

Stiliana Milkova. Elena Ferrante as World Literature

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inaugurato con il saggio *Sulla formazione intellettuale di Dante: alcuni problemi di definizione*, «Studi e problemi di critica testuale», 90, 2015, pp. 31–54.

La figura di Cavalcanti è, in effetti, un punto di discussione dirimente e particolarmente interessante anche nei confronti delle figure di Boccaccio e Petrarca, laddove soprattutto il primo, rendendosi conto della condanna dantesca di Guido, lo rivaluta (*Dec.*, VI 9) come esempio di forza speculativa (p. 505) che in qualche modo restituisce alla giusta interpretazione il pensiero epicureo (p. 520); in Petrarca, invece, Cavalcanti ritorna nella canzone LXX di *Rufe* nel *Triumphus cupidinis* IV, 28–38; in entrambe le situazioni Dante è ridotto a semplice poeta d'amore poiché "colpevole" di aver narrato di una donna defunta e per essersi posto come unico soggetto auto-promosso del viaggio ultraterreno e del suo valore profetico. La rinuncia alle premesse ideologiche della stessa opera complessiva del poeta riduce Dante a qualcosa che non è molto differente dal «primo amico» poi definito eretico; secondo il critico, insomma, Dante subisce una vera e propria metamorfosi che lo assimila a Cavalcanti e nello stesso tempo azzera ogni differenza tra i due (p. 388).

Tale riflessione, letta all'interno di un'approccio filologico e metodologico al pensiero di entrambi nasce dalla necessità di restituire una visione delle *tre Corone* il più possibile integrata, strutturalmente consona al riconoscimento dei codici comuni e capace di rinunciare a qualsiasi dogmatismo critico: per questo l'analisi della scrittura e del pensiero dantesco vanno letti anche all'interno di scelte metodologiche e critiche capaci di elaborare esposizioni argomentativamente complesse eppure chiare, stilisticamente e retoricamente impostate e gestite secondo un controllo continuo della forma, sempre presente strutturalmente in ogni testo qui raccolto e sempre replicabile negli altri.

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Stiliana Milkova. *Elena Ferrante as World Literature*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2021. Pp. 214. ISBN 9781501357527.

Since 1992, when Elena Ferrante debuted in Italy with her first novel *Troubling Love* (2006), her stories have re-delineated and affected the lives of millions of female and male readers, including those of the scholars who have attempted to chart the writer's powerful world of images and words, such as *smarginatura* and *frantumaglia*.

These two terms shape the itinerary of Stilian Milkova's *Elena Ferrante as World Literature*, the first English-language monograph entirely dedicated to the Neapolitan writer who, like her characters, has exited any patriarchal, traditional frame by deciding to remain anonymous. Both *frantumaglia* and *smarginatura*, defined by Milkova as "borders of a universal feminine imaginary" (23), help the reader to follow Ferrante's women through a series of symbolic "descents," whether it is into "the archetypes of feminine suffering" (12), or into the complex ambivalence of texts building "a modern feminine mythology" (13).

One of the noteworthy elements of this monograph is Milkova's choice to examine all of Ferrante's earlier novels, along with the lesser-known children's book *The Beach at Night* (2016), analysed within the framework of the writer's recurring epitomization of mothers, daughters, and dolls (74–86). The entire research further benefits from frequent and fitting references to non-fiction writings, such as *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey* (2016) and *Incidental Inventions* (2019), which configure the creation of Ferrante's authorial persona and powerfully run counter to the harsh criticisms addressed at the writer's choice of anonymity.

The effectiveness of Ferrante's artistic and political project is lucidly exposed throughout the five chapters of the volume, the scope of which is elucidated in the last part of the introductory section (21–26). The strength and novelty of the monograph rely in its capacity to engage in a productive way with the notion of world literature, by demonstrating that Ferrante's texts already possess the capacity to situate themselves "within a broad literary realm where the foundational principles of literary narrative ... hold universal currency" (5). This appears today particularly relevant in the context of our globalised and porous societies, now more than ever marked by gender, class, and race inequalities.

Another advantage of the book is its dynamic approach, "putting all of Ferrante's novels in conversation" (22), with a very easy and approachable effect for the readers. Like Ferrante's, Milkova's gaze inventively recurs to a "jumble of fragments" that are only apparently unrelated. Similar to a tapestry, each argument evokes and revitalises the others, while interrogating a constellation of disciplines, including feminist art history, psychoanalysis, Greek mythology, and post-structural philosophies. Thus, for instance, not only do the power of literary translations and their impact on "our era of global violence and gender inequality" (3) become elements for a discussion on the trans-nationality of genres and motifs; they also allow Milkova to propose a re-reading and re-politicisation of academic criticism based on a gendered discourse on translation (18–21). On a similar note, the analyses of Ferrante's centrality of mothers and daughters (61–103), or

of a female creativity and authorship opposing male-dominated representational patterns (105–29), encourage readers to meditate upon the Italian literary canon and its rigidly patriarchal roots, as the author reads between the lines of Ferrante’s creative dialogues with other Italian women writers, such as Sibilla Aleramo, Elsa Morante, Natalia Ginzburg and Alba De Céspedes, all forming “a female creative legacy that sidesteps the patriarchal tradition” (106). Such legacy is porous, as well as inclusive: the monograph includes fascinating comparisons with a diversity of women writers — Jumpa Lahiri, Elif Shafak, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, among others — as well as with visual artists and photographers (e.g., Cindy Sherman, Marina Abramovic, Dare Wright), whose works are insightfully used by Milkova to explore the productive and symbolic tensions characterising Ferrante’s protagonists.

I would mention three main qualities that make Milkova’s research particularly praiseworthy. First of all, the scholar’s comparative approach to literature, further informed by references to the visual arts (including photography and architecture), is paralleled by her activity as a literary translator and editor. Thanks to a knowledge that is both theoretical and practical, Milkova’s book solicits an awareness of the trans-locality of textual languages, which is something she shares with Ferrante’s own artistic project. The writer’s “dissolving the boundaries” — between mothers and daughters, between bodies and spaces, or between cultural practices — is, therefore, an artistic and political gesture fully endorsed by Milkova’s attentive investigation.

A second valuable aspect is the author’s capacity to maintain a balance between theory and textual analysis. Though Milkova solidly bases her analysis on the relevance of Ferrante’s authorial gendered position and its closeness to specific French, Italian, and Anglophone feminist psychoanalysts and philosophers (13), she is also careful not to be trapped by the objectifying gaze of any ideological criticism, and adheres to Ferrante’s own adoption of feminist theory as “points of departure and exploration of the female body and psyche” (14). This gives birth to a research that is, concurrently, rigorous and free from predeterminations.

A third advantage is Milkova’s deep understanding of Ferrante’s apparently “neutral” Italian, in which the presence of subtle echoes of Neapolitan dialect embodies the phantasms of gender violence, as well as of acute social, class and generational divides. In this respect, I have found particularly illuminating the exploration of Ferrante’s laughing mothers and their Bakhtinian grotesque suggestions (95–100). Through the whole book, the scholar’s focus on the semantics of single terms used by Ferrante guides the reader into the territories of a language that disarticulates its culture of origin, while exposing the pervasive mechanisms

that, not surprisingly, also partly recur in the reception of Ferrante among Italian (mostly male) academic circles.

Endowed with a trans-national *and* a gendered approach to criticism, Milkova provides her readers with a necessary instrument of analysis, as well as a vivid example of scholarship. Just like Ferrante's female protagonists remapping their own spaces of agency, creativity and resistance, this book invites the readers to enter a textual and corporeal space — a metaphorical house, filled with connecting rooms and doors, each one providing a journey into the writer's world.

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Federico Pacchioni. *L'immagine del burattino. Percorsi fra teatro, letteratura e cinema*. Pesaro: Metauro, 2020. Pp. 163. Euros 22. ISBN 9788861561601.

Il nuovissimo volume di Federico Pacchioni raccoglie anni di ricerca sul teatro di figura, che ha attraversato la cultura popolare italiana sopravvivendo e affermandosi, anche dopo l'avvento dei mass media, soprattutto nel cinema, dal primo Novecento ad oggi.

L'intenzione autorale si concentra sul valore antropologico ed etnografico di queste figure, che affondano le loro radici in primitive operazioni ritualistiche, animistiche e feticistiche, e sulle valenze culturali che esse acquistano come espressione della condizione dell'individuo contemporaneo, del suo rapporto con la storia, del suo operare tra arte e mondo reale, ma anche come simulacro che, proprio grazie alla sua dissimulata figuralità, supera i limiti dell'umano. Nella fitta trama di rimandi storici e letterari dei dieci capitoletti che compongono il volume, Pacchioni ci rammenta del fruttuoso e articolato viaggio di queste figure, del loro carattere transnazionale, costruito su superamenti, contaminazioni e rielaborazioni che ne hanno potenziato sia l'espressione artistica che il valore simbolico.

I primi tre capitoli illustrano le varie rimediazioni della figura, partendo dalla tradizione greca attraverso il Medioevo, il Rinascimento fino alla Commedia dell'Arte. Con sguardo critico Pacchioni annota la trasformazione del personaggio di Burattino, fino all'Ottocento e al Novecento, che lo vede adattarsi a nuove forme di intrattenimento, in primis quello cinematografico, grazie a una intermedialità che non è un semplice incastro del teatro di figura nel nuovo medium ma piuttosto una rielaborazione di convenzioni drammatiche e di potenzialità