

‘Being Inside a Tangled Knot’: *Écriture Féminine* and Elena Ferrante

Brigita Miloš^{1*}, Dubravka Dulibić-Paljar¹

Published: March 1, 2025

ABSTRACT

Starting from the intertwining of interpretations of the term *écriture féminine*, this analysis will develop around the ‘poethical’ and political aspects of Cixous’ concept, which could be described as the non-presence of the author, language as a productive force and the ‘poethical’ as political. If it is the case that *écriture féminine* is not a recipe, not a protocol, not a style, and not even necessarily *féminine*, then the rest of *écriture* might also host versions of a feminine that is formed in its own language, outside of any particularity, essence or opposition. The core ideas underlying our claim that Ferrante’s *oeuvre* is a new form of *écriture féminine* lie in Ferrante’s reflections on her way of writing, in the productive heights of narrative pleasure she expresses, and in the narrator’s not-knowing, not-saying and enjoying. Ferrante’s writing challenges the theoretical and/or political dead ends of thinking about women and literature, not only because of her persistent anonymity, but above all because of her immersion in a language that does not allow for safe simplifications.

Keywords: art, *écriture féminine*, Elena Ferrante, feminism, literature

I prefer to think of myself as being inside a tangled knot:
tangled knots fascinate me. (Elena Ferrante)

THE INTERTWINING OF *ÉCRITURE FÉMININE*

The syntagm *écriture féminine* is a term coined in 1975 by Hélène Cixous in her ground-breaking article *The Laugh of the Medusa*. It seems that *écriture féminine*, as the name itself indicates, relies on the notion of ‘*féminine*’ (or ‘woman’), both of which are terms burdened with troubles – nowadays, somewhat different sorts than previously faced. For example, in her article Cixous wrote:

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies (...). Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. (Cixous, 1976: 875)

Jones clarifies that Cixous’ theoretical and imaginative works emphasise the significance of various, particularly feminine, subconscious libidinal impulses in women’s unconsciousness and the creation of future liberating female discourses (Jones, 1981: 252). It seems that for Cixous, a woman’s body is a direct source of female speech; the immediacy with which the body is experienced ‘promises a clarity of perception’ against phallic delusion.

Still, the ideas of plain ‘feminine’ or ‘woman’ sound at odds not just with contemporary theoretical efforts focused on emphasising the instability or fluidity of identity concepts in their gendered and other aspects. Even at the time of its inception, the intrigue of the term was present in what Berger later calls the ‘false enemy’ (Berger, 2021: n.p.), meaning the fact that Cixous herself ‘gave the greatest recognition to female writers named Shakespeare, Genet, or Kleist’. Berger goes on to point out that

the term ‘woman’, the adjective ‘*féminine*’, and even the phrase ‘the woman’ (...) none of these terms, taken together or separately, refer to what was previously believed and said about the second sex. The ‘woman’ invoked in these texts is not an ideological fossil. (authors’ translation)

¹ University of Rijeka, CROATIA

*Corresponding Author: bmilos@uniri.hr

Therefore, it seems unjustified to understand *The Laugh of the Medusa* as a kind of essentialist discourse that invokes or celebrates a way of writing based on the notion of ‘femininity’ or the notion of ‘woman’, which would represent a different foundation than the notion of ‘man’ or ‘masculine writing’. Ultimately, Cixous herself has renounced the *feminine* in the term, so that what remains is literature ‘which is in itself queer’ (Segarra, 2021: 97). In this sense, writing is to be understood as a specific activity in which the subject can open up to far greater possibilities than those offered by ‘traditional binarism’.

If it is the case that gender particularism (essentialism) is merely a reductionist and superficial reading and understanding of the concept and its context, the question arises as to how that concept can be presented in its holistic and intended sense. This line of enquiry is further complicated by the fact that it seems that whilst the question itself can be included in the (epistemic) register from which it can certainly be posed, it is equally impossible to find a precise or at least satisfactory answer within this register. As Cixous wrote:

As soon as the question ‘What is it?’ is posed, from the moment a question is put, as soon as a reply is sought, *we are already caught up in masculine interrogation*. I say ‘masculine interrogation’: as we say so – and – so was interrogated by the police. (Cixous, 1981: 45)

At the risk of unwittingly/unintentionally tying ourselves up in the knots of the investigative process, we suggest that one way to approach the term *écriture féminine* in its programmatic sense is to contextualise it as a form of resistance or challenge to phallogocentrism.

For Cixous, most literary texts are phallogocentric as they are determined by an invasive, colonising, ‘obligatory virility’ (Cixous, 1976: 877). The necessary reference to Derrida in this context points not only to the creative affinity between the two authors, but also to some premises that Cixous and Derrida share in their work and which are important for analysing the literary material in this study. The first premise concerns the concept of the author; the second, the concept of style.

With regard to Derrida’s and Cixous’ shared conception of language and writing, Segarra notes that Derrida’s thesis of renouncing performative authority in order to enable the appearance of ‘events’ in language is also accepted by Cixous, who writes that the ‘author must not be the ‘pilot’ in the journey of writing, but must ‘submit’ to the power of language’ (Segarra, 2019: 227–228). On the other hand, if the presence (penetration) of the author in a work is recognisable (interpretative?), such a style (authorial style?) could write the work out of what would fall under *écriture féminine*. ‘In fact’, as Segarra underlines, “‘feminine writing’ and ‘style’, a term rejected by both Cixous and Derrida, would be poles apart’ (227). These premises in Derrida and Cixous are linked to their ‘postmodern style due to an intensive use of the versatility and possibilities of signifiers’ (228) in the pursuit of ‘meaning and truth’.

It can be assumed that the (again contested) nouns ‘meaning’ and ‘truth’ are to be understood within the framework of the postmodern, deconstructivist paradigm of the formation of these terms. In any case, the desired goals are only achievable through the activation of different libidinal economies than those that are generative for and within the mainstream realm of cultural, social and political (phallogocentric) space. This different libidinality, even if labelled feminine, should be understood as a (creative) position (of difference), ‘and not as an essence of actual women’ (Segarra, 2019: 228).

If fact, ‘writing with the body’ or, more broadly, (feminine) writing, might be assimilated to a performative writing that not only thematizes the body in unusual ways in literary tradition, but writes the body, inscribing it in the text. (...) ‘To risk’ the writer’s own ‘active body in the text’ may also be considered an ethical engagement, which has frequently been related to a feminist way of writing, at least as it was undertaken by some women writers, Cixous among them, in France at the time of the MLF, the 1970s. (229)

In any case, to attempt a taxative or formal account of the elements that constitute *écriture féminine* or writing with the body would be ‘a regrettable oversimplification of the notion’ (227). Therefore, it is likely that analytical representations of Cixous’ terms can be found in the (interpretative) tangled knots of poetics, politics and ethics and in the dynamics of tensions between holistic and particularist (essentialist) approaches, such as the one mentioned by Jones or in the quote from the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* which reads:

Hélène Cixous famously proposed the notion of *écriture féminine*, positing that the expression of women’s lived experience might be impressed in women’s literary production in linguistic styles that offer alternatives to standard objective description and linear temporal development. (Korsmeyer and Weiser, 2021: n.p.)

Toril Moi more straightforwardly points out that Cixous’ standpoint appears to embody a potent feminist adaptation of Derridean theory, rejecting essentialism and biological determinism. Nevertheless, Moi continues:

Unfortunately, Cixous's theory is riddled with contradictions: every time a Derridean idea is evoked, it is opposed and undercut by a vision of woman's writing steeped in the very metaphysics of presence she claims she is out to unmask. (Moi, 2002: 108)

It is not only Moi who is overtly unhappy with Cixous' solutions, whether literary or political. Jones recounts Wittig's outraged exclamation about the scandalous nature of Cixous' stances on the necessity (actually non-necessity) of analyses of material aspects or causes of gender oppression (Jones, 1981: 256–261). Moi is likely working along the same lines as Wittig with an interesting comment on 'ermine as emancipation' (Moi, 2002: 124). However scandalous and contradictory Cixous might be, she is also one of the most prominent figures of endeavours aimed at proposing parallel methods to distinguish creative *puissance* different from monosexual, phallogocentric writing.

Apart from the poetic-political-ethical knot that is noticeable at the level of receptions to Hélène Cixous' writing, 'the poethical' (Parker, 1999) aspect of Cixous' approach to writing also functions, according to Sant, as Cixous' intrinsic organisational and creative principle. Sant notes similarities between Cixous' writing practice and Derrida's conception of the 'poem', explaining that 'the poem is a dictate that comes from the other' (Sant, 2017: 79). In the words of Cixous: 'The other is imposed on me, is dictated in an absolute way to me' (Cixous, as cited in Sant, 2017: 80). Moreover, as Sant emphasises, the importance of the ethical (poethical?) aspect in Cixous' work is made clear in her quote: 'for me, there is only ethics, nothing else' (81).

The poethical nature of Cixous' *écriture féminine* thus becomes political, i.e., a relationship with the other, with alterity, 'which allows for an opening towards the undecidable and the unpredictable' (Erlingsdóttir, 2014: 115). This relationship consists in the 'liberation from social stigmas through the liberation of language', through the 'invention of new ways of speaking and writing, but also new ways of seeing, hearing, touching, and tasting' (115).

ELENA FERRANTE, OR AN AUTHOR IN THE (K)NOT

To add more uncertainty to the already not very solid ground of *écriture féminine*, let us recall that the pronouns 'she' or 'her' used to denote Elena Ferrante are themselves questionable. Elena Ferrante is a pseudonym behind which a person unknown to the public is hidden. A dozen novels can be attributed to the author Elena Ferrante, *L'amore molesto* (*Troubling Love*) being the first published title (1992). It took about a decade of a fruitful writing career to arrive at the smash-hit in four volumes titled the *Neapolitan Novels*. The series consists of the titles *My Brilliant Friend* / *L'amica geniale* (2012), *The Story of a New Name* / *Storia del nuovo cognome* (2013), *Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay* / *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (2014), and *The Story of the Lost Child* / *Storia della bambina perduta* (2015).

Despite being recognised as a novelist at an international level, Ferrante has kept her identity secret. Speculation about it has been rife, and several theories, based on information she has given in interviews and analysis drawn from the content of her novels, have been put forward. For example, in 2003 Ferrante published *la frantumaglia*, a collection of letters, essays, reflections and interviews, which sheds some light on her background. In a 2013 article for *The New Yorker*, critic James Wood summarised what is generally accepted about Ferrante, based in part on letters collected in that volume:

(...) we learn that she grew up in Naples, and has lived for periods outside Italy. She has a classics degree; she has referred to being a mother. One could also infer from her fiction and from her interviews that she is not now married ... In addition to writing, 'I study, I translate, I teach.' (Wood, 2013: n.p.)

Of course, the question of why we, the public, should take these, or any other sentences of Ferrante as non-fiction remains unanswered. In fact, she herself cites Italo Calvino's sentence on biographical facts:

I don't give biographical facts, or I give false ones, or anyway I always try to change them from one time to the next. Ask me what you want to know, but I won't tell you the truth, of that you can be sure. (Calvino as cited in Ferrante, 2016: 84)

Unlike Calvino, Ferrante concludes the paragraph by emphasising her reluctance to create a chain of false answers and preference to remain silent about who she (or he...) is.

Hiding the author behind the signifier 'Elena Ferrante' has, in the theoretical sense, several resonance fields. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that pseudonyms have hardly been an unknown phenomenon in literature, especially in earlier eras. In particular, female writers choosing pseudonyms, whether suggesting a male or female author, is nothing new. The decision to adopt a pseudonym would be driven by the desire for success in an environment not always (or ever) favourable to female authors, or perhaps the pseudonym would serve to give female authors the opportunity to venture into creating works that were new or different from what they were known for. The author's name or even a pseudonym was not always necessary for the publication of a literary text,

but contemporary publishing works according to different economic and cultural codes. In that respect, the pseudonym in the case of Elena Ferrante can also be read as an interesting (media), lucrative (marketing) and ingenious (publishing) move.

Furthermore, the fact that the pseudonym 'Elena Ferrante' refers to a female author indicates the deliberate construction of a specific gender position of authorship. This gendered position can still, and often does, function as the other half of humanity in the wider social context. Therefore, 'Elena Ferrante' can also be understood as a signal of a ghettoising convention (in either an ironic or non-ironic key). Certainly 'Elena Ferrante' must also be understood as a conscious acceptance of a name that exists only as a play of signifiers. The most intriguing moment associated with the theme of pseudonymity undoubtedly relates to Barthes' concept of the 'death of the author'. When this death occurs, Barthes writes, 'writing begins' (Barthes, 1977: 142). Writing, however, a 'neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away', is a type of space 'where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing' (Barthes, 1977: 142). Barthes' renunciation of the writing body corresponds to Cixous' call that the adjective feminine is not a marker for an opposition, and that it does not refer to an essence of woman or the feminine, but is a signifier for a difference to (gender) opposition itself: a signifier that can ultimately also be removed because it is a tautology of the noun to which it was originally attached.

And just as some of the feminist readings previously discussed are not entirely convinced by Cixous' proposals, it is also the case that Barthes' theoretical proposal was not met with enthusiasm by some feminist authors. Mary Eagleton, for example, writes about how Barthes' death of the author or Foucault's indifference to the question of who speaks provoked critical responses from Kamuf, Miller and Sage (Eagleton, 2005). All these responses can be described as critical reservations about Barthes' proposal, emphasising the importance of the (female) identity component in literary theoretical considerations.

From the perspective of 'identity' (feminism), the pseudonym 'Elena Ferrante' can easily become a semantic knot that needs to be addressed or categorised. However, this can only happen if 'Elena Ferrante' is understood as something other than an integral part of the writing process – or that she is something other than the 'language that speaks' (Barthes, 1977: 143), the point at which only language acts, 'performs', and not 'I' (Barthes, 1977: 143).

What interests us, then, as much as Ferrante's 'extra-literary' authorial framing, is the writer's elaboration of the way of writing, or her way of writing as a form of autopoiesis. Since the time of Varela and Maturana (1980), the term autopoiesis has been employed in many different contexts. When literary scholars use the term, it usually refers to conceptions of language processing, as in Ira Livingston's quotation:

(...) an autopoietic system is an eddy in linear time, or, to put it another way, autopoietic systems constitute relational time (...) this eddying flow is familiar as the operation of meaning in language: in the flow of speech and writing, words that come after alter the meaning of words that came before, making meaning a continual and more or less open-ended recontextualising. (Livingston, 2006: 88)

Other readings that emphasise specific aspects of literary texts and the representations of consciousness are articulated through various literary genres (see Lippert, 2009). The description of the successiveness of language as a fundamental cognitive principle of language processing can be a valuable introduction of Ferrante's autopoiesis to the concept of *écriture féminine*, and especially so through the notion of *la frantumaglia*.

LA FRANTUMAGLIA AND SMARGINATURA: UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Ferrante may be anonymous, but what distinguishes her is the massive critical appraisal of her work. She has been called the writer of her generation and perhaps the greatest living novelist. Her writing is described as addictive, fascinating and even universal in its impact on readers regardless of their cultural, linguistic, gender, class or age differences. Naples seems to have become a widespread *topos* for everyone's joys and miseries.

As Tiziana de Rogatis, one of the scholars whose work on Ferrante is often praised as thorough and exceptionally informed, states:

(...) the signature of Ferrante's poetics lies in the plasticity of her prose, which enables her to remain anchored in the real world with its objective, opaque and trite features, and also reveal, epiphanically, its metaphorical depth. (De Rogatis, 2019: loc. 338/4726)

What prevents such poetics from falling into the abyss of bizarreness or chaos, and what makes it 'plastic' (understood as convincing, plausible or *vraisemblable*) 'is the porous wall separating the public "I" from the disorder of *frantumaglia*'.

These terms need more detailed explanation. Detected as Ferrante's *métier* is her capacity to 'guide an event' of everyday life towards 'its murkier, more resistant centre because writing is rooted in a preverbal realm, where words fail us', as Tiziana de Rogatis further explains

The so-called public 'I' can thus be understood as a specific point from which Ferrante's narration slips into a differently styled course of events, purposefully more internal, in order to stimulate the sensation of a more intimate truth: the kind of truth that could be called someone's personal reality. (De Rogatis, 2019: loc. 338/4726)

Ferrante's insistence on being as close as possible to reality/objectivity leads her deep into the depths of the personal unspeakable, into the world of complex feelings every person faces as an inevitable and immediate surrounding. To that extent, the inner world is characterised by particular features of a unique reality, and this reality has the potential to dissolve into a preverbal disorder of precepts, sensations and fragments: what Ferrante calls *la frantumaglia*. What is fascinating about this familiarism – the word belongs to the vocabulary of Ferrante's mother – is that despite being the state of a dreadful abolition and negation of reality, it has the productive power of reality, which makes the frightful 'eddy' (seem) real. The interchangeable appearance of different narrative intensities merges the interplay of inner and outer optics and creates Ferrante's narrative-tissue dynamics.

I work by contrast: clarity of facts and low emotional reaction alternating with a storm of blood, of frenzied writing. However, I try to avoid dividing lines between the two moments. I tend to make them slide into one another without a break. (Ferrante, 2016: 86)

This absence of breaks creates the particular tone of Ferrante's writing, and her texts' continuity and almost organic coherence facilitate an overall atmosphere of reality in the narrative worlds represented in her novels.

In her reading of the phenomenon of *la frantumaglia*, Milkova suggests that it is a denotation mark for 'women's corporeal and psychological fragmentation', that is to say:

Her protagonists succumb to systematic assaults which leave them bleeding or broken. (...) Battered, bleeding, disfigured, mutilated or penetrated female bodies frame the representation of women's corporeality (...). In turn, this corporeal fracturing informs women's subjectivity as shaped by, and lived as, fragmentation, liminality and slippage. (Milkova, 2021: 28)

A few lines later, Milkova draws a bold conclusion: 'To be afflicted with *frantumaglia* is to acknowledge – and submit to – the protocols of a universal patriarchy'.

Our reading, we believe, does not lead to such a straightforward conclusion, but it certainly shares some similarities with Milkova's argument. We read *la frantumaglia* as an epistemic principle, even an epiphanic flash outside of the downbeat (narrative) successiveness of one's life course. Namely, *la frantumaglia* has to do with the outer reality that strikes the characters (and dictates the tone of Ferrante's writing) at certain moments in time. The outer impulses are reduced to their most potent (typical) fragments, excessive in their clarity and multitude, and the plenitude of such forms simply overwhelms. *La frantumaglia* in our reading is a productive stasis that enables Ferrante's characters' (narrative) progression and development. In contrast to Milkova's conclusion, we argue for *la frantumaglia* as a principle of an outsized understanding of the conditions of life, but not necessarily the condition of patriarchy as an underlying principle. If the patriarchy were an underlying principle in Ferrante's writing, the characters would not be in a position to embrace any modality of knowing outside the rigid framework of the unique and overall status quo. The logic of the text has to provide for the prolapses of 'feminine' ways of knowing, but they have to stay merged in the totality of causes and events constitutive of the narrative. The position of horizontality of events afflicted by *la frantumaglia*, which equates them with other events – even those of explicit patriarchal brutality – assures the narrative adherence to the (pro-)claim(ed) (of) reality. Therefore, our reading of *la frantumaglia* does not rely on the disfigured (butchered, perforated and smashed) female body or psyche, but on the feminine body and psyche capable of knowing and understanding.

Furthermore, the other important term in Ferrante's writing, *smarginatura*, the dissolution of margins, is something Milkova reads as a symptom of *la frantumaglia*. We propose that *smarginatura* is a symptom of the absence of *la frantumaglia*. *Smarginatura* is more of Ferrante's *stylistic/symptomatic* principle. Reality starts to dissolve in the absence of linkage (painful and overbearing) to it. The process of dissolution initiates stiffness, immobility, and utter incomprehension of the surrounding reality; in consequence, it makes the character feel fearful and incompetent.

The principle of *smarginatura* is best represented in the character of Lila in the *Neapolitan Novels*: not just in her narrated dissolving episodes, but the complete setting of her character's narrative appearance and functioning. As well as Lila, the character of Olga in *The Days of Abandonment* suffers the symptoms of *smarginatura*. After Olga is abandoned by her husband, she goes through a crisis in which descriptions of her daily life, such as caring for her children and the house, alternate with paralysing sequences of *smarginatura*. The stupor of *smarginatura* completely numbs Olga and renders her incapable of even the most banal actions, such as unlocking doors. Olga desperately tries to understand, to find her own truth and meaning.

Therefore, with an effort that cost me a struggle to the limit of the bearable, I got to my feet. I have to take hold of myself, understand. Get back in touch immediately. (Ferrante, 2005: 140)

But this is not the case. The mere desire for understanding is not the same as understanding itself. The novel *The Days of Abandonment* is somewhat simplistically understood as the portrait of a woman's pain in the crisis of a failed marriage. This portrait is indeed detailed, up close and personal. The seductive intimacy and strategic proximity to typically understood 'women's-fiction' themes skilfully conceal the possibility of a different (happy) ending. At the end of the novel, Olga talks to a neighbour with whom she enters into a romantic relationship, and he asks:

- What happened to you that night?
- I had an excessive reaction that pierced the surface of things.
- And then?
- I fell.
- And where did you end up?
- Nowhere. There was no depth, there was no precipice.
- There was nothing. (Ferrante, 2005: 205)

The 'nowhere', the 'no' and the 'nothing' that finally frees Olga from the burden of fate *à la* Ana Karenina, her literary ex-point of reference, is the promise of an undiscovered personal epistemic space that is yet to come.

ETHICS AND POLITICS OF THE OTHER: STUMBLING OVER A BODY

The body of Ana Karenina is famously destroyed under a train. Karenina's body is certainly not the only female (literary character's) body annihilated in writing. In the context of *écriture féminine*, as elaborated before, the body appears to be a significant stumbling block, even with all of the changes that term has gone through: from unique *fémminine* anti-theorising practice all the way to the general concept responsible for designating numerous different writings and literary possibilities. The term is loaded with second-wave pathos and contradictions and it resonates with the questions of language management, engagement and liberation. Certainly, the term resonates with (if not mirrors) the idea of a woman's body as well.

The phantasm of the woman's body expressed, represented, engraved, won or regained in language has motivated our choice because Ferrante's novels are fertile sources for these types of analyses. Multiple facets appear through Ferrante's narratives, creating a maternal, sexual, sisterly, friendly, girlish, artistic and intellectual kaleidoscope of women's lives. These facets create the material *locus communis* of female narrative destiny by being crammed inside the phrase 'a woman's body'. They create and sustain it as a perceptible narrative fact; the myriad facets are 'watched over' to produce a specific result:

The female body has learned the need to watch over itself, to take care of its own expansion, its own vigour. Yes, vigour. Today this noun may seem suitable only for the male body. But I suspect that at first it was mainly a female virtue, that the vigour of the woman was like that of plants, invasive life, rampant life (...). (Ferrante, 2016: 104)

The vigorous female bodies of Ferrante's narratives are not to be mistaken for rigorous bodies if such a remark is allowed (or may be induced) by the phrase 'watched over'. The author continues to elaborate on the importance of female awareness and 'looking-after-ness' of self-sustainable processes during challenging and/or formative periods. Her stance towards female vigour – as a nourishing and supportive prerequisite of any (*fémminine*) life – is almost an echo of Cixous' words:

And woman? Woman, for me, is she who kills no one in herself, she who gives (herself) her own lives: woman is always in a certain way 'mother' for herself and for the other. (Cixous, 1991: 50)

The word 'mother', as formulated in Cixous' paragraph, functions as a generative force of self-giving and attention, an incentive of alert auto-productivity with manifold possible outcomes. For Ferrante, the 'vigorous body' carries a very similar meaning.

The vigorousness of the female body is needed especially for the reasons of knowing how to continue living one's life after being affected by the harsh lessons of *la frantumaglia*. Ferrante writes:

The *frantumaglia* is to perceive with excruciating anguish the heterogeneous crowd from which we, living, raise our voice, and heterogeneous crowd into which it is fated to vanish. (Ferrante, 2016: 99)

If we are to offer an example of the *frantumaglia* afflicting Ferrante's characters, we can again turn to Olga, a protagonist of *The Days of Abandonment*. As Ferrante explains:

[Olga] doesn't want to be Ana Karenina or a broken woman. Above all she doesn't want to be like the abandoned woman of Naples who made an impression on her as a child, she feels that she is the product of different culture, a different female story, she thinks that nothing is inevitable. Of course, she feels deeply that every abandonment is a vortex and annihilation, maybe also an indication of the desert that has expanded around us. But she reacts, she recovers, she lives. (Ferrante, 2016: 76)

Furthermore, and not to miss the famous tetralogy the *Neapolitan Novels* and an important shift in Ferrante's ethics of care, the character of Elena, the narrator, vigorously watches over herself as well as others throughout the narrative. In possession of the means of creation and care/surveillance – language – Elena Greco could have emerged as the more resilient figure of the two protagonists. On the other hand, Lila Cerullo, essentially stripped of her own voice (and her language, the dialect), could have remained just one of the figures in Elena's coming to being, of Elena's story. However, as Ferrante exclaims:

You hear? My, my, my. How often do we repeat that possessive adjective. In fact, a first big step forward, in the matter of writing, is to discover exactly the opposite: that what we triumphantly consider ours belongs to others. Dealing with the world, yes at any time they are entirely ours. But the words – the written form in which we enclose them, attentive to the red margins of our notebooks – are not. (Ferrante, 2022: 46)

Is there any contradiction in this statement of Ferrante's? What does 'dealing with the world' mean? Moreover, without words, how is one to deal with the world? How is one to accomplish the deeds, and how will those accomplishments be structured as parts of a person's life? There is a possibility that Ferrante distinguishes between the world of words and the world of deeds. Moreover, it seems that we belong to the words – even the bad ones – but the words do not belong to us. They are always someone else's; we always need someone other than ourselves – or many others – to tell (us) our own story in others' words.

The thought of being placed in language – and thus in storytelling – as a fundamental element of making meaning of life leads Ferrante to think about her specific position as a writer. Left unenthusiastically empty after finishing her 'one-protagonist' novels, Ferrante concluded:

My women, because I could see only one way that adequately and truthfully described them and myself, ended up, against my will – I insist: you don't tell the story without the shoves of others; that old principle has remained firm – in a sort of solipsism, without which, however, I saw, for me as an author, only a regression toward the inauthentic. (Ferrante, 2022: 35)

The desire Ferrante experienced to find a new language suitable to her new authorial needs is evident in the following passage:

I was trying to get out of the dead end of *The Lost Daughter* by drafting a new story of mothers and daughters (...) when I picked up Cavarero's book again. It seemed new, a book I had never read, starting from the use she makes of Karen Blixen and the story of the stork, recounted in *Out of Africa*. But what kindled my imagination was an expression: *the necessary other*. It serves as the title of an entire chapter, is set up by a complex dialogue with Hannah Arendt, skirts the theme of narcissism, and arrives finally at the following definition: The necessary other is (...) a finitude that remains irremediably an other in all the fragile and unjudgeable insubstitutability of her existing. It was, I recall, a shock. *An other* seemed to me what I needed in order to leave the three earlier books and yet stay within them. (Ferrante, 2022: 35–36)

The Necessary Other – which was supposed to be the title of the first volume of the tetralogy – thus becomes the backbone of the constructive mechanisms of the author's subsequent novels. Differently put, in her writing about coming to writing, Ferrante emphasises the condition of interrelational writing. Besides the interplay of auto- and biographical, the mutual exchange or the principle of the necessary other also presupposes a condition to share, exchange, and most importantly, be narrated – put into being – with and through the other. That an 'I' exists through the discourse of the other, and the other exists through the discourse of an 'I' is the protocol of the fundamental procedure of Ferrante's narrative structures. It is also the underlying credo of Ferrante's narrated worlds: worlds crowded with other women.

It is in this aspect of Ferrante's work that we find a crucial step in understanding her *écriture (féminine)*. For the purposes of this article, we have named this aspect the ethical principle of Ferrante's discourse. The ethical principle of Ferrante's writing is much less invested in examining the language effects from within by interrupting, successfully or less successfully, the core protocol of language acquiring, the successiveness (in a different register – readability). *Écriture féminine* (or for that matter also Irigaray's *parler femme* or Kristeva's semiotic coda), is an attempt heavily indebted to either deconstruction or psychoanalysis, or both theoretical approaches. Having (or wanting) to deal with (man-made) structuralist and poststructuralist theories, Cixous' endeavour (and those of others mentioned as well) suffered several criticisms such as cohesive inconsistency (the body problem) or formal inability (to deconstruct the deconstruction). Still, in Weil's words:

(...) these writers [meaning the so-called French feminist authors] want to go beyond the playful deconstruction of the male tradition, and strive to write in such a way as to open up another space for female imagining and action. French feminists used *écriture* as a weapon not to represent the feminine but to create it through experimental poetics. (Weil, 2006: 169)

Such interventions strove to grasp language and spill (it) over the edges to fertilise and grow what the language could/can not sustain. How hollow does it sound to write a woman? And to whom?

THE FIREWORKS PUT ASIDE, OR *QUESTIONE LINGUISTICA*

From the privileged position of the *post hoc* and for reasons of analytical clarity, we will distinguish between two layers (at least) of Ferrante's language. The first is what has usually been named the narrative technique, which builds the style that affects the tone of a specific narrative. In other words, the first layer consists of language that in technical terms would be understood as Elena Ferrante's poetics. The second layer is that of language understood as materialisation in specific idiom.

The first-layer analysis starts with the language of Elena, the first-person narrator of the *Neapolitan Novels*, as a mechanism (made) of others that is formed entirely by the subtle threads of mutuality in between the narrated content and in between the layers of narration/writing. If we are to make a 'femme' to Cixous and ask what the language of the white ink looks like, the answer for Ferrante could be that it is 'a flow of language and writing without feeling otherness as a barrier' (Ferrante, 2022: 66). To start with Elena, furthermore, means to be aware of the knots that any other character creates in Elena's narrative and pulls and pushes them in the story as if Elena and others, especially Lila, want to unknot their mutually entangled hair. Those movements of force and delicacy, of ruthless bestiality and sweet tenderness, produce the fundamental dynamic of the tetralogy. Moreover, if our metaphor is functional, it speaks of the essential content of the tetralogy that is skilfully entangled into the formal novelistic constitutive parts. Namely – and in line with Adriana Cavarero's reading (Pinto *et al.*, 2020) – the suggested 'poethics' of the tetralogy is that the biographical narrative of Elena mirrors the development of the papers written by Lila. Still, those papers are absent, and Ferrante writes that throughout the *Neapolitan novels*, we never know anything of Lila's extraordinary writing except what Lenù summarises for us, or the little that emerges in Lenù's writing.

I said to myself at a certain point: you should make up some passages from Lila's letters of notebooks. But it seemed to me inconsistent with Lenù's rebellious inferiority, with her deluded autonomy that aims, in a process as complex as it is contradictory, at absorbing Lila by taking off her power, and empowering Lila by absorbing her. And, besides – I confessed when the book was going well – would I who write along with Lenù, I, the author, even be able to create Lila's writing. Am I not inventing that extraordinary writing just to describe the inadequacy of my own? (Ferrante, 2022: 54)

The intertwining of the narrative levels expressed in the interview with Ferrante mentioned above mirrors a continuous intersection at which each becomes the narrator of the other, actual or potential. Cavarero detects in this fact the poetics that, in Ferrante's writing, becomes a new literary genre for fiction: biographies of lasting relationships (Pinto *et al.*, 2020: 239–240).

Therefore, the ethical principle of Ferrante's *écriture* does not reach only up to the combinatory effects of narration, but it displays relationality as the key feature of the constitutive narrative. The tectonic movements of Ferrante's world are not those of the narrated facts (biographies of people) but those of the underlying processes (biographies of relationships). The same structure can be detected in the layer of language understood as materialisation in specific idiom.

As for this second layer: we start with two main questions regarding Ferrante's work. The first question considers the so-called brow dilemma, and the second we have named the dialect dilemma. Put somewhat differently and a little more humorously, whether Ferrante is incapable of writing in proper Italian or she is

incapable of writing in the Neapolitan dialect, for some readers and critics she is a deluge of bad language. A more positive description of Ferrante's use of language would be somewhat Spartan, or as Schappell called it 'spare, muscular prose' with no 'pyrotechnics' where 'the language never draws attention to itself', but this very fact 'creates a powerful effect' (Schappell, 2015: n.p.). In the interview with Schappell Ferrante has commented on her language stylisations, emphasising that she writes stories about 'middle-class women who are cultivated and capable of governing themselves'. In *Frantumaglia. A Writer's Journey* Ferrante highlights:

Then something breaks and these women's boundaries dissolve, and the language with which they are attempting to say something about themselves also is loosed, unbounded. From that moment, the problem – a problem that is, above all, mine, as I write – becomes how to rediscover, step by step, the measured language they started with and, with it, the kind of self-governing ability that stops the characters from falling into depression, into self-degeneration, or into dangerous feelings of revenge, aimed at themselves or at others. (Ferrante, 2016: 336)

And this is not the only problem with Ferrante's use of language, as described here. As mentioned before, the problem with the 'brow' position is also to be tackled. In an article titled 'A problem of middlebrow style: Dialect and translation in Elena Ferrante's Naples tetralogy', Robinson neatly lists all the relevant aspects raised in the discussion of Ferrante's middlebrow-oriented writing. Having stated that it is rather suspicious that Ferrante is not using dialect, Robinson argues for Ferrante's work as being a modern type of middlebrow literature characterised and shaped by the set of expectations of the particular type of readers to whom new-middlebrow literature is speaking. Some of the essential features constitutive of this type are the 'intelligent passion' of middlebrow reading, cognitive complexity of immersion, and empathetic identification, which need not be conceived as naïve and pre-modernist (Robinson, 2022: 583–584). The author continues:

This recent rearticulation of a sophisticated middlebrow sensibility well describes the critical reception of Ferrante's novels, particularly as the middlebrow is primarily though not exclusively associated with the majority of readers. It is gendered feminine because most readers of fiction are women. (584)

Differently put, taken from the perspective of brows, what exactly would constitute an appropriate literary canon of proper (female) art? Would it consist of writers suspicious of style, resistant to the fetish of beautification, those transgressing genre boundaries, those commercially popular within the system of world literature? Would it include those whose use of language is queer because their written signifiers allow for translations (almost!) without being lost in it? If so, Ferrante has her place reserved. It is precisely in the form of queer reductivism of Ferrante's language that we see the 'formal' (technological) step forward in the notion of *écriture à la Ferrante*. Her version of *écriture (féminine)* appears as if the semiosis of her texts is a force active in the interplay of the subterranean depths of (her) language.

The second dilemma of Ferrante's language is that of dialect. A paragraph from *The Story of the Lost Child* illustrates the problem. Namely, during a conversation with Lila, just after Lila's daughter has gone missing, Elena writes:

It occurred to me that it was now a linguistic question. She resorted to Italian as if to a barrier; I tried to push her toward dialect, our language of candour. But while her Italian was translated from dialect, my dialect was increasingly translated from Italian, and we both spoke a false language. She needed to explode, lose control of the words. I wanted her to say in the authentic Neapolitan of our childhood: 'What the fuck do you want, Lenù, I'm like this because I lost my daughter, and maybe she's alive, maybe she's dead (...)' (Ferrante, 2015: 362)

Where a materialised dialect should occur, only its naming occurs. There are very few dialectal expressions in the works of Elena Ferrante. She explains this as follows:

This is because dialectal vocabulary and syntax, as soon as they're written, seem even more false than Italian. (...) Once written, Neapolitan seems sterilised. (...) Gradually, I began to find it [the dialect] could be effective in a literary work, not used as it typically is in the realist tale but as a subterranean stream, a cadence within the language, a caption, a disturbance in the writing that suddenly erupts with a few, usually obscene words. (Ferrante, 2022: 51)

Robinson formulates it as the *questione linguistica* that is repeatedly confronted in narrative but is evaded in language (Robinson, 2022: 601). Ferrante's explanation of engaging the dialect as a lurking linguistic force highlights her loyalty to standardised Italian invariant of language. She even mentioned Italian language as a sole modus of assigning her own sense of national belonging to herself: 'Being Italian, for me, begins and ends with the fact that I speak and write in Italian language' (Ferrante, 2019: 18). In Italy, as in other nation-states, the

question of language standardisation is rarely just about philology. It is loaded with political, cultural, economic and historical elements. Besides, in Ferrante's case, the '*nom du dialecte*' sheds light on the sometimes critically unappreciated, 'mediocre' (Porciani, 2016), unbrushed, '*grosso modo*' (Sacco, 2016) Italian standard she has generally used in her writing. These rather unflattering characterisations of the language Ferrante uses are part of the reserved reception (mainly Italian) of Ferrante's work, which is partly due to linguistic reasons and partly to remarks about, for example, the specific composition of the novels, which resemble scripts for television series (Limbrandi, 2019: 285–386).

Apart from Robertson's assertion about the fundamentally meta-linguistic status of dialect in Ferrante's work, however, other studies also point to a much more nuanced relationship between standard Italian and dialect (or local language) in Ferrante's novels. For example, Limbrandi, who analyses dialect primarily in Elena Ferrante's tetralogy, proposes the term 'silent language' (*lingua silenziosa*) (Limbrandi, 2019: 388) for all those linguistic expressions in Ferrante's work that have a local or dialectal basis. Limbrandi notes that some of them are predictable and serve to characterise the characters, while others are less conspicuous and more original and are related to the structure of the narrative. Alfonzetti analyses the role of dialect in the novel *Nasty Love* through the 'silent language' and finds that dialect is consistent with the psychoanalytical interpretation of the novel. The dialect is interpreted as a trigger for the protagonist's confrontation with a childhood trauma and as a means of healing that trauma (Alfonzetti, 2018: 306–311).

The dialect in Ferrante's novels 'involves a strong emotional engagement at the prosodic and kinesic level' (Alfonzetti, 2018: 306), often indicating anger, rage, vulgarity and obscenity, but sometimes also intimacy, proximity and love (Limbrandi, 2019: 389-390). When asked about her (non-)engagement with dialect, Ferrante confessed:

As a child, as an adolescent, the dialect of my city frightened me. I prefer to let it echo for a moment in the Italian, as if threatening it. (Ferrante, 2016: 234)

In the quoted paragraph, the dialect is represented as a frightening environment, because it is the dialect of the city: its main means of communication. At the same time, it represents an ambivalence of possibilities for the (young) Ferrante – either she has to engage with the dialect and suffer the consequent anxiety, or communication is interrupted. Therefore, the dialect in the quoted paragraph reveals itself as a specific (textual) orifice of and towards the other. At the same time, it opens up as a form of (linguistic, communicative, epistemic) wound. The circumventions around the dialect in Ferrante's novels repeatedly emphasise the position of dialect as a 'non', as a hole (and we are fully aware of the play of signifiers here), a wound. If Cixous is right when she claims that 'the wound is at the origin of writing' (Sant, 2017: 73), then Ferrante's circumvention around the wound is simultaneously an ethical and poetic claim. For if the ethical occurs exactly 'where the unexpected arrival of the other reveals the ineffectiveness of a priori established modes of conduct', and if unconditional hospitality requires the 'willingness to relinquish mastery' (111), then Ferrante's engagement with dialect is present as, for example, in the quotation from *The Story of the Lost Child*, in which Elena opens herself up to the subterranean cadence of Lila's indignant fear and hostility caused by the immeasurable pain of losing her daughter. But it does not come to that. On the contrary, Lila's use of 'translated Italian' does not fulfill Elena's desires related to how she believes Lila should express her pain. Elena is thus deprived of the effect of the unconditional hospitality that Lila offers her, and *vice versa*. It seems that both characters have no possibilities to understand each other or themselves.

The void of the wound prevents the characters from translating them from the places where they reside in the process of signification. At the same time, at the level of the narrative, the wound fertilises the progress of the text, regardless of the fact that it is a text that lacks 'language', regardless of the fact that it is 'wounded' (Fleishman, 2015: 192). Ferrante's work

points to an orientation towards experimentation with/in the powers of language/languages that simultaneously underlies and undercuts different communicative positions: that of authorship, the position of the text itself and that of the reader.

(FEMININE) READWRITING

Ferrante has gone one step further with the concept of (feminine) writing, creating a linguistic universe that is in harmony with her narrative stimuli of *frantumaglia* and *smarginatura*, with the anonymity whose presence resonates loudly, with the other-body in the process of mutual exchange, with the wounds that are preserved from the banality of dictating to heal or to be complete. However, Cixous might call this step a *scandale*. Is it possible to imagine '*Nun me ne fott!*' being Ferrante's likely answer? Hardly, we believe, although this dialectal expression will not be a problem at all to accurately translate in any language into which Ferrante's answer might be translated.

Far from feminist auto-irony or even complacency and especially feminist resentments, Moro writes about Ferrante:

Ferrante's arduous pursuit of a language capable of expressing the truth about women's lives ultimately casts doubt upon the viability of such an enterprise, laying bare the limits of language, literature, friendship and feminism. (Moro, 2023: 135)

If women's lives are cramped, stifling, monotonous, laborious, empty, and paralysed in the vortex of fragments (and in Ferrante's works the lives of the heroines are often thus) then Luperini's cry for air is not surprising:

Enough, I told myself at a certain point, enough! Air, air! I felt trapped in a lightless universe: cramped, concentrated, consisting solely of minutiae of intersubjective relationships and psychologically repetitive dynamics that always unfold in obsessively monotonous ways. In these pages, one cannot breathe. (Luperini, 2015: n.p.; authors' translation)

Luperini struggles in the demanding environment of narrative text. Women often struggle in the demanding environment of life. We opt for an open conclusion of this article in relation to the sudden appearance of the (plain?) 'woman', which might appear as a pre-existing phantasm or as a regress of this writing, or as a *regressus* in infinite 'sclerosis' (Miller as cited in Eagleton, 2005: 19), or discrepancies between theoretical positions dedicated to engaging with the notions of literature and gender.

Openness here is an act of welcoming 'the other, conveyed by literature'. As Segarra points out, 'This opening might also be identified to the 'feminine' in feminine readwriting' (Segarra, 2019: 229). If reading for Cixous is a bodily experience comparable to a 'wound' that 'opens the reader's body', if it is equitable to writing, and if *f eminine* is one of the many possible differences of * criture*, then our reading of Ferrante's *oeuvre* can be understood as * criture f eminine*.

REFERENCES

- Alfonzetti, G. (2018). Il dialetto 'molesto' in Elena Ferrante, in G. Marcato (ed), *Dialetto e societ * (pp. 303–314). Padova: CLEUP.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *The Death of the Author*. Translated by S. Heath. London: Fontana.
- Berger, A. E. (2021). L'invention de l' criture f eminine. *Dictionnaire du genre en traduction / Dictionary of Gender in Translation / Diccionario del g nero en traducci n*. 19. April. Available at: <https://worldgender.cnrs.fr/notices/linvention-de-lecriture-feminine/>. (Accessed 18 May 2024).
- Cixous, H. (1976). *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Translated by K. Cohen and P. Cohen. *Signs*, 1(4), 1, 875–893. <https://doi.org/10.1086/493306>
- Cixous, H. (1981). *Castration or Decapitation?* Translated by A. Kuhn. *Signs*, 7(1), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.1086/493857>
- Cixous, H. (1991). *'Coming to Writing' and Other Essays*. Translated by S. Cornell, A. Liddle, and S. Sellers. Edited and translated by D. Jenson. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press.
- De Rogatis, T. (2019). *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*. Translated by W. Schutt. New York: Europa Editions. iBooks.
- Eagleton, M. (2005). *Figuring the Woman Author in Contemporary Fiction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230502215>
- Erlingsd ttir, I. J. (2014). Inscriptions du politique chez H l ne Cixous. *Diff rence sexuelle, r ves et r sistances. Milli M la*, 6, 109–130.
- Ferrante, E. (2005). *The Days of Abandonment*. Translated by A. Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions.
- Ferrante, E. (2015). *The Story of the Lost Child*. Translated by A. Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions.
- Ferrante, E. (2016). *Frantumaglia. A writer's journey*. Translated by A. Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions.
- Ferrante, E. (2022). *In the Margins: On the pleasures of reading and writing*. Translated by A. Goldstein. New York: Europa Editions.
- Fleishman, I. T. (2015). 'Ce qui est coup  repousse': Jean Genet, H l ne Cixous, the wound, and the poetics of omission. *French Studies*, 69(2), 190–204. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fs/knu300>
- Jones, A. R. (1981). Writing the body: Toward an understanding of 'l' criture f eminine'. *Feminist Studies*, 7(2), 247–263. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3177523>
- Korsmeyer, C. and Weiser, P. B. (2021). Feminist aesthetics, in E. N. Zalta (ed), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>. (Accessed 18 May 2024).
- Lippert, F. (2009). Narrowing circles: Questions on autopoiesis and literary interpretation after Dietrich Schwanitz. *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, 16(1–2), 125–141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506808101762>
- Livingston, I. (2006). *Between Science and Literature: An introduction to autopoetics*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

- Luperini, R. (2015). L'ultimo libro di Elena Ferrante: Discutiamone. Il caso Elena Ferrante/1, *laletteraturaenoi.it*, 20 April. Available at: <https://laletteraturaenoi.it/2015/04/20/l-ultimo-libro-di-elena-ferrante-discutiamone/>. (Accessed 5 February 2024).
- Maturana, H. R. and Varela, F. J. (1980). *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The realization of the living*. Dordrecht, Boston and London: D. Reidel Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-8947-4>
- Milkova, S. (2021). *Elena Ferrante as World Literature*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501357558>
- Moi, T. (2002). *Sexual/Textual Politics*. London and New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203426036>
- Moro, C. (2023). The pursuit of feminist language in Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan quartet. *The Italianist*, 43(1), 133–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614340.2023.2254125>
- Parker, A. (1999). Living writing: The poethics of Hélène Cixous. *Postmodern Culture*, 9(2). Available at: <https://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/19/living-writing-the-poethics-of-helene-cixous/>. (Accessed 18 May 2024).
- Pinto, I., S. Milkova and A. Cavarero. (2020). Storytelling philosophy and self writing—Preliminary notes on Elena Ferrante: An interview with Adriana Cavarero. *Narrative*, 28(2), 236–249. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nar.2020.0006>
- Porciani, E. (2016). Da Napoli al cliché. Note sull'*Amica geniale* di Elena Ferrante. *Allegoria*, XXVIII (87), 174–178. Available at: <https://www.allegoriaonline.it/929-da-napoli-al-cliche-note-sull-amica-geniale-di-elena-ferrante>. (Accessed 5 February 2024).
- Robinson R. (2022). A problem of middlebrow style: Dialect and translation in Elena Ferrante's Naples tetralogy. *Textual Practice*, 36(4), 528–604. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0950236X.2022.2030514>
- Sacco, M. (2016). Leggere Elena Ferrante. Cosa scrive, *Il Pickwick*, 11 April. Available at: <https://www.ilpickwick.it/index.php/letteratura/item/2599-leggere-elena-ferrante-come-scrive>. (Accessed 26 December 2023).
- Sant, J. (2017). *The ethics of poetic force Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Paul Celan* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University). Available at: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/107652/>. (Accessed 20 May 2024).
- Schappell, E. (2015). The mysterious, anonymous author Elena Ferrante on the conclusion of her Neapolitan novels, *Vanity Fair*, 27 August. Available at: <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2015/08/elena-ferrante-interview-the-story-of-the-lost-child>. (Accessed 5 February 2024).
- Segarra, M. (2019). Derrida, Cixous, and feminine writing, in J. M. Rabaté (ed), *Understanding Derrida, Understanding Modernism* (pp. 226–239). New York: Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501331893.0022>
- Segarra, M. (2021). Venturas y desventuras de la *écriture féminine*. *Tropelias Revista de Teoría de la Literatura y Literatura Comparada*, 36, 86–100. https://doi.org/10.26754/ojs_tropelias/tropelias.2021365311
- Weil, K. (2006). French feminism's *écriture féminine*, in E. Rooney (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521807069.008>
- Wood, J. (2013). Women on the verge: The fiction of Elena Ferrante, *New Yorker*, 13 January. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/01/21/women-on-the-verge>. (Accessed 5 February 2024).

Citation: Miloš, B. and Dulibić-Paljar, D. (2025). 'Being Inside a Tangled Knot': *Écriture Féminine* and Elena Ferrante. *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, 9(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/16023>

Copyright © 2025 by Author/s and Licensed by Lectito Publications, Netherlands. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.