre fosse entrata nella sua e che lui ora avesse dentro le dita gente vera."<sup>34</sup> It is also clear from such episodes that Antonio's psychosis is passed down from his mother as well as from the violent role the patriarchy expects him to play. It is no surprise that Antonio starts to work for the Solara brothers, the neighborhood mobsters, like his father (who died under obscure circumstances) had probably done before him.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, Ferrante makes it clear that both men and women are victims of a society that inherently destroys them, and whose mechanism and social divisions cause a genetic, hereditary modification of the self. In particular, women as mothers, understood merely as wombs, are the tool for the genetic perpetration and transmission of violence and suffering. It is significant, for example, that Lila's mental instability worsens with the efforts on the part of her husband and mother-in-law to end her string of miscarriages, to cure her "insufficienza

as a woman.”<sup>36</sup> In the chauvinist universe that Ferrante depicts, motherhood is thought to be the only place women actually belong. As Irigaray explains, in a patriarchal society, “woman [cannot] control her relation to maternity, unless she reduces herself to that role alone” and “there is no difference between being a mother and being a woman.”<sup>37</sup> In the third volume, for example, a doctor suggests Lila should get pregnant in order to cure her psychological distress.<sup>38</sup> However, this distress is caused by her employer who continually molests her in his factory, and thus by that same chauvinistic society that tells her to be a mother and to offer herself as a vessel for men’s perpetuation. Elena reflects: “I maschi [. . .] si affacciano dentro di noi e si ritraggono lasciandoci, celato nella carne, il loro fantasma,” a phantom that will be inherited by the next generation.<sup>39</sup>

This process is similar to the one described by Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, who believe that one’s unconscious derives from “the father’s or the mother’s unconscious, in which are inscribed the parent’s unspoken fears, their apprehensions, [. . .] their hidden faults.”<sup>40</sup> They speak of a “phantom,” a non-elaborated trauma, a violence committed or suffered, “which passes [. . .] from the parents’ unconscious to the child’s” and repeats itself through generations.<sup>41</sup> Yet, while scholars on trauma such as Abraham and Torok, Gabriele Schwab, and Peter Fonagy psychoanalytically analyze how violence—in the form of a caused or suffered trauma—passes on to the next generation, Ferrante revisits this process and all its derivative dynamics in genetic terms instead.<sup>42</sup> In Ferrante’s novels, violent surroundings genetically modify individuals, who, like animals, adapt to their environment. For example, another victim of such a genetic bond is Nino, Elena’s young crush and classmate. Nino despises his father, Donato Sarratore, for his hypocrisy, for the fact that he is always kind and considerate towards his mother while also cheating on her with other women, including Melina. During their holiday in Ischia, where Nino’s family and Elena are staying during the summer, he tells Elena: “Dedicherò la mia vita a cercare di non assomigliargli.”<sup>43</sup> Elena actually notices substantial differences between Nino and his father. Unlike Donato, who is always very exuberant and theatrical, and who likes to be the center of attention, Nino seems very introverted and quiet.<sup>44</sup> For example, Elena finds that Nino swims “senza l’esibito virtuosismo del padre, con naturalezza.”<sup>45</sup> However, this individuality is short lived. During their first conversation, his father’s narcissism and selfishness surface in Nino’s attitude: he monopolizes the discourse, flaunts his knowledge, and does not leave any space for Elena to talk.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Donato tries to seduce and deceive any woman he meets. For instance, he is very loving with a woman named Nella who hosts him in Ischia, and also with Lila and Pinuccia. Moreover, he consistently tries to seduce Elena with his attention and declarations of love.<sup>47</sup> In Elena’s case, the violent nature of Donato’s courtship is patently clear, as Donato sexually harasses her twice.<sup>48</sup> The fact that Nino randomly kisses Elena throughout the first and second volume while also showing affection towards Lila despite having a girlfriend, and later

has an affair with Elena though he is happily married also suggest a similarity with his father in this respect.<sup>49</sup> In the second volume, Melina, one of the victims of Donato's seduction, actually mistakes Nino for his father, which hints at and reconfirms the likeness between the two.<sup>50</sup> However, Elena does not initially want to recognize this likeness and defines Melina's mistake as short-sightedness, which she compares, in a moment of anger towards her friend, to Lila's blindness: "era capace di guardare solo come Melina [. . .] chiusa nella sua follia."<sup>51</sup> The truth is, rather, that since she was a child, Lila has had a good understanding of the mechanisms of power. She has precociously realized that money means power, and thus lack of money signifies suffering and violence, the processes of which continue uninterrupted unless somebody breaks the circle. This is why she chooses to marry Stefano.

Stefano is another example of genetic inheritance. Stefano fascinates Elena and Lila because he is rich, he is the "incarnazione della ricchezza," which could help change things in the neighborhood.<sup>52</sup> However, he is "anche simpatico, anche buono," and appears to Lila's eyes as someone who is not afraid to change the existing balance. In courting Lila, Marcello Solara's crush, Stefano openly challenges the Solaras' predominance in the neighborhood.<sup>53</sup> For this reason, Lila ultimately decides to marry him. Unfortunately, Stefano is also the son of Don Achille, a usurer and black market dealer: "Don Achille era l'orco delle favole, avevo il divieto assoluto di avvicinarlo [. . .]. Era un essere fatto di non so quale materiale [. . .], vivo col respiro caldissimo che gli usciva dal naso e dalla bocca [. . .] Lo immaginavo a bocca aperta per via delle lingue zanne d'animale."<sup>54</sup> After Stefano and Lila's marriage, Stefano starts to emulate his father's personality traits: "Non è mai stato Stefano," explains Elena after reading Lila's notebooks, "è stato sempre il figlio grande di Don Achille [. . .]. Don Achille stava risorgendo [. . .] nutrendosi della materia viva di suo figlio. Il padre gli stava crepando la pelle, ne stava modificando lo sguardo, gli stava esplodendo nel corpo."<sup>55</sup> Elena describes him beating his wife, Lila, with the features of a beast—these same features that characterized Don Achille in Elena's childhood fantasies: "Mostrava fauci bianchissime, una lingua rossa nel foro buio della bocca."<sup>56</sup> On the one hand, Stefano's violence derives from a contemporary and chauvinist social imperative that tells him with regard to his wife, "devi fare l'uomo [. . .] o la pieghi adesso o non la pieghi più."<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, his violence comes from an inherited lack of humanity or empathy, something genetically inherited from the previous generation, as his father took advantage of other people to make money: "il signor Peluso [. . .] gli addebitava il fatto che a tradimento s'era preso [. . .] tutti gli arnesi per il lavoro di falegname, cosa che aveva reso inutile la bottega [. . .]. Gli rimproverava che s'era preso anche quella e l'aveva trasformata in salumeria."<sup>58</sup> Similarly, and for the same reason, Stefano takes advantage of Lila's family shoe shop by partnering with other mobsters, such as Marcello and Michele Solara.<sup>59</sup>



Gennaro, Lila's son, is the ultimate proof that violence is not only learned, but hereditary. He lives with his mother and has never had any contact with his father, Stefano. However, Gennaro turns out to be somewhat like him: "Il bambino era sicuramente molto simile a Stefano [. . .] recitava la parte del ragazzino ben educato."<sup>60</sup> At first Gennaro appears polite, but in reality, the child is "subdolo" and violent.<sup>61</sup> Facing all these inherited similarities such as Lila's resemblance to Melina, much like the resemblance of Nino, Stefano, Antonio, Ada, and Gennaro to their respective parents, Elena fears that she might turn out like her mother as well. She wonders: "Possibile che i genitori non muoiano mai? Che ogni figlio se li covi dentro irrimediabilmente? Dunque da me davvero sarebbe sbucata mia madre, la sua andatura zoppa, come un destino?"<sup>62</sup>

#### STAGING A WORD: TOWARD THE RESOLUTION OF VIOLENCE

Despite Ferrante's insistence on genetic inheritance, in the saga environment plays a primary role in causing and preserving the characters' violent personality traits. In other words, Ferrante makes it clear that such genetic expressions originate in a constantly violent environment and thus depend on sociological reasons.<sup>63</sup> In this way, Ferrante challenges beliefs, popular during the tetralogy's setting, that human abilities are derived exclusively from genetic inheritance. Such thinking was used to justify movements like eugenics. Francis Galton's conceptions about the strict bond between behavior, psychological disorders, genius, and genes elaborated in *Hereditary Genius* (1869) and his term "eugenics" experienced a resurgence. These ideas became the cornerstones of Third Reich ideology and the governing logic of the so-called Final Solution.<sup>64</sup> Ferrante contrasts the extremism of behavioral genetics, focusing on the fact that it is above all else the environment that influences and nurtures genetic changes.

From the beginning of the tetralogy, Lila seems very aware of the importance of the environment in the constitution of the individual, and of the fact that money, social class, and education are the tools that rule society. Furthermore, she is conscious of the injustices and imbalances in the distribution of power in the neighborhood; this is why she wants to master these tools in order to modify the situation and the environment. She aims to change the way in which such tools are used, as she wants to follow a path that does not involve violence or aspirations to power. According to Franco Gallippi, Lila "detects a lack of love in the city of Naples" and "suggests it is possible to [. . .] 'found' a new city."<sup>65</sup> She wants to prevent Naples from being "una città senza amore," because according to her such a city would be "persa."<sup>66</sup> To do this, she marries Stefano, since as previously noted, Lila perceives him as someone who wants to change the status quo. He could grant her access to money with which to change the distribution of power in the neighborhood. Even after the failure of their marriage, Lila always uses her wealth to help other people in the neighborhood: "Lila si prendeva cura degli amici. Lila badava a tutti [. . .] se ti trovavi in difficoltà metteva mano

alla borsa.<sup>67</sup> She also funds the innovative Basic Sight and provides her friends with employment after learning all she can about computers.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, she promotes education. She has always believed in the importance of knowledge, and this is why she has forced Elena to continue studying and doing her best to improve herself.<sup>69</sup> In the same way, she wants her son and daughter to receive the best education possible, because she believes that: “se ci si fosse dedicati a ogni bambino piccolo del rione, nel giro di una generazione tutto sarebbe cambiato, non ci sarebbero stati più i bravi e gli incapaci, i buoni e i cattivi.”<sup>70</sup> Lila wants to abolish hierarchies and differences between social classes, those same differences that cause Elena’s marriage with Pietro, the son of a prestigious professor, to end. Elena foresees it from the beginning: “Io venivo da quella famiglia, Pietro da quell’altra, ciascuno si portava nel corpo i suoi antenati. Come sarebbe andato il nostro matrimonio?”<sup>71</sup> Despite her unfortunate marriage, Elena manages to change her social status and become a very famous writer, thanks to Lila who always prods Elena like a “pungolo” and forces her to do better: “voglio che tu faccia meglio, è la cosa che desidero di più, perché chi sono io se tu non sei brava, chi sono?” says Lila to Elena.<sup>72</sup> When Elena decides to move into the same building as Lila, the latter wants her to put her knowledge and education to good use in the neighborhood, and tells her: “Ora che stai qui devi aiutarmi a farla diventare come le tue figlie [. . .] tu aiuti me, io aiuto te. La scuola non basta,” and “visto che hai deciso di stare qui con noi, cambiamo il rione.”<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, Lila’s attempts prove to be in vain, at first. During her upward social movement, Elena realizes that violence not only dominates the neighborhood but, in some ways, the entire world: “non è il rione ad essere malato, non è Napoli, è il globo terrestre, è l’universo o gli universi.”<sup>74</sup> For example, Elena’s intellectual acquaintances, too, “sono avidi, godono a farti del male, stanno coi forti e si accaniscono contro i deboli [. . .], trattano le donne come cagnoline [. . .] e ti mettono le mani addosso esattamente come negli autobus qui da noi.”<sup>75</sup> As I have partially implied with reference to men’s construction of women, the patriarchy also influences the most elaborate structures of thought, as Elena discovers when reading Lonzi’s *Sputiamo su Hegel*. Violence also seems inescapable in *Storia della bambina perduta* (2014), when Elena publishes a novel inspired by one of her conversations with Lila about the neighborhood, the constant fight between mobsters and fascists, and the killing of Don Achille. The novel is successful and is advertised in important magazines including *Panorama*, where a picture of Elena and Tina—Lila’s daughter—accompanies an article with the caption: “Elena Greco con sua figlia Tina.”<sup>76</sup> Of this, Elena notes, “Chi scriveva non recensiva il mio libro e non ne parlava come di un romanzo, ma lo usava per raccontare quello che chiamava ‘il feudo dei fratelli Solara’ [. . .] forse legato alla camorra.”<sup>77</sup> The publication is interpreted as an accusation against the local criminal organization, and Lila’s daughter Tina is taken for Elena’s daughter. Soon after, Tina disappears. Violence then seems to have prevailed over positive social

change, also considering that Tina is the heir of Lila's genius: "La bambina era piena di curiosità, imparava ogni cosa in un attimo, aveva un gran vocabolario e una manualità sorprendente [. . .] identica a Lila."<sup>78</sup> In addition, Elena attributes Tina's healthy appearance to the fact that she is "il frutto dolcissimo di un rapporto solido" between Lila and Enzo and her cleverness manages to grow thanks to the positive family environment that Lila and Elena have managed to foster together.<sup>79</sup> Tina, therefore, is also the symbol of Lila's efforts to create a better world. After Tina's eventual disappearance, Lila completely loses her mind and decides to disappear, to withdraw from a world of inescapable violence.

However, looking more closely at the events of the narrative, Lila's attempts to modify the environment are not in vain. For example, Lila's social action in the neighborhood seems to have some effect; some of its inhabitants start to resemble her, to behave like her and to be influenced by her positive actions: "il rione si stava assestando a lei," Elena says, "mi sembrò di vedere sempre più lei in tutte le persone che le erano state o le erano vicine," for example Alfonso.<sup>80</sup> Lila's most striking influence is on Elena. Tiziana de Rogatis underlines how, in her effort to offset male dominance, Lila has gradually substituted men in taking possession of Elena's female body and the surroundings.<sup>81</sup> However, in doing so, she has also subverted the modalities of dominance, which becomes instead an equitable fusion. Elena takes an active part in this union: while "Lila si impadronì di me," Elena says "le avevo fatto posto in me," so that "le nostre teste urtarono [. . .] l'una contra l'altra, a lungo, e si fusero fino a diventare una sola."<sup>82</sup> Their identities merge: "frangersi, mescolarsi, non sapere più cos'era mio e cos'era suo."<sup>83</sup> Ferrante stresses the difference between Elena and Lila's innovative relationship and those between men and women by comparing the former with Elena's relationship with Nino. Despite the fact that Elena sees the two as "molto simili," the very difference between them is Nino's chauvinistic narcissism and self-centeredness.<sup>84</sup> Lila and Elena's chats are always described in terms of an exchange, a mutual excitement: "io mi infiammo insieme a lei, qui, nel momento stesso in cui mi parla."<sup>85</sup> These "scambi [. . .] con Lila," Elena says, "mi accendevano la testa [. . .] ci strappavamo l'un l'altra le parole di bocca [. . .] insorgeva un'eccitazione che pareva una tempesta tutte scariche elettriche."<sup>86</sup> Nino, on the other hand, "sembrava contento della mia presenza solo se rimanevo in silenzio ad ascoltare" and seems bothered by Elena's erudition: "Con Nino era diverso. Intuì dovevo stare attenta a dire ciò che lui voleva che dicessi."<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, it is Elena herself who chooses, of her own free will, to follow Lila in the first place. Elena rejects her mother as she is afraid of becoming the abject and chooses her friend Lila as a substitute model to follow: "Qualcosa mi convinse, allora, che se fossi andata sempre indietro a lei, alla sua andatura, il passo di mia madre [. . .] avrebbe smesso di minacciarmi."<sup>88</sup>

In this double operation of maternal rejection and female fusion, Ferrante seems to draw on Kristeva's and Luisa Muraro's theories. On the one hand, Elena

takes on the position of the deject and abjects her mother's passive position: she wants to be a subject. On the other hand, she welcomes Lila as a maternal substitute, something that, according to Muraro, reminds us that the nature of our identity is plural. As in the original relationship of the child with her or his mother, where the two beings inhabit one body, the relationship with Lila is one of interdependence and fusion in opposition to an individualistic and paternalistic society of the type described by Muraro in *L'ordine simbolico della madre*.<sup>89</sup> Muraro criticizes what she views as the basis of contemporary society in a discrepancy originating in the low value that we give to the relationship of the child with her mother, as the child is forced to reject the mother in order to become an adult. Because of the society we live in, "è necessario che ci separiamo dalla madre e che voltiamo le spalle all'esistenza di relazione con esse," like Elena towards her mother in the book, "per entrare nell'ordine simbolico e sociale, l'agente di tale separazione essendo il padre."<sup>90</sup> Muraro disagrees with Kristeva about the necessity of such a separation from the mother, which Muraro calls "taglio tetico" in Kristevian fashion, and considers it a great loss for the identity of the individual. Muraro thinks that "l'esperienza di gran lunga più importante che facciamo nella vita sia quella [. . .] incentrata sulla relazione con la madre."<sup>91</sup> The importance of the relationship between mother and child lies in the fact that it is precisely in collaboration with the mother that the child starts to signify the world: "È l'esperienza di relazione con la madre [. . .] come uno schema per le esperienze future e la possibilità di dar loro un ordine logico."<sup>92</sup> In other words, it is not individually, but in collaboration with the mother, that the child creates their vision and interpretation of the world.<sup>93</sup> The nature of Lila and Elena's cooperation resembles the interdependent relationship between mother and son which, according to Muraro, the patriarchal praise of independence and individuality compromises: the substitution of such a "coppia creatrice originaria," of a relationship of "l'essere con l'essere," with the point of view of patriarchy, "si sovrappone alla positività dell'opera della madre, scinde la logica dall'essere ed è causa del nostro perdere e riperdere il senso dell'essere."<sup>94</sup> According to Muraro, aspiring to an individual self-determinate authority is a vain, debilitating, and reality-distorting endeavor; the original act of symbolization, of perceiving, giving meaning, and thus creating reality is based on a social exchange which recalls the original collaboration of the child with the mother.<sup>95</sup> It is therefore important to "accettare i sostituti della madre," our dependency, and welcome back the maternal into the Symbolic order as the principle which orders the world because this is the only way to acquire coherence between thought and being, and a full sense of existence.<sup>96</sup> Lila's constant need for Elena and Elena's fear that "perdendo [. . .] pezzi della [. . .] vita [di Lila], perdesse intensità e centralità la mia" show that they reciprocally act as maternal substitutes.<sup>97</sup> However, the fact that their relationship is reciprocal slightly contrasts with Muraro's hierarchical

structure that sees one participant or element only as the symbol of the authority of the mother.

In any event, according to Muraro, such an operation of acceptance is particularly important for women, whom she considers to be the first victims of a patriarchal organization of society which marginalizes and strips them of their identity, as Ferrante's subjugated female characters exemplify.<sup>98</sup> In order to acquire a social existence, Muraro suggests that women should draw upon a concrete maternal substitute, constructing a relationship of entrustment with another woman. The relationship between Lila and Elena is an example of such a bond, although Ferrante shapes it in a reciprocal fashion. Muraro explains in "Bonding and Freedom" that "this relationship occurs when you tie yourself to a person who can help you achieve something which you think you are capable of but which you have not yet achieved" and "this relationship of entrustment between one woman and another constitutes this tie," which women need in order to have a "social existence."<sup>99</sup> As previously noted, the basis of such a bond is the recognition of the authority of the mother, which according to the philosopher does not have a place in contemporary society and is ignored even by women.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, the first positive effect of Lila and Elena's collaboration is that, with Lila acting like a maternal substitute for Elena and vice versa, Elena gradually re-evaluates the maternal with reference to her own role as a mother and, subsequently, to her own mother. Secondly, thanks to her relationship with Lila, Elena also succeeds in acquiring social existence by becoming a successful writer. Through Elena's pen, on her part, Lila manages to bear witness to her own existence and of the patriarchal violence affecting their lives.

When Elena and Lila get closer again after a period of separation, Elena's body happily welcomes her second pregnancy: "reagì con forte adesione."<sup>101</sup> Similarly, Elena starts to understand her love for her own mother: "Mentre la pancia cominciava ad affacciarsi in allegria [. . .] constatai ogni giorno, dolorosamente, il deperire di mia madre. Mi emozionò che stesse aggrappata a me per non perdersi, come io da piccola alla sua mano."<sup>102</sup> It is significant that Elena's mother finally confesses the reason for her limping, a reason that can be read metaphorically as an attempt on the part of society to erase, reject, and abject the mother: "mi raccontò perché era zoppa [. . .] l'angelo della morte [. . .] m'ha [. . .] sfiorata da piccola con lo stesso male di adesso."<sup>103</sup> From that moment on, Elena's rancorous mother becomes more serene and willing to open up to her daughter. She reveals to Elena all her fears, her guilt, and even some embarrassing details about her intimate life with Elena's father.<sup>104</sup> Through Elena's mother, Ferrante materializes the horror and disgust to which Abraham and Torok refer when talking about parental secrets. According to them, the difficulty of elaborating transgenerational traumas "lies in the patient's horror at violating a parent or a family guarded secret, even though the secret's text and content are inscribed within the parent's own unconscious. The horror of transgression [. . .] is compounded by the risk of undermining the fictitious yet

necessary integrity of the parental figure in question.”<sup>105</sup> Such a trauma, as Schwab explains, becomes a sort of inexpressible “taboo.”<sup>106</sup> As previously noted, this is the case with Elena’s mother’s limping, the cause of which Elena initially does not know. Elena feels haunted by her mother’s disability, which Elena perceives as a sign of her mother’s abject nature, and which rather symbolizes the violence of society on her poor, ignorant and marginalized mother.<sup>107</sup> Despite Lila’s influence, this limp is passed on to Elena as soon as she gets pregnant for the first time, and thus is about to acquire the same social role as her mother: “Ero al settimo mese, la pancia ormai pesava [. . .] avvertii un guizzo dolorosissimo al centro della natica destra che si allungò lungo la gamba come un ferro caldo. Tornai a casa zoppicando [. . .], il peso che portavo in grembo mi affaticava causandomi un po’ di sciatica.”<sup>108</sup> Elena’s intolerance of her pain shows her initial rejection of her social role as a mother: “Il mio organismo rifiutava il ruolo di madre [. . .], il dolore era un tormento.”<sup>109</sup> This social and genetic inheritance seems inescapable. However, Abraham and Torok suggest a solution for the elaboration of such a transgenerational and “unspeakable” violence.<sup>110</sup> First of all, it is important to recognize the presence of our ancestors’ lives in our psychological lives, the violence of our ancestors, and the fact that our violence derives from them. Secondly, we must recognize it, we must give it a voice: “to stage a word [. . .] constitutes an attempt at exorcism, an attempt to relieve the unconscious by placing the effect of the phantom in the social realm.”<sup>111</sup>

Elena’s mother’s staging of words about herself and her limping aids in the reconstruction of Elena’s bond with her mother, as it helps Elena to appreciate her mother as a human being with her frailties, rather than a repulsive Kristevian abject. Consequently, Elena finally recognizes and accepts her inherited limp, which has been in some ways purged of the violence: “avendo la gravidanza riesumato la fitta all’anca e non essendo il parto riuscito a cancellarla, scelsi di non rivolgermi ai medici. Mi coltivai quel fastidio come un lascito custodito nel mio stesso corpo.”<sup>112</sup> Lila notices Elena’s acceptance of her own mother. She tells Elena, “ti sei inventata che devi zoppicare per non far morire del tutto tua madre, e ora zoppichi veramente. [. . .] Stai invecchiando come si deve. Ti senti forte, hai smesso di fare la figlia, sei diventata veramente madre [. . .] ti è bastato zoppicare un pochino e ora tua madre se ne sta quieta dentro di te.”<sup>113</sup>

Elena’s mother’s staging of words clearly recalls the *pratica dell’autocoscienza*, very popular among Italian feminists of the 1970s such as Muraro, which consisted in “small groups of women [. . .] who met regularly to analyze their experiences in order to gain deeper understanding of themselves” and to investigate not only “the mechanics of oppression” of patriarchal society, but also “the relationship between/among women” which society had damaged, in order to re-establish it.<sup>114</sup> The aim is to allow women to accept maternal substitutes in themselves and to recognize the authority of the mother as a symbolic code against the fallacy of individualistic thought. Therefore, Elena and Lila’s fusion

allows the recovery of Elena's relationship with her mother, in defiance of a patriarchal society which seeks to suppress it. Furthermore, their friendship affects not only their familial environment, but that of the next generation. In the fourth volume, when Elena actually comes back to the Neapolitan neighborhood and moves into an apartment above Lila's flat, the two women start to raise their children together: "Siamo mamme di tutt'e due e vi vogliamo bene entrambe," Lila tells their daughters.<sup>115</sup> In other words, Lila changes the familial coordinates in different ways as she tries to break the transgenerational chain of violence. As a result, just as violence modifies Ferrante's characters' genetic patrimony, Lila's constant contact with Elena causes a genetic change in the latter, who actually passes it onto her first daughter, Dede: "Lila [. . .] se una volta se ne stava acquatata dentro di me, ora era scivolata dentro Dede, con gli occhi stretti, la fronte corrugata."<sup>116</sup>

Together with the previous and next generation, through Elena, Lila manages to start a process of redemption of her contemporaries, too. First of all, as previously noted with reference to Muraro, the bond between the two friends provides Elena with a social existence, when, thanks to Lila's support and encouragement, she becomes a very famous writer. Her initial motivation to become a writer actually comes from the dream she shares with Lila: "cominciammo ad associare lo studio ai soldi. Pensammo che studiare molto ci avrebbe fatto scrivere libri e che i libri ci avrebbero rese ricche."<sup>117</sup> In addition, her writing arises from the intertwining of her voice with Lila's voice and thoughts: "la capacità di formulare belle frasi è roba che viene da me [. . .] ma [il testo] l'ho elaborato insieme a lei [. . .] l'idea."<sup>118</sup> The idea always comes from Lila. It is thanks to Lila that Elena speaks. What is more, through Elena, Lila redeems the traditional image of the *Mater* who, as Emma Van Ness explains, "suffers in silence, who does not speak," substituting her with that of a writer-mother.<sup>119</sup> Finally, as the first-person narrator of the tetralogy, Elena enacts that same process of awareness and staging of words promoted by Abraham and Torok, with reference to the violence, crimes, and guilt of her own society. On the one hand, thanks to Lila, she improves her awareness of the dynamics of patriarchal society. On the other hand, as the first-person narrator, Elena displays what Schwab would call "traumatic historical legacies;" she is giving these legacies a shape, facilitating a new way of facing and changing them.<sup>120</sup> Gallippi stresses this concept with reference to Elena's writing, raising the "question about the function of literature [. . .] by writing, one sublimates a difficult reality, making it become bearable, livable, and in a sense manageable, creating thus the conditions for viewing it from a critical standpoint, and for generating an attitude of challenge rather than resignation."<sup>121</sup> Throughout the four books, Elena repeats that "ciascuno si portava nel corpo i suoi antenati" and tells the story of a returning violence which intertwines the past and present, and their private and public lives.<sup>122</sup> Lila asks Elena, "ti ricordi [. . .] il clima del rione quando eravamo piccole? È peggio, anzi no, è uguale. E citò suo suocero, don Achille Carracci, lo

strozzino, il fascista, e Peluso, il falegname, il comunista, e la guerra che c'era stata proprio sotto i nostri occhi."<sup>123</sup> The old quarrels between Don Achille and Peluso continue in the figures of the Solara brothers and Pasquale.<sup>124</sup> In some ways, Elena reveals and breaks the taboo of criminality in the neighborhood which is initially symbolized by Don Achille: "l'orco delle favole, avevo il divieto assoluto di avvicinarlo. [. . .] Era un essere fatto di non so quale materiale."<sup>125</sup> Elena discloses the real nature of crime itself, and Lila plays a crucial role in opening Elena's eyes, showing her this transgenerational linkage and wanting to go back to the origins of things—violence at the time of Don Achille—in order to change them, to erase the violence in which they live.<sup>126</sup> In Gallippi's words, Lila's main idea about such a "before [. . .] involves memory and the importance of remembering history to avoid repeating the same mistakes of the past."<sup>127</sup>

In conclusion, the patriarchal family in Ferrante is a tool for the perpetuation of violence and the mirror of a society which victimizes its individuals and creates familial arrangements that are destined to break. However, in the Neapolitan novels Ferrante testifies that the destiny that ancestors impose upon us is not inescapable. While depicting the transgenerational transmission of violence, Ferrante proposes the keys for its resolution: the recognition of our ancestors' violent inheritance, the testimony of this violence and admission of guilt, and finally, the acquisition of a subject position on the part of the marginalized individual who must act to improve the situation. Despite the fact that Lila and Tina disappear, Lila in some ways survives in Elena's writing, in Elena's voluntary or involuntary attempt to depict the current situation and its relationship with the past, as Elena's very reason for telling Lila's story in the tetralogy is to preserve something about Lila: "puntavo a riafferarla, a riaverla accanto a me."<sup>128</sup> As Muraro also writes in "Bonding and Freedom," recognizing the Symbolic authority of the Mother means making a restitution.<sup>129</sup> Through her bond with Lila and her role as a writer, Elena actually redeems Lila's disappearance: "Per tutta la vita [Lila] aveva raccontato una sua storia di riscatto, usando il mio corpo vivo e la mia esistenza."<sup>130</sup> She also redeems her abjected and silenced mother, and the mother-daughter bond, starting a process of redemption of society as a whole, which has been damaged by chauvinistic mechanisms. Finally, Lila and Elena's collaboration calls for an awareness of the pluralistic nature of the self against the contemporary, individualistic and sterile vision, and suggests a renovation of the family and society, which should be based simply on love, rather than violence.



## Notes

1. In Italian, the Neapolitan novels are often referred to as *L'amica geniale*.
2. Elena Ferrante, *L'amica geniale* (Rome: E/O, 2015), 18–19.
3. Elena Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta* (Rome: E/O, 2016), 449.
4. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, Indice dei personaggi.
5. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 33.
6. Patrizia Sambuco speaks of space as gendered with reference to Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* (1992) and *I giorni dell'abbandono* (2002) in "Construction and Self-Construction," in *Beyond the Piazza: Public and Private Spaces in Modern Italian Culture*, ed. Simona Storchi (Brussels: Peter Lang Publishing, 2013), 115–116. I believe that such a consideration also applies to the Neapolitan novels.
7. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 34–35.
8. Elena Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome* (Rome: E/O, 2016), 102.
9. Stiliana Milkova offers an analysis of how Ferrante's patriarchal society plays with concrete images of women, as metaphors for women's bodies and selves, in *L'amore molesto* and *L'amica geniale* in "Elena Ferrante's Visual Poetics," in *The Works of Elena Ferrante: Reconfiguring the Margins*, ed. Grace Russo Bullaro and Stephanie Love (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 159–182.
10. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 122. Ferrante is profoundly influenced by Luce Irigaray, whom she mentions more than once in *La frantumaglia* (Rome: E/O, 2016), 299, 323. Irigaray explains such a commodification of women in "Women on the Market" in *This Sex Which is Not One* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170–191.
11. Elena Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (Rome: E/O, 2016), 321.
12. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 221, 254, 323. Irigaray's influence on Lonzi is also undeniable. In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1974), Irigaray attacks Freud's essay "Femininity" (1933) and his naturalization of women's inferiority and passive social role by defining them as castrated and thus lacking. Irigaray denounces the Freudian concept of women's penis envy and the patriarchal construction of women's image. In a patriarchal society, women are denied subjectivity because while man is the Subject, woman is only conceived as man's negative.
13. Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kempt (Oxford: Basic Blackwell, 1991), 40, 44, 50.
14. Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 13.
15. Kristeva, 13, emphasis mine.
16. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 92. Katrin Wehling-Giorgi offers an exhaustive panorama of Ferrante's mothers and their depiction as both desired and repulsive, in accordance with Kristeva's definition of abject, in "Playing with the Maternal Body: Violence, Mutilation, and the Emergence of the Female Subject in Ferrante's novels," *California Italian Studies* 7, No.1 (2017): 1–15.

17. Judith Butler affirms that what Kristeva is talking about is actually the social and cultural construction of woman: “if we accept Foucault’s framework, we are compelled to redescribe the maternal libidinal economy as a product of an historically specific organization of sexuality [. . .] itself suffused by power relations” in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), 117–118. In these terms, Kristeva’s association of the abject with the abstract concept of the maternal is born out of a reality where interplays of power create woman/mother as a subject with definite characteristics: “the female body that [Kristeva] seeks to express is itself a construct produced by the very law [and society] it is supposed to undermine,” Butler, 118. In fact, “what Kristeva claims to discover in the prediscursive maternal body is itself a production of a given historical discourse, an effect of culture rather than its secret and primary cause,” Butler, 103. In other words, according to Butler, the association woman-abject does not come from an intrinsic set of qualities belonging to the woman; it is patriarchal society which creates the concept of woman and its abject characteristics.

18. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 143. Such a theme is quite recurrent in Ferrante’s novels. Lisa Mullenneaux analyzes Ferrante’s *L’amore molesto* as the first novel to explore Irigaray’s “mother-daughter estrangement as the inevitable price of male violence” in her article “Burying Mother’s Ghost,” *Forum Italicum* 41, no. 1 (March 2007), 246.

19. Fanning stresses how matrophobia is actually a recurring theme in all Ferrante’s works in “Ferrante’s Mothers: Re-imagining the Maternal?” (Conference paper, Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan Novels: An Interdisciplinary Workshop, Bristol, UK, March 2017).

20. The initial rejection of the mother and of the traditional maternal role seems to be a repetitive topic in Italian women’s writing in the twentieth century, as Fanning for example underlines in “Generation through Generations: Maternal and Paternal Paradigms in Sibilla Aleramo and Dacia Maraini,” *Women’s Writing in Western Europe: Gender, Generation and Legacy* (2007): 248–260 and in “Touching on Taboos: Imagining and Reconceptualizing Motherhood in Some Post-’68 Italian Women’s Autobiographical Writings,” *La Modernità Letteraria*, 4 (2011): 49–58.

21. Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*, 35.

22. Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*, 36.

23. Ferrante, *L’amica geniale*, 38.

24. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 96.

25. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 94.

26. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 147.

27. Giuseppe Montalenti et al., “Frequency of Mycrocythaemia in some Italian Districts,” *Nature*, CLXV (1950): 682–684; Giuseppe Montalenti, “Further Data on Genetics of Mycrocythaemia,” *Annals of Eugenics*, XVI (1952): 299–314.

28. Ernesto Capanna, “Montalenti, Giuseppe,” *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, last modified in 2011, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppe-montalenti\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giuseppe-montalenti_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

29. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 109, 115, 124.

30. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 144.

31. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 420–421.

32. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 144, 317.
33. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 318.
34. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 318.
35. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 321.
36. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 176–178.
37. Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 143.
38. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 173–174.
39. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 340.
40. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, “Secrets and Posteriority: Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom,” in *The Shell and The Kernel* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 180.
41. Abraham and Torok, 173.
42. Gabriele Schwab, “Haunting Legacies: Trauma in Children of Perpetrators,” *Postcolonial Studies* 7, No. 2 (Aug 2016): 177–195; Peter Fonagy, “The Transgenerational Transmission of Holocaust Trauma,” *Attachment and Human Development* 1, No. 1 (1999): 92–114.
43. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 216.
44. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 211–212.
45. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 213.
46. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 212.
47. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 208; Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 187.
48. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 227; Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 292.
49. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 195–196, 221–223; Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 131.
50. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 166–167.
51. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 168.
52. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 245.
53. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 244.
54. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 23–24, 27. Nino clarifies Don Achille's illicit activities in Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 202.
55. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 41.
56. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 37.
57. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 40.
58. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 32.
59. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 34, 37–38.
60. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 278.
61. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 278.
62. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 47.
63. Abraham and Torok, “Secrets and Posteriority: Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom,” 176.
64. “Galton, Sir Francis,” Treccani, accessed May 4, 2018, [www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sir-francis-galton](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/sir-francis-galton).

65. Franco Gallippi, "Elena Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend: In Search of Parthenope and the 'Founding' of a New City," in Bullaro ad Love, *The Works of Elena Ferrante: Reconfiguring the Margins*, 101–102.

66. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 156, 184.

67. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 82.

68. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 114–119.

69. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 93.

70. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 398.

71. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 87.

72. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 91, 247.

73. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 251.

74. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 19.

75. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 252.

76. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 265–267.

77. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 265–267.

78. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 248.

79. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 228.

80. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 82, 119, 151, 196–198.

81. Tiziana de Rogatis, "Metamorfosi del tempo. Il ciclo dell'*Amica geniale*," *Allegoria* 73 (November 2016): 135.

82. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 34; Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 94, 294.

83. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 354.

84. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 219.

85. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 126.

86. Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 194–195.

87. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 213; Ferrante, *Storia del nuovo cognome*, 194–195.

88. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 42.

89. Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2006), 50–56.

90. Muraro, 42.

91. Muraro, 37, 44.

92. Muraro, 26.

93. Muraro, 36.

94. Muraro, 27, 41.

95. Muraro, 50.

96. Muraro, 56, 76, 90.

97. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 207.

98. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 33.

99. Luisa Muraro, "Bonding and Freedom," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Paola Bono and Sandra Kempt (Cambridge, US: Basic Blackwell, 1991), 123.

100. Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, 92.

101. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 127.

102. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 136.

103. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 138.

104. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 138.
105. Abraham and Torok, "Secrets and Posteriority: Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom," 174.
106. Schwab, "Haunting Legacies: Trauma in Children of Perpetrators," 186.
107. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 42.
108. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 213.
109. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 216.
110. Abraham and Torok, "Secrets and Posteriority: Theory of the Transgenerational Phantom," 174.
111. Abraham and Torok, 176.
112. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 207.
113. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 350–351. Ferrante stages a sort of Freudian fort-da game as Emma Van Ness explains in "Dixit Mater: The Significance of the Maternal Voice in Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels," in Bullaro and Love, *The Works of Elena Ferrante: Reconfiguring the Margins*, 298. The original rejection of the maternal—symbolized also by Lila and Elena throwing away their dolls in the first volume—is nothing but an attempt on the part of the protagonists to master the relationship with their mothers that patriarchal society denies them. I believe that such a process also characterizes the relationship between Leda and her mother and daughters in Ferrante's *La figlia oscura* (2006).
114. Paola Bono and Sandra Kempt, ed., *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, 82. In *L'amore molesto* and *I giorni dell'abbandono* especially, Ferrante hints at the practice of *autocoscienza*. Elizabeth Alsop and Olivia Santovetti reflect on the importance of telling one's stories, of linguistic structures in the preservation and re-equilibration of the self of the protagonists respectively in "Femmes Fatales: 'la fascinazione di morte' in Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto* and *I giorni dell'abbandono*," *Italica* 91, no. 3 (Fall 2014), 474 and "Lettura, scrittura e autoriflessione nel ciclo de *L'amica geniale*," *Allegoria* 73 (January/June 2016), 190–191.
115. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 244, 270.
116. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 220.
117. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 66.
118. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 189.
119. Van Ness, "Dixit Mater," 294.
120. Schwab, "Haunting Legacies: Trauma in Children of Perpetrators," 184.
121. Gallippi, "Elena Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend," 104–105.
122. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 84.
123. Ferrante, *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*, 239.
124. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 115.
125. Ferrante, *L'amica geniale*, 23–24.
126. Gallippi, "Elena Ferrante's My Brilliant Friend," 158–159.
127. Gallippi, 113.
128. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 449.
129. Muraro, "Bonding and Freedom," 126.
130. Ferrante, *Storia della bambina perduta*, 451.