

Loss and Renewal Elena Ferrante's Representation of Mourning in *Days of Abandonment*

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Abstract

Days of Abandonment, Ferrante's most frequently read novel in English world before *My Brilliant Friend*, witnesses the establishment of Ferrante's unique voice. It relates the psychological and physical turmoil of its female protagonist Olga who has been abandoned by her husband. By drawing on Freud's theory of mourning and loss, as well as Judith Butler's theorization of ungrievable loss, this paper seeks to lay bare the process of the reconstruction of female subjectivity in *Days of Abandonment*. It is argued that, by conducting a proper mourning process for the loss of her boundedness with the patriarchal order as represented by her husband Mario, Olga has managed to step out of the patriarchal order and reestablish her connection not only with other human subjects, but also with nonhuman actors as well. And in this posthuman intra-action with materiality of the world, she has rebuilt her identity that initiates her into a more rewarding life.

Keywords: Ferrante, Mourning, Woman, Loss, Otherness.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Neapolitan teratology, *My Brilliant Friend*, by the mysterious writer Elena Ferrante, has taken the readers as well as critics around the world by storm. Ferrante has represented the half-century long friendship between two women, who hail from the poor district of Naples, with sharp and precise observation. The enchanting and mesmerizing subjectivity radiating from those two female characters, however, has been foreshadowed by Ferrante's decades-long explorations of the living situations of women in modern Italy. Long before Ferrante amazes the world with her famous teratology, she has already found her place in modern Italian literature, famous for her "affective poetics, contemporary historical relevance, and the important political, linguistic, interpersonal, and gender issues that she tackles with both complexity and ease" (Russaro and Love, 2011, p. 1). *Days of Abandonment*, Ferrante's most frequently read novel in English world before *My Brilliant Friend* (Wood, 2013, para. 5), witnesses the establishment of Ferrante's unique voice. It relates the psychological and physical turmoil of its female protagonist Olga who has been abandoned by her husband.

By drawing on Freud's theory of mourning and loss, as well as Judith Butler's theorization of ungrievable loss, this paper seeks to lay bare the process of the reconstruction of female subjectivity in *Days of Abandonment*. It is argued that, by conducting a proper mourning process for the loss of her boundedness with the patriarchal order as represented by her husband Mario, Olga has managed to step out of the patriarchal order and reestablish her connection not only with other human subjects, but also with nonhuman actors as well. And in this posthuman intra-action with materiality of the world, she has rebuilt her identity and enters into a more rewarding life.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The "Ferrante Fever" has not only influenced readers worldwide, but also has given rise to vibrant scholarly research. In 2021, famous literary magazine MLN published a special issue entitled "Elena Ferrante in a Global Context". It addresses the global success of Elena Ferrante and regards Ferrante's novels as important parts of contemporary World Literature. In this issue, scholars examine Ferrante's novels from different perspectives. Rosselia di Rosa (2021) and Enrica Maria Ferrara (2021), for example, examine Ferrante's novels with new epistemological categories

such as new materialism, posthumanism, and transcorporeality. Enrica Maria Ferrara, drawing on Karen Barad's theorization of agential realism, has teased out Ferrante's posthuman reconstruction of female subjectivity in *Days of Abandonment*. Others have been focusing on the unique narrative forms of her creations. Rebecca Walker (2021), for example, theorizes about Ferrante's global poetics of fracture. Emauela Caffè (2021) emphasizes the global significance of Ferrante's Neapolitan saga "because it reflects the current state of crisis in portraying the world-wide issue of patriarchal violence against women as overarching and crucial in the protagonists' lives" (p. 32). And according to her, Ferrante's intersectional representation of the different social factors and the variety of contexts and circumstance in the lives of Lila and Elena has problematized the definition and representation of trauma, and in a way "suggests a de-pathologization and de-victimization of the survivors of violence" (p. 33). What's more, the dystopian nature of Ferrante's novels has also inspired comparative studies between *My Brilliant Friend* and *Handmaid's Tale*, for both, according to de Rogatis (2021), depict women "in an otherness that is uncanny because its roots lie within a social and anthropological underground, an underground space symbolic of the violence that is both endured and enacted by the victims themselves" (17). The critical recognition of the dialectic relationship between women and victimhood in Ferrante's works, that women as both victimizer and victimized, has partly explained the global appeal of Ferrante's works.

In their introduction to *The Works of Elena Ferrante*, Grace Russaro and Stephanie V. Love (2016) have summarized the reasons behind the rare popularity of Elena Ferrante's works across the world. "The content and style of her works appear to reach across cultures and societies, touching readers deeply through her affective poetics, contemporary historical relevance, and the important political, linguistic, interpersonal, and gender issues that she tackles with both complexity and ease" (p.1). Among them all, the strong affective power of her poetics and her unique engagement with gender issues have merited special attentions. James Wood (2013), for example, in his influential "Women on the Verge: The Fiction of Elena Ferrante", has noticed the "intensely, violently personal style" of Ferrante's works, which "seem to dangle bristling key chains of confession before the unsuspecting reader" (para.4). This confessional nature of Ferrante's narrative is inextricably linked with the her "shockingly candid" themes, which include "child abuse, divorce, motherhood, wanting and not wanting children, the tedium of sex, the repulsions of the body, and the narrator's desperate struggle to retain a cohesive identity within a traditional marriage and amid the burdens of child rearing" (para. 4). In a way, those are themes that fill up the lives of real women, especially mothers, in modern Italy, but which are curiously

absent from modern imagination of mother in Italian literature.

Benedetti (2007), for instance, has noticed the discrepancy between the prominence of motherhood in the Italian cultural landscape and "the limited space literature has devoted to mothers as subjects" (p. 4). Furthermore, the image of mother in Italian literature has been caught between a web of symbolic associations that oscillate between the sacrificial mother of Christ and the destructive Medea, both curiously distant from the daily lives of real mothers. Ferrante's works, in a certain sense, fill up this representational gap. Her women figures are neither sacrificial mothers nor destructive Medeas. Instead, they possess an ambivalent complexity that is rarely seen in Italian literature. Adriana Caravero (2020), for example, has noticed the valuable status of "mother-daughter relationship" in Ferrante's oeuvre (p. 247). This mother-daughter relationship is fraught with tensions, for Ferrante creates daughters who harbor "ambivalent feelings towards her mother" (Benedetti, 2007, p.104), and vice versa. James Wood summarizes the gripping quality of Ferrante's earlier novels as its willingness to "take every thought forward to its most radical conclusion and backward to its most radical birthing", and he finds this kind of writing shown to its best advantage when the narrator contemplates about "children and motherhood." Interestingly, the *Days of Abandonment*, as one of the mostly read novels of Ferrante in English world before *My Brilliant Friend*, suffers from publishing dilemma when it was first translated and considered for publication precisely because its unconventional depiction of motherhood. The editor thought Olga's treatment of her children during the days of her abandonment bordering on the verge of "child abuse" and should not be considered for publication. This episode, however, reveals more about the limits of the public imagination and idealization of women, especially of mothers, than the artistic and literary value of *Days of Abandonment*, which specifically tries to counteract the traditional patriarchal idealization of women which forbids them out of the maze of traumatic abandonment. In the following part, I will examine how Ferrante skillfully interacts with and challenges Freud's skeletal theorization of mourning, acknowledges Butler's idea of "ungreivable loss", and creates a female subject that survives the pain of victimhood.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

In "Mourning and Melancholia", Freud (1917) has pointed out that mourning "is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (p. 243). This process is accompanied by intensive experience of pain. This pain is caused by the realization of the fissure between the actual loss of the loved object and subject's psychological refusal to accept the truth. The

psychological cathexis that was once bestowed on the loved object does not evaporate together with the actual and physical absence of the love object in the subject's life.

The process of mourning, according to Freud, is subject's slow and intensive psychological negotiations with the reality of loss. It will last until the final detachment between the subject's libido and its object is achieved, and it is until then the ego of the subject becomes "free and uninhabited again" (p. 245). Mourning, in another word, is the psyche's slow catching-up with the outer reality, fraught with pain and suffering. What's more, loss is not accommodated through denial of the value or worth or desirability of the loved object. Rather, the mourning subject readjusts and sublimates every bit of memories and expectations of this relations in order to reach the final detachment. This means that those in mourning will go through a process filled with intensive ruminations, through which the affective investment is liquidated to a bearable amount.

Silvan Tomkins (1995) also notices this liquidation of affective investment in those who have lost their objects of love. According to Tomkins, "any affect investment in object or activity somewhat external to the self necessarily commits the affect life to agencies either not entirely dedicated to his purposes or quite indifferent to them" (p. 66). But luckily, "this restriction is never absolute in the sense in which air deprivation instigates panic" and the subject can always liquidate his or her affective investment when the cost becomes too much. "Only as investment loses its liquidity can the individual be caught by excessively unprofitable affective investment" (Ibid). The "excessively unprofitable affective investment" in Tomkins's writing takes the form of melancholia in Freud's and Butler's respective theorizations.

Freud has identified similar mechanism at work in processes of mourning and melancholia. According to him, mourning is "regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (p. 243). Likewise, melancholia is also a reaction to the loss of loved ones, albeit of a more "ideal" or "ambivalent" kind. Mourning and melancholia share largely similar mental features, such as "a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity" (p. 244). Different from profound mourning, melancholia is also observed to exhibit symptoms such as "a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (Ibid). Those self-reproaches found in the ego that demonstrates melancholia are theorized to be the

internalization of the lost object as a result of refused mourning.

Judith Butler (1995), building on Freud's theorization of the mechanism of insufficiently-grieved loss, has connected the melancholic incorporation to the sense of guilt that is often felt by people harboring homoerotic desire (p.173). According to Butler, the foreclosure of homosexual possibilities by compulsory heterosexuality has produced an ungrievable loss in individuals which is subsequently incorporated as part of the ego of the individual concerned. What is more, the "never was" and "never lost" nature of the loss shared the ambivalence of loved object in that part of the conflict between two individuals is displaced unto the ego of the one who cannot properly process the mourning. This, manifest in mental features, takes the shape of a harsh super-ego who is constantly berating the ego that is identified with the lost object (p.168). Insofar as the loss of a homosexual love object remains ungrievable, the mourning cannot be accomplished and the subject is in danger of being plunged into melancholia where the ungrievable loss is incorporated into the subject's ego and exists in the form of guilt. This will cause deep depression in the subjects whose loss cannot be properly mourned. Likewise, the abandoned women, whose loss of love object, if not properly mourned, may also have the danger of being depressed. In some sense, women and homosexuals suffer from the oppression of patriarchal society in the same form. The shame of being abandoned has prevented many women from seeking justice, and thus rendered their loss ungrievable.

Apart from the ungrievable loss caused by undelivered justice, abandoned women, especially housewives, also have great difficulty in liquidating their affective investments and will probably end up hurting themselves or those besides them when their pain or suffering becomes too unbearable. Ferrante has explicitly stated her adolescent dislike of women who hurt or kill themselves after being abandoned both in real lives and in imaginary artworks. She confesses her adolescent dislike of Dido's suicide and thinks that the suicide of Dido was the consequence of her going into the labyrinths of marriage or love without a "magic thread that can control getting lost". She also recalls her agitation when she read Dido's mad passions after she has been abandoned and how she imagined "that she expelled the furies, found love again, learned the art of getting lost and finding the way out" (Ferrante, 2016, "La Frantumaglia"). Olga, however, has found her way out and managed to expel her furies by the cathetic mourning of the loss of her love object.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Olga's mourning

If we combine Freud and Butler's theorization of mourning process with Tomkins' discussion of liquidation of affective investment in the unrequited

lover, we can understand how Olga successfully sidesteps the fate of *poverella* who has killed herself after she been abandoned. Ferrante has created an Olga who is not inhibited by the feeling of shame and who succeeds in breaking through the affective inhibition imposed on her by patriarchal society. Her unapologetic and confessional expression of negative emotions like anger, disgust, indifference, redirects the destructive energy towards the world outside of her own psyche.

In *Days of Abandonment*, Olga's mourning begins with intensive ruminations. The story begins with Olga being told by her husband that he is leaving her and their children. This announcement and Mario's subsequent removal from the house have sent Olga down the spiral of rueful ruminations. She "spent her night thinking, desolate in the big double bed", "examined and reexamined the recent phases of their relationship", looking for any signs of crisis (Ferrante, 2018, p. 9). Having found none, or willfully ignored some, Olga persuaded herself that the abandonment was not final, rationalizing her husband's decision to leave as "going through one of those moments that you read about in books, when a character reacts in an unexpectedly extreme way to the normal discontents of living" (p.10). This recoil into fictional world marks her denial of the reality. By turning absolute loss into a form of temporary rupture, Olga managed to parachute her feelings onto safer ground. However, as Freud has pointed out, in relationship there is not just sweetness and comfort. Pain and struggle are also present. If we regard proper mourning as a slow and intensive process of libidinal readjustment, the subject not only has to detach him/herself from those sweet moments, but also learn to let go of past feelings of betrayal and pain.

Likewise, just after Olga has reassured herself of the "solidity" of her relationship between her husband and her, she slipped into the memory of a traumatic event in their marriage years ago. Mario has cheated on Olga before. Years ago, they moved to Turin. Mario ended up infatuated with young daughter of their neighbor. The affair ended and the family of mother and daughter moved away. Mario returned to Olga, referring to his extramarital affair as "an absence of sense" (Ferrante, 2018, p.13) and refused to give a proper explanation of his behaviors. This ambiguity and lack of respect in their relationship have made Olga's mourning extremely difficult. Freud has pointed out that ambivalence in the relationship between subject and its loved object may lead to inadequate mourning. The ambivalence can either be manifested as full of tensions and misunderstandings, or a mixture of pain and happiness. Subject's ambivalent affective reactions towards the lost loved object increase the difficulty of mourning. The anger at her husband's occasional betrayals, overpowered by Olga's fear for the failure of her marriage, has added to her suffering in this eventual abandonment. This has almost pushed Olga into the abyss of melancholia. Olga has refused to succumb to

the disorienting power of the pain and anguish and reconnected with the maternal power in her body.

Obscenity is the representative of the maternal power. Ferrante has always been interested in the relationship between language and subjectivity. For her, the language adopted by a person not only indicates his or her identity, but also reveals one's expectations for oneself. This point is emphasized in *Days of Abandonment*. Before marriage, Olga was an independent woman who had published a well-received novel already. She had high hopes for her literary career. For example, she didn't want to write about "cultured women, in comfortable circumstances", who broke like "knickknacks in the hands of their straying men" (p.21). She regarded them as "sentimental fools", and wanted to write stories about "women with resources, women of invincible words, not a manual for the abandoned wife with her lost love at the top of her thoughts" (Ibid). This ambitious Olga determined to cultivate for herself a life of culture and decency, different from life she was born into. And that life was filled with turbulent noise and interpersonal disrespect. In the book, Ferrante (2016) records Olga's self-conscious estrangement from the language habit used by her family members. She trained herself into someone who had learned to "speak little and in a thoughtful manner, never to hurry, not to run even for a bus, but rather to draw out as long as possible the time for reaction, filling it with puzzled looks, uncertain smiles" (p. 12).

This hard-worn and self-trained habit crumbled when she realized the fact of her abandonment. The cultured way of speaking has given way to obscenity. She resorted to the obscenity, which, in her childhood years, has endowed her with a "sense of masculine freedom", has now become "sparks of madness" that burned her reason down to ashes. She noticed that.

She went from using a refined language, attentive to the feelings of others, to a sarcastic way of expressing myself, punctuated by coarse laughter...Obscenity came to my lips naturally; it seemed to me that it served to communicate to the few acquaintances who still tried coldly to console me that I was not to be taken in by fine words. As soon as I opened my mouth, I felt the wish to mock, smear, defile Mario and his slut (Ferrante, 2016, p.26).

This resorting to obscene language recalls the "motif of hysterical women" in literature. In fact, Freud's psychoanalysis began with his study of cases of female hysteria. The most often seen characteristic of hysterical women, or "mad women", is the uncontrollable spurring out of obscene language. According to Freud and his followers, the reasons that ungird this uncontrollable indulgence in obscene language might be the suppressed sexual desire of

women. The most often used example is Ophelia from *Hamlet*. A maid, who is as fair as the rose of May, has the audacity to speak or even chanting bawdy ballads in the sublime court of Denmark. When Ophelia is well and sound, she is disciplined by her father and brother. Only when she is mad can she voice her desires. Her undisguised passion for Hamlet has scandalized the Queen, who has to get rid of her as quickly as possible. This analytical logic seems so smooth to be taken for truth. This Freudian suggestion of Olga's resorting to obscenity, however, should not be regarded as Ferrante's endorsement of Freud's theories. Rather, it should be regarded as Ferrante's self-conscious and critical engagement with Freud's theories.

Ferrante is not unfamiliar with Freud's theories. "I love Freud, and I've read a fair amount of him: it seems to me that he knew better than his followers that psychoanalysis is the lexicon of the precipice"(Ferrante, 2017, "La Frantumaglia"). Rather than regarding Freud's theories as irrefutable dogma, Ferrante has realized the narrative potential embedded in Freud's "universalizing representations" of "individual's psychic reality". What interests her is the "pure specific inner disorder, irreducible flashes of ectoplasm, a jumble of fragments without any chronology" that is left beyond Freud's signpost of precipice. An analysis of Olga's retort to obscenity constitutes Ferrante's creative engagement and negotiation with Freud's idea of hysteria. First of all, unlike Ophelia whose sexual desire is disciplined and unaddressed, Olga was not shown to be sexually inhibited. Instead, she enjoyed a rather intimate sexual relationship with her husband, only slightly disturbed by her nurturing responsibilities. In fact, her intense sexual attachment to her husband, probably a result of harmonious sexual life, has increased the difficulty of her detachment. Therefore, Olga's resort to obscene language differs from the Freudian conjecture. Obscene language, for Olga, represented "a sense of masculine freedom" when she was a powerless little girl. But now, it could "raise sparks of madness" that could let her express her anger. Olga's self-conscious appropriation of obscene language and the freedom it offers to offend has distinguished her from the poor Ophelia who could only utter her distress while unconscious and mad. What's more, Olga's unapologetic utilization of the obscene language to vent her anger towards the outside world has prevented her from hurting herself.

Ferrante sees through the patriarchal logic behind the Freudian psychoanalysis and makes Olga realize that, in order to steer through this ocean of immense pain, she has to resort to her mother's language to empower herself. Even though Olga has complained about how she could not stand the rudeness of her original place and the loudness of her mother tongue, it is by reconnecting with the mother tongue that she recharges herself. Her mother tongue turns out to be the only language that can accommodate her

anger. Women's anger is disciplined. In *Good and Bad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger*, Rebecca Traister (2018) has analyzed different disciplinary processes women have to go through in their daily lives with examples from literature and real lives. She points out that.

The furious female is, we are told to this day, in innumerable ways, both subtle and stark, a perversion of both nature and our social norms. She is ugly, emotional, out of control, sick, unhappy, unpleasant to be around, unpersuasive, irrational, crazy, infantile. Above all, she must not be heard ("Medusas").

This corresponds with what happens to Olga. The civilized language cannot accommodate the angry expressions of women. If you want to express your anger, you have to resort to coarse and rude language. But once you adopt this language, you are no longer heard, or as Olga realized, "I found myself alone and frightened by my own desperation" (Ferrante, 2018, p.27). The anger caused by negligence and disrespect is used to justify the undue respect and negligence, resulting in the structural dilemma that is built on tautology. The possibility of expressing anger is foreclosed by the patriarchal system. In "The Aptness of Anger", Amia Srinivasan (2018) discusses a special strategy that is used to discipline women's public speaking, namely tone-policing. It is mainly used to delegitimize the content of women's public speaking by finding fault with her tone. Originally identified as a strategy of disciplining black female employee, who are famous for their loud and emotional expression of misgivings in working environment, it turns out to be a strategy used generally towards women. As Mary Beard (2017) has pointed out in *Women and Power*, even powerful and white women like Hilary Clinton and Margaret Thatcher have to take special voice training to make their voice sound reasonable to their male colleagues, or even the public. Ferrante has seen through the social inequality behind Olga's suffering. Her public and unapologetic expression of her anger in obscene language has estranged her from the common friends she has had with Mario, who, according to her, "always side with those who enjoy themselves, happy and free, never with the unhappy" (Ferrante 2018, p. 27).

Ferrante also gives a full representation of the protagonist's "ugly feelings". Olga was unpleasant and she knew it. Her unpleasantness is shown in her unrestrained and public demonstration of her strong emotions. For example, she became mean with the common friends of her and her husband. Her uncontrollable expression of hostility has estranged her from her friends. "And so even the very few people who still tried to help me withdrew in the end: it was difficult to put up with me." (Ferrante 2018, p.27). This expression, however, is essential in her revival.

Furthermore, she even deliberately insulted people who have helped her and exhibited a social indifference and coldness that she knew was inappropriate under normal circumstances.

Apart from this slackening of social responsibility, Olga also goes through a period when she could hardly keep up with the social expectations of motherhood. Olga demonstrates a heightened sensibility to the social expectations of motherhood and ideal women and she is willing to comply with those roles before she is abandoned. But her abandonment has rendered those rules less binding. For example, when she discovered her son was in a fever, she leaned “absently” over Gianni to feel his forehead with her lips”, and ordered Gianni “unsympathetically” to get out of the bed, ignoring Gianni’s complaint about his headache (Ferrante, 2019, 93). What’s more, she was aware of the effect her coldness has had on her children. To still the pain of abandonment has taken up all her energy, she has nothing to spare for the usual niceties that is required of her as a mother. This deliberate flaunting of expected motherhood has in some way distanced Olga from her familiar role as a mother and let her see the fissure between social expectation and her true feelings as a wounded individual.

4.2. The Way Out of the Maze

In Greek mythology, Ariadne betrays her brother and husband, and guides Theseus throughout the intricate maze that imprisons the monster Minotaur. Afterwards, she leaves her homeland with Theseus but is unfortunately abandoned by Theseus onto an island, and dies of childbirth in the end. Ironically, the woman who is able to guide the man through life-threatening maze is caught up in the maze of erotic desire and love and dies of it eventually. In *Frantumaglia*, Ferrante records her earlier efforts to rewrite the destiny of Ariadne. In her version of the story, a group of women decide to write letters in the tone of Theseus after he has left Ariadne for good, to comfort her in her loneliness. But she gave up when she has reached the second letter, for she has found out that the story is aiming at sketching “an ideal male in whose reality no Ariadne, however desperate in her abandonment, would have believed, especially today” and this community of women is full of goodly feelings that seems inauthentic (2018, “La Frantumaglia”). Ferrante labels this kind of writing as “describing how women dream of being loved” (Ibid). But imaginary or fictionalized love cannot make up for the real loss created by abandonment. It will postpone the pain, but once the letters stop coming, the wave of grief will again overwhelm the abandoned Ariadne.

Those are not thread that could lead one out of the maze of love. Instead, they are allurements that invite the abandoned deep into the maze where the monster called loss waits to devour them. Ferrante refuses to follow the traditional trajectories of

abandoned women and add another helpless woman to the literary canon. She decides to find a way out for them. Olga in *Days of Abandonment* has found her way out.

Even though Ferrante has not named Olga’s literary precedents in the novel, the strong emotional reactions of Olga as well as her experiences of abandonment remind the reader of the Medea from the Crete Island and Dido, the queen of Carthage. While Medea takes revenge on Eason in cold fury after she is betrayed by Eason, and flees into the dark woods afterwards, Dido sets fire upon herself when she is abandoned by Aeneas, hoping to scandalize the Trojan prince by her own death. Those two independent and rebellious women have not survived the excruciating pain of abandonment and have harmed themselves in great fury. Ferrante has recorded her own ambivalent feelings towards those women. While she likes their independent minds, which guide them out of the house of their fathers, she finds it hard to bear when they get caught up in the maze of erotic passion and lost everything. “As a girl, as I said, I detested that suicide. I thought that as a woman you go into labyrinths with a magic thread that can control getting lost” (Ferrante, 2018, “La Frantumaglia”). What’s more, she refuses to regard Dido or Medea’s self-consuming anger as “merely the product of a pernicious male racket, of a patriarchal plot” which presupposes the victimhood of women in those dire situations. Rather, she sees the traditional imagination of their pain as a result of a reductive thinking of women’s complexity. Women are not just “organism with good feelings, skilled masters of gentility”. They also harbor feelings of “hostility, aversion, and fury”. What’s more, those powerful and negative feelings, which rather than be imagined as reactive response to the abuse of patriarchal violence, should be felt as if “they are there, Aeneas or no Aeneas, Theseus or no Theseus”. Only by speaking in pride of “our complexity, of how in itself informs our citizenship, whether in joy or in rage”, can we cultivate the “art of getting lost in the difficulties and impracticalities” of real life. For Ferrante, the love that beguiles women does not necessarily falls into the heterosexual normative practice. Rather, it may appear in “the image of a beloved mother who nevertheless gives birth to suicidal dolls and minotaurs” (2018, “La Frantumaglia”).

Ferrante’s Olga has mastered the art of getting out of the maze of her troubling love with Mario. Though abandoned, she has not abandoned her art of self-surveillance. Not only has she kept reminding of herself of the actual realities that exist apart from her husband, but also has she utilized the hostility of her daughter to keep her attentive to the duties and responsibilities of her life. What’s more, she allows the full expression of her anger and desperation. Instead of trying to hide them behind the social niceties she has acquired over the years, she lets go of her control over

her feelings and releases her aggressive power. Lea, the mutual friend of her and her husband, has played an important role in her recovery. Among their mutual friends, Lea is the only one who stays to help Olga. She not only withstands Olga's misdirected anger but also serves as the bridge between Olga and the departed husband, and makes sure that Olga's life is somehow kept above water. Unlike those men friends, who choose unanimously to withhold any information from Olga, Lea reaches out to Olga and helps her reestablish connection with Mario in order to settle their divorce. Once the split couple find their new way of negotiating with each other, Lea disappears from Olga's narration. When Olga decides to enter into new life, Lea reappears and helps Olga finish her reconstruction of her identity.

Lea invites Olga to attend a medieval concert. On the concert, Olga was able to "see" "others" again. Her former pain has blinded her eyes to individuality of other people, or to be precise, other existences around her. They are only noticed as fodder to her raging pain. This obsessive attention is not empowering. Instead, it is self-centered and limiting. Only when Olga is able to look at others not in relation to herself, but as something of its own existence can she free herself from the pain of abandonment. In Chapter 46, Olga was able to admit her true feelings towards their dead dog. "Did you love Otto?" he asked. "No," I answered, "while he was alive, no." This admittance of her true feelings towards the dog, which she used to pretend to love because of her husband, has reconnected Olga with her true self. She was finally able to reconnect with others as they were, and responded to them with genuine interest and detachment as well. This also happens in her relationship with Mario. Removed from Mario, she began to have an objective and detached opinion of Mario which enabled her to see through his ego-centric way of behaving. When Mario found Olga no longer in love with him, he immediately turned into the selfish man who only wanted to get rid of his responsibility for children.

An important step in Olga's recovery from the pain of abandonment is her sudden realization of absolute otherness of those others in her life. Those others take different forms, either in human or non-human appearances. Non-human others include the wind, the trees, the smells, the door, the dog. Humans include her children, her neighbor Carrano, and her friend Lea. Their radical otherness, or in words of new materialism, their materiality is registered by Olga when they refuse to obey the narrative flood that pours forth from Olga's mind. In another words, they claim Olga's attention by becoming uncharacteristically obtrusive. They interrupt Olga's narration. Take the door for example. On the worst day of Olga's ordeal, she finds herself unable to open her new door. In order to open it, she tries everything and even improvises outrageous ways to interact with the door as if it has its own agency. The materiality of the door has slowly

dismantled her sense of reality. The door has an existence that is not entirely subordinate to her will or consciousness. The experience with the door, with the unfathomable and unnegotiable materiality of others, has reminded Olga of her own materiality as a human being. It is precisely through this realization that Olga finally finds her way back to normal life.

In *In the Margins*, Ferrante (2022) discusses her artistic intention behind the creation of women like Olga, who "are imagined as women who, because of the events of their lives, have become tightly sealed bodies". Having failed in the past to build a bridge between themselves and others, they remained alone throughout their lives. This self-imprisonment of women is rarely described. Since they "don't have ongoing relations with relatives, they don't have women friends, they don't trust themselves and don't entrust themselves to husbands, lovers, or even children", they are the sole source of the story. The affective power of the narration is generated through the manipulation of the discrepancy between unreliability of their narration and the torrential emotional pain and honesty caused by the Ferrante's deliberate elimination of the "distance from the wounds". Ferrante has not allowed the narrator the comfort of the "other", the "external" and leave the narrator in "their isolated situation" ("Pain and Pen"). This is a bold literary experiment. The reader is drawn into this emotional spiral of Olga with no relief.

Interestingly, Olga used to be writer and she understood the power of third-person narration. When Otto's suffering began to register itself, Olga suddenly realized her situation. She resorted to third-person objectivity, in order to steady herself. For example, in Chapter 24, she wrote, "Olga marches down the hall, through the living room. She is decisive now, she will remedy things (Ferrante, 2018, p.115). This conscious resort to other-perspective has allowed Olga to step out of her self-imprisonment and prepared her for her reconnection with others.

V. CONCLUSION

In *Frantumaglia*, Elena Ferrante (2016) talks about the reason that propels her to write *Days of Abandonment*. She says she wants to present how in this modern world, the abandonment of a well-educated woman can still have such devastating power on the woman's psychic well-being ("La Frantumaglia"). Luckily, her story is a story of survival. We've witnessed the strenuous battle between Olga's reason and the disintegrating pain caused by the loss. Instead of minimizing Olga's pain and struggle, Ferrante gives it a vivid description and it is through this successful mourning that Olga manages to abandon the patriarchal order that has once bounded her and turned her into one of the "sealed bodies". In this sense, those days of abandonment do not simply mean that Olga was abandoned by her husband, but also that Olga has

abandoned her own illusions about her marriage and her husband. Most importantly, through this painful process of mourning, she has reconnected with others in her life and anchor herself solidly in this world with a renewed sense of reality.

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