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The Global Novel, Gendered Trauma and Transmedia Perspectives
My Brilliant Friend, Americanah and The Handmaid's Tale

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Abstract • In this paper, I will present a constellation of three contemporary women writers, three novels and two connected TV series: Elena Ferrante with her *My Brilliant Friend* cycle (2011-2014), and the homonymous TV series (2018-2022, three seasons directed by Saverio Costanzo, Alice Rohrwacher, and Daniele Lucchetti); *Americanah* (2013) by Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Adichie's representation of blog inside and outside this novel; *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Canadian Margaret Atwood, analyzed from the perspective of the TV series (five seasons directed by Bruce Miller, aired between 2017 and 2022). I will situate this overall constellation in the context of the Global Novel as well as in a transmedia context: two global languages furthermore unified by the common field of contemporary «primordialism» (Appadurai, 140), a gendered trauma of late-modernity. From this shared perspective, I will then focus on the narrative and visual mechanisms of trauma in the three novels and the two TV series.

Keywords • Primordialist trauma; Retelling; Traumatic immersiveness.

Ledizioni 

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Introduction

This paper is divided into an introduction, four paragraphs and a conclusion. In this introduction, I present a well-known constellation of three contemporary women writers, three novels and two connected TV series, together with the overall structure of my analysis. Authors, texts, TV series and order of presentation are the followings: Elena Ferrante with her quadrilogy, *My Brilliant Friend* cycle (*L'amica geniale*, 2011-2014), and the homonymous TV series (2018-2022, three seasons directed by Saverio Costanzo, Alice Rohrwacher and Daniele Lucchetti); *Americanah* (2013) by Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Adichie's representation of blog inside and outside this novel; *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Canadian Margaret Atwood, analyzed from the «metamodern»¹ perspective of the TV series (2017-2022, five seasons directed by Bruce Miller).

The first paragraph (*The Global Novel, Gendered Trauma and Transmedia Perspectives*) will situate this overall constellation in the context of the Global Novel – a heterogeneous galaxy of «new morphologies» and narrative devices constructed as «reality hunters»² – as well as in the transmedia and neuro-cognitive context of «narrative expansion»³ and «metamorphic» irradiation.⁴ These two global languages will be furthermore unified by the common field of contemporary «primordialism»,⁵ a gendered trauma of late modernity that this specific constellation of novels and TV series has intercepted and narrated.

From this shared perspective of «primordialism» and historical trauma, in the following three paragraphs I will then focus on the narrative and visual mechanisms of trauma adopted by the three novels and the two TV series. The third paragraph will compare *My Brilliant Friend* cycle and the homonymous TV series. The fourth paragraph will analyze the relation between sexual trauma and narrative function of the blog in Adichie's *Americanah* (and its persistence in Adichie's online website). The fifth paragraph will focus on the relation between Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and the homonymous TV series.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will go back to the introduction, focusing again on the contemporary trauma of global primordialisms against women and LGBTIQ+ rights, and on

¹ Fabio Vittorini, *Raccontare oggi. Metamodernismo tra narratologia, ermeneutica e intermedialità*, Bologna, Patron, 2017. All the translations reported in this essay from critical texts with bibliographic references in Italian are mine.

² Stefano Calabrese, *www.letteratura.global. Il romanzo dopo il postmoderno*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005, pp. VII-VIII.

³ Donata Meneghelli, *Senza fine. Sequel, prequel, altre continuazioni: il testo espanso*, Milano, Morellini, 2018, p. 11.

⁴ Massimo Fusillo *et al.*, *Le sfide degli adattamenti*, in *Narrazioni espanse: intermedialità, transmedialità, virtualità*, ed. by Massimo Fusillo *et al.*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2020, pp. 10-11.

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis-London, Public Words, 1996, p. 140.

the urgency to face this primordialist «backlash»⁶ with anti-relativist and unifying links of gender and transnationalism.⁷ Both this cognitive web and this new dynamics between «frames» and «scripts»⁸ of late modernity are able to embody an original reservoir of «social memory»,⁹ as well as of contemporary female imaginaries. This fusional and expanded storytelling practices elaborate, in different ways, contemporary primordialist traumas, and express the urgent task of creating «an immunological model against the dangers of destabilization».¹⁰

I. The Global Novel, Gendered Trauma and Transmedia Perspectives: *My Brilliant Friend* cycle, *Americanah*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and the two TV series

I.I The Global Novel

My Brilliant Friend cycle, *Americanah* and the current rediscovery of *The Handmaid's Tale* are inscribed in the Global Novel, a vast field of transnational fictional narratives published between the Nineties of the Twentieth century and our contemporaneity. This broad narrative constellation is united, among other things, by a rediscovery of the density of stories, which are summoned in the fragmented panorama of our multicultural globalization to act as a shared anthropological repertoire, and to renegotiate the frames and cognitive contents («frames» and «scripts») of our contemporaneity. These stories in fact develop a new «agreed syntax of gestures and actions rooted in the cultural tradition of a social space».¹¹ This return to the density of stories is accompanied by an original and diversified reuse of fictional realism.¹² Through a genealogical expansion and a multi-local

⁶ Susan Faludi, *Backlash. The Undeclared War Against Women*, London, Vintage, 1993.

⁷ On the link between gender, transnationalism, transmedia posture and storytelling in these three novels and their authors, see also Tiziana de Rogatis, *Transnational Perspectives, Gender and Storytelling. Elena Ferrante, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Margaret Atwood*, «Allegoria», 2022, 86, pp. 120-150.

⁸ Calabrese, *Neuronarrazioni*, Milano, Bibliografica, 2020, pp. 32-36.

⁹ Id., *Self occidentale, Self orientale: un confine millenario*, in *Storie di vita. Come gli individui si raccontano nel mondo*, Milano, Mimesis, 2018, p. 46.

¹⁰ Id., *Introduzione*, in *Neuronarratologia. Il futuro dell'analisi del racconto*, a cura di Stefano Calabrese, Bologna, Archetipolibri, 2009, p. 18. On «fusion» and «simultaneity» as main characteristics of «present practices of intermediality» see Vittorini, *Un mondo che si espande oltre la nostra presa. Comparatistica e intermedialità*, «Comparatismi», 5, 2020, pp. 70-76. See also Id., *Raccontare oggi* cit.

¹¹ Calabrese, *Della segmentazione. La riconoscibilità cognitiva degli eventi nelle narrazioni*, «Symbolon», 11, XIV, 2020, p. 117.

¹² On the Global Novel and the reuse of realism see Calabrese, *www.letteratura.global*, cit., and Debjani Ganguly, *Catastrophic Form and Planetary Realism*, «New Literary History», 51, 2020, pp. 419-453; Ead., *This Thing Called the World: The Contemporary Novel as Global Form*, Durham and London, Duke UP, 2016. On Ferrante's quadrilogy, on *Americanah* and on Atwood's writing in the Global Novel see Adam Kirsch, *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*, New York, Columbia Global Reports, 2016. On the «underworld realism» and the Global Novel in Ferrante see Tiziana de Rogatis, *Elena Ferrante and the Power of Storytelling in the Age of Globalization*, in Ead., *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*, trad. Will Schutt, New York, Europa Editions, 2019, pp. 276-291 and Ead., *Global Perspectives, Trauma, and the Global Novel. Ferrante's Poetics between Storytelling, Uncanny Realism, and Dissolving Margins*, in *Elena Ferrante in a Global Context*, special issue edited by Tiziana de Rogatis, Stiliana Milkova, Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, «Modern Language Notes», 136, 2021, pp. 6-31.

and multi-temporal dislocation, the hyper-genre of the Global Novel manages to tell the stratification and relationship between identities, generations, cultures and chronologies that diverge from each other, yet are solicited to coexist.¹³

As it already occurred in the Nineteenth century – another historical scenario in vertiginous as much as extreme change – the narrative desire takes the form of a map capable of reading the complexity of reality and proposing a shared interpretation of it. However, Nineteenth-century poetics oriented towards the representation of a totality re-emerge in the contemporary multicultural world in a new and original way. These new choral stories are in fact very often staged by modernistically unreliable narrative voices, and are refracted and multiplied by a transmedia dynamic, which is internal and/or external to the plot and is instead inherited from the postmodern. The narrative turn of the Global Novel is actually part of a broader interdisciplinary «metamodern» trend, a new «structure of feeling». Between the end of the 1980s and until today, this «sensitivity, a sentiment that is so pervasive to call it structural»¹⁴ has reactivated three epistemological elements weakened by postmodernism: historicity, depth and affectivity. However, these three elements are intertwined with the introspective depth of modernist duration and with the self-reflexive status of postmodern transmedia narratives. In this sense, the prefix «meta» of this new turn taken by the global imagination refers to something that is at the same time with, between and beyond modernism and postmodernism.¹⁵

All three novels here analyzed fall within the metamodern galaxy of the Global Novel, for characteristics that cross the criterion of translation and wide reception from a minor to a major language (this is the case of *My Brilliant Friend* cycle) with that of a construction displaced and stratified across different geographies, temporalities and synchronic identities (as in *My Brilliant Friend* cycle and in *Americanah*) and, finally, with that of an exemplary incarnation of the global imaginary in a majority language (*The Handmaid's Tale* must be ascribed to this typology).¹⁶ As I have already argued,¹⁷ although *The Handmaid's Tale* came out in 1985, and therefore in a phase slightly preceding the Global Novel, it can be considered as a precursor text of the Global Novel because of its experimental realism. Together with other novels of that chronological area – such as for example *History. A novel* (1974) by Elsa Morante and *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison

¹³ On the connection between post-colonial writing, multiculturalism and the Global Novel see Paul Jay, *Global Matters. The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Ithaca and London, Cornell UP, 2010.

¹⁴ Robin van den Akker-Timoteheus Vermeulen, *Periodising the 2000s, or the Emergence of Metamodernism*, in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism*, ed. by Robin van den Akker-Alison Gibbons-Timoteheus Vermeulen, London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2017, pp. 6-7. See also Vermeulen-van den Akker, *Notes on Metamodernism*, «Journal of Aesthetics & Culture», 2, 2020, p. 5, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3402/jac.v-2i0.5677>>.

¹⁵ On the category of the metamodern – very briefly outlined here – I am indebted to the research of Fabio Vittorini, who reconstructs «a theory of the metamodern narrative text» by identifying the hybrid qualities of the metamodern «hyperplot» (Vittorini, *Raccontare oggi* cit., pp. 19-20, 58). See also Federico Bortolini, *Le relazioni familiari e generazionali nel romanzo metamoderno*, in *Normal People. Gender e generazioni in transito tra letteratura e media*, ed. by Fabio Vittorini e Federico Bortolini, Patron, Bologna, 2021, pp. 215-240.

¹⁶ For these criteria see Calabrese, www.letteratura.global and Kirsch, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ de Rogatis, *Bewitched Worlds, Underground Stories, Dystopian Narratives in Elsa Morante, Elena Ferrante and Margaret Atwood*, «Romance Studies», 40, 3-4, 2022.

– *The Handmaid’s Tale* is substantially extraneous to the postmodern season.¹⁸ These three novels indeed present a radically different form of emplotment that is based on the documentary consistency of narrated materials, on a historical or dystopian shift, and on tragic and affective micro-stories intertwined with that shift.

1.2. Trauma and primordialism in the Global Novel and in the two TV series

The contemporary multicultural context is increasingly marked by economic, racial and gender inequalities, by the pressure of fundamentalist terrorism, by the urgency of an imminent ecological catastrophe, by pandemics and – while I’m writing this paper – by the threat of a third world and nuclear war on the European soil. The «traumatic realism»¹⁹ and «planetary»²⁰ realism of the Global Novel narrates the world from the perspective of the end of the world, by representing it «as a borderland of extremity and everydayness».²¹ The trauma is a suppressed and denied universe the traces of which are recoverable only through cracks, marks, ellipses, metamorphoses and multiplications. Being non-processable and non-communicable on an immediate linguistic level, trauma continually returns as a «deferred action».²² The traumatic event «*is its future*»²³ because the «deferred action» manifests itself in the form of a trace, a ghost, a symptom that leads the individual or a community to walk down the hidden track of the original event.

These three novels intercept one of the traits of this age of trauma: a transversal and diversified «primordialism» that we are facing in many Western and emerging countries, as well as in a lot of areas in the Global South. Modernity appears as a «moment of traumatic loss, one that is radically new».²⁴ With its claim on «strong sense of group identity, of we-ness», its restoration of xenophobic values, politics and jurisdictions inspired by «shared claims to blood, soil, or language»²⁵ and its anti-gender movements expressing misogynistic, homophobic and transphobic attacks, global «primordialism» is the globalized and widest manifestation and ideological compensation of this trauma. In this dimension, this claim for a so-called natural order is embedded within modernity and neoliberal crises, rather than being chronologically eccentric or exceptional to it. If modernity is, in fact, «a moment of epistemological upheaval, cognitive disorientation, symbolic crises, and loss of values, a moment imbued with melancholy, anxiety, nostalgia or dread»,²⁶ primordialism emerges as the globalized and strongest symptom of this trauma.

¹⁸ Bloom speaks of a radically anti-postmodern collocation of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, albeit in reductive tones: «Though acclaimed by so many Post-Modernist ideologues, Atwood is a kind of late Victorian novelist, and all the better of it» (Harold Bloom, Introduction to Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, ed. by Harold Bloom, Philadelphia, Chelsea House, 2004, p. 9).

¹⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*, Minneapolis, Minnesota UP, 2000.

²⁰ Ganguly, *Catastrophic Form* cit.

²¹ Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* cit., p. 109.

²² Sigmund Freud, *Project for a Scientific Psychology* [1895], in *Pre-psycho-analytic publications and unpublished draft. The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey, vol. I, London, Vintage, 1999, p. 356.

²³ Cathy Caruth, *Introduction*, in Ead., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth, Baltimore, The John Hopkins UP, 1995, p. 8.

²⁴ Rebecca Saunders, *Preface*, in *Lamentation and Modernity in Literature, Philosophy and Culture*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, p. XI.

²⁵ Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²⁶ Saunders, *Preface* cit., p. XI. In Saunders’s research, most consistent theoretical reference is to Anthony Giddens and, in particular, to his theory of the modern as «reflexivity»: a repertoire of

Primordialism can be defined also as one of the many cyclical forms of «backlash»²⁷ moved by modernity against female emancipation which, in other respects, it was precisely modernity itself that initiated. And yet, the quantitatively accelerated and entropic interdependence typical of neoliberal globalization – with the collapse, in many Western countries, of welfare, with the dizzying increase in inequalities and with the complementary decrease in inclusive possibilities for migratory communities – makes this particular reaction more dangerous and radical than others. For these reasons, this backlash has been defined also in terms of a global war against women.²⁸

A «remediation»²⁹ takes shape on the narrative and transmedia levels of the Global Novel, the TV series and the blog in *Americanah*, as it elaborates in a figural and symbolic way the trauma of primordialism according to three variants of the historical crisis of patriarchy and of the emergence of women as the «Unpredictable Subject»³⁰ (in *My Brilliant Friend* cycle, both the novel and the TV series), of racial suprematism (in *Americanah* and in its in-text blog), and of dystopian neo-patriarchy (in *The Handmaid's Tale*, both the novel and the TV series). At the center of all three novels and the two TV series lies a traumatic nucleus – differently declined from the point of view of the protagonists – of loss and/or coercion, which simultaneously shapes plots and inner lives. In *My Brilliant Friend* it is the disappearance of the dolls, an archetype of innumerable previous and subsequent collapses of female destinies over the six decades of historical time narrated; in *Americanah*, it is the sexual abuse suffered by Ifemelu at the beginning of her migration to the United States; in *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is Offred's enforced transformation, from being a free and emancipated woman to becoming a reproduction slave in the Theocratic Republic of Gilead. However, the narrative dynamics of the protagonists are never expressed in solely transparent or politically edifying forms. The narrating protagonists-voices of the quadrilogy and of *The Handmaid's Tale* are unreliable narrators, and the intertwining of their stories is also generated by the ambivalence each female protagonist shows towards the others, or by their temporary incorporation of male domination. This narrative dynamic gravitates, in particular, around two elements shared by the three plots and the two TV series: the liberating force of female word and knowledge that originates decisive turning points in the stories, and the ambiguous, yet indubitable centrality of female education, which is represented both in the form of a partial emancipation (the education of Elena and Lila in Ferrante's quadrilogy), as well as an authoritarian deformation (the educational apparatus of the Aunts and the Red Center of *The Handmaid's Tale*). Not surprisingly, the educational perspective is assigned a privileged role by the Global Novel, since different temporalities and communities of the contemporary multicultural world

unstable and precarious knowledge and an uprooting of social relations restructured across indefinite spans of time-space (Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, London, Polity Press, 1990, pp. 7, 21). See also Mark Stephen Micale-Paul Frederick Lerner, *Trauma, Psychiatry and History: a Conceptual and Historiographical Introduction*, in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age 1870-1930*, ed. by Mark Stephen Micale-Paul Frederick Lerner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-27.

²⁷ Faludi, *Backlash* cit.

²⁸ For the emergent features of this backlash see Sylvia Walby, *Crisis*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2015; Jacqui True, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 2012; *The Routledge Handbook of the Politics of the #MeToo Movement*, ed. by Giti Chandra-Irma Erlingsdóttir, Oxon-New York, Routledge, 2021.

²⁹ Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1999.

³⁰ «il Soggetto Imprevisto» (Carla Lonzi, *Sputiamo su Hegel. E altri scritti*, Milano, Et al., 2020, p. 47).

can only achieve a mutual recognition and coexistence through an effective access to education and to a shared system of symbols and knowledge.³¹

1.3. Il retelling del trauma, la smarginatura e il chunking

All three novels and the two TV series can be read as a «retelling» of trauma, thanks to the «experience of embodied simulation that narrative texts represent for the reader».³² These transmedia narratives perform a powerful cathartic function, as they position themselves within the protected dimension of a symbolic constellation that is related to the contemporary trauma of primordialism, yet is also distanced from it thanks to its fictional nature. On a cognitive level, these narratives can be experienced as «a game immune to the defeats and to the material or emotional bleeding of real life».³³ The allegorical and figural forms of primordialist trauma can be displaced in the past (this is the case, for example, of the generational narrative featured in the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle), in a stratified postcolonial present (as in *Americanah*), or in an apocalyptic future (as is the case with the dystopian narrative of *The Handmaid's Tale*). The pluri-temporality of these three novels is inhabited by ghosts and latencies capable of entering and exiting their historical frames. They are archetypes of traumatic memory re-emerging in (and coming from) different spatial, temporal and cultural contexts. The spectral ubiquity is given by the fact that «the traumatic event, although real, took place outside the parameters of normal reality, such as causality, sequence, place and time».³⁴ Time is perceived as «deferred action»:³⁵ a laceration between cause and effect, between the traumas of modernity and migration and their consequences, between metamorphosis and the ability of this metamorphosis to incorporate within the lives it has even shaped. If the reader can perceive as analogous three opposite movements of time – in the quadrilogy and in its past, in *Americanah* and in its present, in *The Handmaid's Tale* and in its dystopic future – this depends on the fact that these fine transmedial narratives stage a traumatic quality of the sentiment of contemporary time, i.e. the trauma of a chronology constantly dislocated and estranged between the tribalizing dimensions of primordialisms, and the ultra-technological ones of late modernity.

³¹ On this topic see de Rogatis, *Global novel, realismo traumatico e fenomenologia dell'educazione scolastica nell'Amica geniale di Elena Ferrante*, «L'ospite ingrato», 9, 2021, pp. 305-326.

³² Calabrese, *Trauma e racconto*, «Testo e Senso», 21, 2020, pp. 6, 10. In the therapeutic context, the autobiographical «retelling» of personal trauma passes through techniques of «anxiety visualization and habituation» (*ibid.*, p. 6) mediated on a cognitive and emotional level by the supported reading of fictional texts related to the area of the trauma (*ibid.*, p. 10).

³³ Id., *Neuronarrazioni* cit., pp. 67 and ff., t. tm. On the pharmacological and liberating power of «vicarious and indirect emotions» and on the reactivation of the Aristotelian theory of catharsis («a situation of epistemic asymmetry where the spectator knows what is about to happen, while the protagonist knows nothing of anything») in the context of Narrative Medicine and Trauma Studies see Id., *Trauma e racconto*, cit., pp. 1-2 and ff.

³⁴ Dori Laub, *Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening*, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, ed. by Shoshana Felman-Dori Laub, Routledge, New York and London, p. 69. On the spectral dynamic of historical traumas see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, translated by Eric Prenowitz, Chicago and London, Chicago UP, 1995; See also de Rogatis, *Trauma, the Spectre and History*, in de Rogatis-Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, *Introduction. A Theoretical Framework on Trauma*, in *Trauma Narratives in Italian and Transnational Women Writers*, edited by Tiziana de Rogatis-Katrin Wehling-Giorgi, Rome, Sue, 2022.

³⁵ Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

The narrative and visual techniques of «traumatic realism» decisively determine the forms of the three novels and the two TV series. As I will show in the next paragraphs, these rely on an idea of representation that, while rejecting transparency, it rather enhances a split and dichotomous dynamic, where the surface of things, though philologically reconstructed, always refers to a further underground, frightening and ambiguous dimension. In reference to Ferrante's compositional poetics concerning «smarginatura» (a «dissolving margin experience») as a breakdown of coherence and causality,³⁶ the structure of the three novels and the two TV series orbits around a meta-smarginatura: a continuous reworking of both the ways in which – on the one hand – the trauma dissolves the story and the connective sequences of the plot and – on the other – the procedures through which the stories and the connective sequences (the «chunking»)³⁷ of the plot recover removed traces from the shadow zone, and even temporarily mend these fractures. If, on the one hand, the trauma poses itself as a structurally anti-narrative event, on the other hand the fictional «retelling» of the trauma can be considered a variant of the ancestral functioning of human narratives. According to the most recent hypotheses, they were in fact born as counterfactual and prefactual connective sequences invented by Upper Paleolithic hunters who would investigate the traces left by animals. If the «retelling» of the trauma is the choice of that specific interweaving, among the many possible ones, able to reconstruct the sequential links broken by the «deferred action», or at least able to circumscribe the shadow area as much as possible, something equally deferred and equally necessary is also at the origin of the narrative act itself. It would be an aesthetics originated from a casual and prehistoric backlash from the intertwining of absence and survival: it would thus correspond to the act of «inventing a narrative that from a *before* comes to an *after*, one that, as it starts from a lack, achieves the elimination of that same lack».³⁸

1.4. The transmedia storyworld and the traumatic immersiveness

The unifying link of this shared repertoire is further enhanced precisely by transmedia dynamics. The strategies of these expanded texts ask readers and viewers to deal with new dimensions of aesthetics, in which the metamorphic and diffractive dimension of the stories prevails over the vertical and hierarchical genealogy between original and adaptations,³⁹ between national and transnational, between identity politics and transversal and global affiliations. Because of their very nature as a disseminated and horizontal communicative circuit, not only do these strategies make these three literary works emerge from their national canons, but also free them from the confines of identity politics, by dampening any hyper-differentistic and/or hyperlocalists deviations. This is the meaning of Costanzo's numerous statements on the universal value of *My Brilliant Friend*, which

³⁶ Smarginatura is much more than a traumatic experience of Lila (and Elena), invoked at various stages of the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle. In many passages of *Frantumaglia*, Ferrante highlights in fact the importance of creative strategies that «emphasize instability» by reducing «the techniques that present events as incontrovertible milestones» (Elena Ferrante, *Frantumaglia. A Writer's Journey*, ed. by Ann Goldstein, New York, Europa Editions, 2016, p. 368).

³⁷ I owe to Stefano Calabrese, whom I thank here, the highlighting of an antithesis between «smarginatura» and «chunking». «Chunking» is the «ability to segment the experience into events», which in its most coherent and cohesive form gives rise to «a hierarchical form of coherent segments and sub-segments» (Calabrese, *Della segmentazione*, cit., p. 120).

³⁸ Id., *Neuronarrazioni*, cit., p. 14. «If we were to say what is most essential for life, there is no doubt that the non-existent would have a predominant role in what exists» (*ibid.*, p. 21).

³⁹ On the diffractive and metamorphic dimension of the intermediate/transmedia constellation cfr. Fusillo *et al.*, *Le sfide degli adattamenti*, cit., pp. 10-11 and ff.

would not only reside in the archetypal bond of friendship, but also in the «power of education, of culture».⁴⁰ The perspective of a transversal and unifying political narrative is also shared by Margaret Atwood and the cast of the TV series, as they underline in a rather unsettling way, and on more than one occasion, that the novel and the TV series cannot be qualified as strictly feminists.⁴¹ In our fragmented multicultural and global world, the neuro-cognitive status of stories – perceived as «gyms that train us in order to interpret the world according to agreed expectations, or to allow us to readjust these expectations according to changes in reality» – is increasingly recognized and investigated.⁴² Among the three transmedia analysis proposed here, that of *The Handmaid's Tale* takes up more space, because it goes in the more explicitly «metamodern»⁴³ and neuro-cognitive direction of a refraction between dystopian writing and its reactivation in visual, political and media discourses. This 37-year-old novel is in fact fully part of the contemporary canon thanks to its visual rewrite in a TV series, and to the parallel push of a political and media embodiment of its dystopia (the election of Trump as President of the United States). There is thus a triple lens that inevitably modifies not only the contemporary reception of the text, but also the political and collective awareness of the primordialist trauma. The «remediation» is therefore, in this particular case, a «reform in the sense that media reform reality itself».⁴⁴

According to transmedia metamorphosis, the variants of the same story are diversified. As this essay demonstrates in particular as it illustrates the passage from the novel *The*

⁴⁰ Saverio Costanzo, *A Elena Ferrante potevo solo scrivere*, ed. by Silvia Locatelli, «Elle», 29 November 2018, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.elle.com/it/showbiz/tv/a25343-282/l-amica-geniale-serie-tv-elena-ferrante/>>.

⁴¹ Esther Zuckerman, *Elisabeth Moss doesn't see The Handmaid's Tale as a feminist story*, «AVclub», 22 April 2017, web, last access 18 August, 2022, <<https://www.avclub.com/elisabeth-moss-doesn-t-see-the-handmaid-s-tale-as-a-fem-1798261012>>; Constance Grady, *The Handmaid's Tale cast has resisted calling it feminist. So did Margaret Atwood once*, «Vox», 25 April 2017, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/4/25/15407972/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood-feminism>>. In 2012, Atwood clarifies that the term «feminist dystopia» for *The Handmaid's Tale* «is not strictly accurate». She makes a distinction between «a feminist dystopia pure and simple», a two-layered structure in which «all of the men would have greater rights than all of the women» and the «pyramid» structure of novel, in which power and status are much more disseminate between men and women (Margaret Atwood, *Haunted by the Handmaid's Tale*, «The Guardian», 20 January, 2012, web, <last access: 18 August, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/jan/20/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood>>). In 2017, Atwood openly underlines that she is radically not interested in «an ideological tract in which all women are angels and/or so victimized to the point that they are incapable of moral choice». (Ead., *Margaret Atwood on What The Handmaid's Tale Means in the Age of Trump*, «The New York Times», edited by Eleni Kalorkoti, 10 March 2017, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html>>).

⁴² «The current transformations of lifestyles must above all be treated as a cognitive variation and a change in perception» (Calabrese, *Neuronarrazioni*, cit., pp. 8, 63). Calabrese's research articulates the stages of this new neuro-cognitive statute, according to which «what distinguishes our species in a unique way from others is not so much the intellect – or at least not exclusively –, but our *instinct to narrate*» (*ibid.*, p. 9). On empathy as a «heterocentric» dimension generated by fiction, and parameterized by various ToM (Theory of Mind) tests, as well as on its limits (*ibid.*, pp. 64 e ss).

⁴³ In the «metamodern space», literature is «profoundly reshaped by new forms of mimesis and new imaginaries generated by audiovisual media and the web (in the *social* version), in a framework of irreversible cognitive and epistemological transformation» (Vittorini, *Un mondo che si espande oltre la nostra presa*, cit., p. 71).

⁴⁴ Bolter, Grusin, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Handmaid's Tale to the TV series (see paragraph 4), the transfer of the story into different – though not radically opposite – forms of *paraquel* and *sequel* highlights both the pluralism and the relativism of forms, as well as the experimental force of these transits (this occurs not without risks, on the other hand). In a transmedia perspective, the narrative dimension is an «interzone»⁴⁵ between story and plot. The transmedia storytelling therefore imposes itself not just as a plot but as a «storyworld», «because a world – unlike a plot – has more mobile, more flexible boundaries».⁴⁶ «Storyworlds» are specific «worlds evoked by narratives», «a narrative sense-making»;⁴⁷ however, sometimes storyworld also refers to the way in which the reader builds his/her own world starting from that world.⁴⁸ The «storyworld» is a heterogeneous, stratified and pluralist dimension, which connects the traditional categories of plot, temporality, chronotope and system of the characters with new elements, invested with a greater affective, cognitive and holistic tone.⁴⁹

By enhancing the metamorphic abilities of the stories and their mutation through different expressive means (in these cases in analysis, fictional writing, blogs and TV series), transmedia aesthetics inevitably generates a healthy and equally unsettling questioning of the structuralist dogma that inspired a large part of twentieth-century narratology: the inseparability of a story from a unique, specific form or plot, and the reduction of the first to a mere function of the second.⁵⁰ This conception actually corresponds to a historically determined category inspired by an antisubjectivist and combinatorial orientation. Such anti-narrative posture has actually been inspired by *avant-garde*, modernist and postmodernist perspectives that were sharing this same goal, although moving from different poetics and techniques.⁵¹ Compared to this falsely universal notion, the stories created by many women writers – due to complex historical reasons – have often been considered as alternative: excessive, or even divergent, first of all in terms of their interzones between stories and plots, their density, intensity and primacy. From this structuralist perspective, these narratives have often been judged as inert contents, not sufficiently settled in the forms.

⁴⁵ Meneghelli, *Storie proprio così. Il racconto nell'era della narrativa totale*, Morellini, Milano 2013, p. 135. On the «lability» of the border or «interzone» between story and plot Meneghelli has written important pages, underlying among other things the significant paradox that, starting from the *Narrative Turn* and up to now, there has been a decline in studies on plot and emplotment (*ibid.*, pp. 132-135 e ss).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

⁴⁷ David Herman, *Basic Elements of Narrative*, Maiden-Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2009, p. 105.

⁴⁸ According to the perspective indicated by Nelson Goodman in *Ways of Worldmaking* (New York, The Harvester Press, 1978, pp. 7-17) and taken up by Herman in different parts of *Basic Elements*.

⁴⁹ See Meneghelli, *Storie proprio così*, cit., pp. 144-149. These new elements are: the geographical and cognitive worlds experienced by the characters, their choral interactions, their emotional syntaxs, the repertoire of their memorable and archetypal gestures, the counterfactual potential of their existences, the narrator's perspectives. For a reconstruction of the strengths and limits of the Narrative Turn see Ead., *Storie proprio così*, cit. pp. 9-72. On the expansion of the narratological categories generated by transmediality, see O'Sullivan, who identifies six new narratological elements in serial aesthetics: «iteration; multiplicity; momentum; world-building; personnel; and design» (Sean O'Sullivan, *Six Elements of Serial Narrative*, «Narrative», 27, 1, 2019, p. 52).

⁵⁰ «Transmediality [...] presupposes [...] that it is possible to re-tell the same story by other means, so that in some way form and content are separable» (Meneghelli, *Storie proprio così*, cit., p. 65).

⁵¹ On this see Calabrese, *Introduzione*, in *Neuronarratologia*, cit., pp. 6 e ss.

The three novels here under scrutiny manage to hold together in a plural form «*mainstream* narratives that are based on *storytelling*, and *author's* narratives that are based on *discourse*». ⁵² The transmedia storyworld of these novels and TV series shows a persistence of this strategy. Instead of exhibiting it, they camouflage the scaffolding of the emplotment. On the one hand, the emplotment is layered into complex and problematic narrative and metanarrative levels of depth. On the other hand, this form emerges on the surface mostly as a pathos grounded on traumatic emotion. This intense form of «immersion» – «the ability to transport interpreters into places and times they must occupy for the purposes of narrative comprehension» – is decisive in order to highlight the neurocognitive primacy of this transmedia constellations. ⁵³ In a transmedia perspective, the «immersive world-creation» generates worlds that expand, becoming a territory of exploration, a source of collective experiences and cultural links. ⁵⁴ In the expanded texts here examined, the experience of immersion is constantly renewed precisely by the mechanism of trauma and its powerful immersive quality, i.e. the ability to sink into a dimension that is, at the same time, inside and outside time, inside and out of space.

2. The *My Brilliant Friend* cycle and the homonymous TV series

2.1. The novel and the TV series

The four volumes of *My Brilliant Friend* follow the lives and friendship of Lila and Elena, from their childhood in the Rione – an underclass suburb of Naples – to mature age, from the 1950s when they are six years old, to 2010, when they have turned 66. In the wake of the great social transformations of which Elena and Lila are unaware protagonists, the two friends have teamed up since childhood in order to trespass the real and symbolic spaces in which a millennial female subordination has locked them up. The story is configured as a quest by Elena, a writer who wants to solicit the reappearance of her mysteriously disappeared friend by recounting and transcribing six decades of shared life.

Between 2012 and 2015, Elena Ferrante's American publisher Europa Editions issued her four-volume cycle *My Brilliant Friend*, translated by Ann Goldstein. Neapolitan Quartet or Neapolitan Novels: these formulas, used by global readers and scholars to define the four volumes, are themselves significant to designate a transnational attention towards the ethnic and social context of the «Rione» placed at the center of the plot and of its symbolic nucleus. The storyworld of the quadrilogy is therefore shaped – to use a Ferrante's formula – as «a world learned, a world perceived, a world imagined» ⁵⁵ from the

⁵² Calabrese, *Neuronarrazioni*, cit., p. 51, connecting to Grodal and his biocultural aesthetics theory (Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions. Evolutions, Emotions, Culture and Films*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 2009, pp. 208 e ss.). O'Sullivan proposes something similar to define the serial narrative «that has at its core two defining and apparently antithetical impulses: a Victorian energy and a Modernist energy» (O'Sullivan, *Six Elements of Serial Narrative*, cit., p. 62).

⁵³ Herman, *Basic Elements*, cit., p. 119. Meneghelli underlines the strong link between storyworld and immersion within Herman's neuro-cognitive narratology (Meneghelli, *Storie proprio così*, cit., pp. 148 e ss.).

⁵⁴ Marie-Laure Ryan, *Narrative Mapping as Cognitive Activity and as Active Participation in Storyworlds*, «Frontiers of Narrative Study», 4, 2, 2018, pp. 235, 244.

⁵⁵ Ferrante, *Frantumaglia*, cit., p. 309.

point of view of the two protagonists, of their «poliphony»,⁵⁶ and from that of the reader. Another element emphasizing the «glocal»⁵⁷ quality of the Ferrante phenomenon is the fact that Europa Editions was originally conceived as the American platform of the Italian publishing house e/o, thus allowing the latter to publish Ferrante's complete work internationally.

The transmedia translation of the quadrilogy starts in 2018 thanks to the homonymous TV series, which marked the most visible accomplishment of the long and heterogeneous transmedia path experienced by Ferrante's work. The first and second season of the TV series (*My Brilliant Friend*, 2018/ *The Story of a New Name*, 2020) are directed by Saverio Costanzo and partially by Alice Rohrwacher (episode four and five of season two). The third season (*Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*, 2022) is directed by Daniele Lucchetti. The fourth season (*Story of the Lost Child*) will be released in 2024, with the co-direction of Saverio Costanzo (for the first two episodes) and Daniele Lucchetti.⁵⁸ The script is written by Elena Ferrante herself, in co-authoring with Saverio Costanzo, Laura Paolucci and Francesco Piccolo. The English version of the script is by Ann Goldstein.

The series production is the result of a collaboration between HBO and the Italian broadcasting company Rai Fiction, and it is the first non-English series produced by the network. This unique collaboration determines the glocal quality of the «storyworld», which can be seen in two different elements. On the one hand, the Italian dimension is underlined by the following aspects: the Italian script, the expressive language (a hybrid between the Neapolitan dialect and its translation by subtitles), the careful choice of a heterogeneous Italian cast (with both professional and non-professional actors), the philological study of the environments, the experimental retrieval of great Italian visual traditions (such as Neorealism).⁵⁹ On the other hand, the series is designed to intercept a global audience, not necessarily driven to view the series by a previous reading of the book. In order to encourage viewing even among non- (or not yet) readers of the novel, the three directors opted for a very readable and persistently diluted articulation of the novel's sequences, which have been structured into eight «tableaux» per season, each one with its specific title. The Chinese reception of the series has responded positively to this type of strategy, to the point that in 2020 the three major Chinese streaming platforms have simultaneously acquired the rights for the second season.⁶⁰ At the same time, the TV series is dealing with a global audience also throughout the abundant textual traces of the quadrilogy in the script. This strategy of preservation is highlighted already by the titles of the three seasons, perfectly corresponding to the titles of the quadrilogy. This textual presence turns the literary legacy of the series into a recognizable feature for all Ferrante's

⁵⁶ de Rogatis, *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*, cit., pp. 42-47.

⁵⁷ Fusillo, *Sulla smarginatura. Tre punti chiave per Elena Ferrante*, «Allegoria», 73, 2016, p. 150; Kirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

⁵⁸ Federica Pogliani, *L'amica geniale 4. Saverio Costanzo torna alla regia*, «TVS», 2 August 2022, web, last access: 14 August 2022, <<https://www.tvserial.it/l-amica-geniale-quarta-stagione-uscita-trama-cast-trailer-streaming-video/>>.

⁵⁹ Elisa Gambaro, *The TV series My Brilliant Friend: Screenshaping Ferrante's Storytelling for a Wider Audience*, in *Elena Ferrante in a Global Context*, special issue ed. by de Rogatis-Milkova-Wehling-Giorgi, «MLN», 136, 1, 2021, pp. 211-213.

⁶⁰ «Chinese streaming giants iQiyi, Alibaba-owned Youku and Tencent Video have all bought the second season of Italian-language drama *My Brilliant Friend*, marking the first time the three operators have acquired a non-English language European drama at the same time» (Richard Middleton, *Freemantle Strikes Unprecedented China Deal for My Brilliant Friend*, «Television Business International», 20 April 2020, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://tbivision.com/2020/04/20/freemantle-strikes-unprecedented-china-deal-for-my-brilliant-friend/>>).

readers. Another element of readability is given by the presence of Elena's voice-off, who intervenes to comment and decipher. It is a voice, that of Alba Rohrwacher – the actress who will play Elena as an adult character in the fourth season of the series –, whose neutrality refers to the bilingualism that is painstakingly conquered by the narrator-voice character, at the cost of a continuous and exhausting self-control.⁶¹ Elena's Italian voice creates an alienating effect – the first one of many others to follow – as she is called upon to frame the overflowing presence of Neapolitan language. In addition, the naked strength of the dialect stands out in a particular way because the screenplay frees it from the comic or sentimental aesthetic filters that a certain Neapolitan mannerism indulges in.⁶² The Neapolitan language of the underclass Rione is carefully measured out in the quadrilogy, and it is built as a text translated from the dialect,⁶³ while becoming a necessarily overflowing element in the TV series, where it is also equipped with subtitles in many languages. It thus serves as a continuous counterpoint for Elena's ostentatiously discoloured, withheld, *foreign* voice-off.

2.2. Trauma and trespassing boundaries: the colours of the storyworld and slippery realism

The TV series introduces several elements that refer to the novel's ability to intercept contemporary primordialism, but elaborate them according to a cinematic syntax and language. One of the constitutive features of the quadrilogy can actually be identified with the narrative mechanism of «breaking barriers».⁶⁴ This narrative device is simultaneously implemented in order to enhance the constant attempts of the two friends to escape from domestic and/or subordinate spaces, as well as to describe the traumas generated by the patriarchal violence that is triggered as soon as the protagonists trespass those boundaries. Costanzo also translates the traumatic-punitive dynamic of trespassing into a poetics of tension, to which a large part of his previous production refers.⁶⁵ In the first season, set between 1950 and 1961, this strategy is also connected with two decisive «ways of worldmaking».⁶⁶ The first device consists in a dark chromatism of spaces and clothes, meticulously contained within a range between gray, blue and brown:⁶⁷ a sort of chrono-

⁶¹ de Rogatis, *Two Languages, Emigrations and Study*, in Ead., *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*, cit., pp. 161-201.

⁶² Faienza underlines the serious and anti-caricatural register of the Neapolitan language in the TV series (Lucia Faienza, *Questa storia non è una commedia. Intragenericità e modalità di adattamento nella serie tv dell'Amica geniale*, in *Narrazioni espanse*, ed. by Fusillo et al., cit., p. 314).

⁶³ Andrea Villarini, *Riflessioni sociolinguistiche a margine de L'amica geniale di Elena Ferrante*, «Allegoria», XXVIII, 73, 2016, pp. 171-189; Rita Librandi, *Una lingua silenziosa: immaginare il dialetto negli scritti di Elena Ferrante*, «Kwartaln Neofilologiczny», LXVI, 2019, pp. 385-398.

⁶⁴ de Rogatis, *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*, pp. 203 e ss.

⁶⁵ Roberta Tabanelli, *Voice and Vision: The Making of L'amore molesto (Troubling Love) by Mario Martone*, «Journal of Italian Cinema & Media Studies», 7, 2, 2019, pp. 274-275. «The constant of the film's dialogues is a latent tension that could explode at any moment» (Faienza, *op. cit.*, p. 315).

⁶⁶ Goodman, *op. cit.*; Herman, *The Third Element: or, How to Build a Story*, in *Basic Elements*, cit., pp. 105-136.

⁶⁷ As Costanzo points out, they first of all coincide with the «faded, worn out» colors of poor post-war clothes (Costanzo, *L'amica geniale, Costanzo: una storia neorealista, colta e popolare insieme*, «RepTV», ed. by Arianna Finnos and videofilmed by Rocco Giurato, 2 September 2018, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://video.repubblica.it/dossier/venezia-75-mostra-cinematografica/l-amica-geniale-costanzo-una-storia-neorealista-colta-e-popolare-insieme/313489/314118>>).

logical-chromatic platform destined to vary in the following seasons according to a “progressive use” of colour.⁶⁸ The chromatic saturation visually translates the sense of claustrophobia and imminent threat looming over the childhood years of both girls. At the same time, this dull palette of hues also serves the purpose of disorienting the readers by disappointing their expectations for Mediterranean folklore, and by instead guiding them towards a more universal perception of history. The second device consists in creating an important dynamics of tension by adopting an alienated positioning of reality. As Costanzo himself pointed out, the series aims to emphasize the «representation of reality», something that quite differs from the reduction of reality adopted by any neorealist reference.⁶⁹ If Ferrante worked through this «slippery, unstable realism»⁷⁰ according to a dichotomy between a surface of verisimilitude and an underworld of trauma,⁷¹ Costanzo goes towards this same goal from another direction: he places the innumerable details of a Neorealist atmosphere within a metaphysical and emptied scenographic context, «fixing the time of objects in a motionless gravity».⁷² The space of the Rione is not in fact taken from the reality of the urban space which inspired it (Rione Luzzatti), but – in affinity with Fellini’s visionary technique – has rather been reconstructed inside a huge set (near Caserta, inside the former industrial area Saint Gobain). The intention is to engender a continuous «disorientation»⁷³ in the viewer – a reaction that is, after all, similar to the sense of textual disorientation obtained by Ferrante – between smooth surfaces and fractures, between reassurance and alarm. A recurring iconic image, in this sense, is that of the tunnel that connects the Rione to the city. It recurs, in particular, in several shots of the first and second season, and it stands out because of a strong tension being released between its hyper-realistic architecture and the surreal semicircle of blue sky framed within it. One hallmark of this strategy is found in the second episode of the first season (*The Money; I soldi*), during which the two girls are filmed in front of the tunnel, as they are about to enter it in order to escape from the Rione. The two childish silhouettes are dominated by a semicircular horizon, which appears serene to the point of inverosimilitude, yet is enclosed within the dark and massive arch of the tunnel (30:12).

⁶⁸ Costanzo explains that the colors will gradually become more and more alive in the three remaining seasons, as material «goods» enter the homes of Italians (Id., *A Elena Ferrante potevo solo scrivere* cit.). Indeed, in the second season – set between 1961 and 1968 – there is a prevalence of shades of green in combination with some flashes of red: a sign of growing rage (this is the title of the sixth episode), expressed in both private and public spheres. In the third season – set between 1968 and 1976 – the colors of consumerism and revolt finally become more and more varied and vivid (*ibid.*).

⁶⁹ «It is a representation of reality; it is not neorealist. [...] We have built houses, this has given us the possibility to control everything and to completely rely on cinematic representation. [...] The story is very neorealist, but the way in which we have narrated it has more to do with someone like Fellini, for instance, who opposed neorealism by building his inner world with papier mache» (*ibid.*). On this estranging realism see Tabanelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 275-276.

⁷⁰ Ferrante, *My Childhood Trauma Turned me into a Secret Writer*, «The Times», 10th October 2021.

⁷¹ de Rogatis, *Global Perspectives, Trauma, and the Global Novel* cit., pp. 26 and ff.

⁷² Faienza, *op. cit.*, p. 308.

⁷³ «A reconstructed set [...] creates disorientation in the spectator» (Costanzo, *From Fellini to Ferrante: the cinematic vision of My Brilliant Friend*, ed. by Tobias Jones, «The Guardian», 19 November 2018, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/19/from-fellini-to-ferrante-the-cinematic-vision-my-brilliant-friend>>).

2.3. Trauma and trespassing boundaries: main gates, doors, classrooms, and dining rooms

The vital quality of the girls' trespassing is enhanced by opening credits that are characterised by an evidently symbolic intensity. These very first images are accompanied by the second and third season theme song (*Whispers*), composed by Max Richter: a dizzying crescendo of strings, powerfully boundless in itself. For the second season, the theme song is inaugurated by Elena and Lila, who run through the spaces of the Rione as girls, and during the rush they transform into young women. For the third season, the same theme opens instead with the hand of one of the girls on top of the other's, while pushing on the main door of a building – as if to open it.

In a continuous complementarity between vital experiences and trauma, the symbolism of the main entrance is reversed by a sequence of the second season, during which the door of the Carracci's apartment closes abruptly, almost magically, on Elena's face, while from the inside Stefano begins to wildly beating Lila (episode 2 *The Body/Il corpo*; 09:00-10:15). From across the door – on which the gaze of both Elena and the viewers insist, as they are coerced to do so by the camera framing – comes the noises of smashed objects, insults, masculine screams: horrors that can be perceived, yet not prevented. It is the still insurmountable border of a patriarchal and feminicidal domestic world.

If we once more consider the perspective of a traumatic trespassing, the first season of the TV series underlines the causal and symbolic link between two scenes and two sequences in chronological succession: the school competition established by Maestra Oliviero, the consequent double aggression suffered by Lila, and the founding rite of intellectual friendship between the two girls. Scenes and sequences are also connected by Costanzo through the recurrence of a spatial and symbolic hierarchy established between high and low levels with the aid of specific markers, i.e. the positions in which the two friends' bodies are situated in each given portion of the episode. This ultimately shows how they reach the lowest possible level, as they lie on the bare ground while playing with their dolls. In the first two scenes, within the same sequence, the competition is specified as a rite of trespassing of skills and knowledge. Maestra Oliviero expressly asks her female pupils to compete with the males of the upper classes in order to be «better than them» («meglio di loro»; first season, episode 1 *The Dolls/Le bambole*; 27: 11-33: 39). This is a particularly daring ritual in the context of a 1950s proletarian neighborhood where, only a few years later, Lila's father would be able to easily argue that his brilliant daughter must not enrol in middle school, because she cannot be better than the male family members who did not attend either. Within such as patriarchal setting, in this sequence we also see Enzo – who has repeated school years for multiple times – getting beaten by Lila; in this very context, during a final competition between the two of them, one of Enzo's classmates yells at him in Neapolitan: «pur 'a na femmena te fai fa'!» (sub-titles: «you got beaten by a girl!») / «ti fai battere da una femmina!» 32:26).

On a visual level, this last scene emphasizes the spatial arrangement of physical and cognitive asymmetries during the school competition. Little Lila faces and wins Enzo, who is much taller than her, and she is placed on the opposite side of Maestra Oliviero's chair, revealing herself – as Elena's voice-off comments – in her splendor as a «holy warrior» («santa guerriera»). In the following scene, outside the school, Lila is again visually placed in front of the overwhelming group of recently beaten boys. The girl confronts them in a stone-throwing fight, yet this time – given the exclusively physical quality of the fight – she falls on the ground, as she gets hit in the head by Enzo. In the second sequence, teenager Stefano Carracci – Alfonso's brother, who also gets humiliated during

the school competition – rises above Lila in all his height, and slaps her (a violence that foreshadows that of their future marriage). After a long sequence of slaps, Stefano opens her mouth and tries to tear her «shitty tongue» («lingua di merda»; 41:00), that is to say the organ that symbolizes the intellectual superiority of the child. In both sequences, Lila is assisted by Elena, who competes with her against the boys and tries to defend her. Thus their alliance takes shape, by being founded on a rite of knowledge and trespassing embodied by a pedagogical *dea ex machina*, Maestra Oliviero.⁷⁴ In the same sequence, once they get up from the ground Stefano has hurled them to, the two girls lay the intellectual foundations of their friendship myth. As they are playing together on the street, while being again on the ground, the girls steal and throw each other's dolls into a dark, underground cellar, with a gesture that embodies the most symbolic fall. This pivotal scene is not the original trauma, but rather a stage of a «deferred action»:⁷⁵ a phantasmatic return of the trauma. The fall corresponds to a ritualized exposure to the darkness of violence, that the two girls have not only suffered but also interiorized in the form of female rage and abjected competition. The «reciprocal theft»⁷⁶ of the dolls is actually a way in which the two girls narrativize and therefore live creatively their mutual envy: the inevitable result of an underclass female subordination. At the same time, as the TV episode visually highlights in an exemplary way, this rite represents a recovery from trauma: a way to rework and redeem the falls that the two girls had to undergo in the previous scenes, in order to experience emancipation. The redemption comes from the fact that the loss will be compensated over the next episode (*The Money/I soldi*), with the purchase and shared reading of a book, *Little Women*, and with their communal ambition of becoming women writers.

The dynamic between trespassing and punishment also emerges from another recurring narrative sequence, that of family encounters around a dining table. These scenes provide a space and a ritual both functional for Elena's and Lila's cyclical return or «backlash» to the archaic world from which they are trying to escape. One decisive scene is, for example, featured in the second season (episode 1, *The New Name/Il nuovo cognome*), when Stefano and Lila return from their honeymoon and are welcomed by both their families inside the Carracci's dining room (30:00-33:13). As Lila enters the room, her disfigured face shows the signs of Stefano's rape. She is welcomed by the brazen indifference of hers and Stefano's relatives towards these evident traces of violence. A series of shots and reverse shots detaches her figure from the family group, which looms over her from a slightly superior camera angle, thus stressing on the overwhelming power of silence. In the third season (episode 3, *The Fever/La febbre*), another significant scene, freely rethought by Lucchetti, shows the marriage vows exchanged between Elena and Pietro during a dinner at the Greco's house (00:00-6:00). Here, as the camera shows how

⁷⁴ «The *deus ex machina* of the story is an elementary teacher, a woman who changes the life of the two protagonists. For me, the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle has a profoundly political and contemporary connotation, because you realize what you no longer have» (Id., *L'amica geniale, i volti di Elena Ferrante e quella citazione di Rossellini*, ed. by Alessandra De Tommasi, «The Hotcorn», 21 september 2018, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://hotcorn.com/it/film/news/saverio-costanzo-lamica-geniale-volti-elena-ferrante-quella-citazione-rossellini/>>).

⁷⁵ Freud, *op. cit.*, p. 356.

⁷⁶ Dayna Tortorici, *Those Like Us: On Elena Ferrante*, «n+1», 22, 2016, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://nplusonemag.com/issue-22/reviews/those-like-us/>>. On the dynamics and quality of Elena's and Lila's trauma, I refer also to the essays by Emanuela Caffè and Katrin Wehling-Giorgi included in the aforementioned special issue *Elena Ferrante in a Global Context*, cit. pp. 32-53, 118-142.

the mother's hands hold her daughter's face tight, framing her in a gesture of unusual tenderness – the same take splits into a visionary dimension in which those same hands are clasped around Elena's neck. In the meantime, the hands of Elena's future husband violently put the engagement ring on her finger (05:07-05:12).

2.4. Trauma and the matrophobic repertoire

Costanzo identifies a foundational trait of Ferrante's traumatic repertoire in a symbolic female universe marked by matrophobia,⁷⁷ and enhances it by inserting new elements or connecting differently the others that are already present in the quadrilogy. In this way, on the one hand, the traces of the trauma are expanded, as if under a magnifying glass. On the other hand, also the traces of temporary recovery from trauma – Lila's and Elena's creative experimentation of alternative models – are highlighted. In particular, three episodes go in this direction.

The first one is a visionary scene featuring hundreds of cockroaches, that in the novel are only «tiny, almost invisible animals [...] entering the water and the food and the air» («animali piccolissimi, quasi invisibili [...] entravano nell'acqua e nel cibo e nell'aria»)⁷⁸. In the TV series the cockroaches emerge at night from the sewers of the Rione and enter nostrils and mouth of Elena's sleeping mother (first season, episode 1 *The Dolls/Le bambole*; 25:34-26:39). From Elena's magical-infantile perspective, the incorporation of these abjected animals would be the imaginative visualization for the violence of the mothers, so intense as to make them – as Elena's voice-off says with a textual quotation from the novel – «angry as starving dogs» («rabbiose come cagne assetate»). The short sequence is set between Elena's fainting – triggered by the physical confrontation between two mothers/she-dogs (Melina Cappuccio and Lidia Sarratore; 24:07-25:33) – and her return to consciousness (26:40-27:03), thus functioning as a narrative and visionary «chunking»⁷⁹ of that specific matrophobic traumatic fracture.

The second episode brings together in the same sequence matrophobia and its escape. We are again in the first episode of the first season (*The Dolls/Le bambole*). During the eviction of Sarratore's family, Melina bursts into a dramatic scene of desperation (45:28-49:30). The scene is immediately followed by Lila's decision to go to Don Achille with Elena, in order to retrieve the dolls. This trial of courage is a reply to the matrophobic plot that has reduced Melina and Lidia to a role of abjected fighters struggling with each other for Sarratore. In the novel, the two events are chronologically and narratively separated, while in the TV series the two little girls witness Melina's desperation and, immediately afterwards, just to redeem the matrophobia aroused by the scene, Lila decides with a significant «enough!» («basta!»): 49:30) that they are going to face don Achille.

The third episode is the scene of Elena's first menstrual cycle (season one, episode 3 *Metamorphoses/Le metamorfosi*; 03:08-06:56) and her escape from home. The blood has mysteriously flowed from her, who is now seeking from her friend, and not from her mother, the explanation of the terrible discovery. Thanks to a series of shots and reverse shots, Elena is alternately filmed from in front and then from behind, as she combs the

⁷⁷ «Matrophobia [...] is the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one's mother*» (Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born. Motherhood as Experience and Institution* [1976], New York, Norton, 1995, pp. 235). On «matrophobia» in *My Brilliant Friend* cycle see de Rogatis, *Elena Ferrante's Key Words*, cit., pp. 86-101.

⁷⁸ Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend*, translated by Ann Goldstein, New York, Europa Editions, 2012, p. 38; Ead, *L'amica geniale*, Roma, e/o, 2011, p. 33.

⁷⁹ Calabrese, *Della segmentazione*, cit., pp. 126 and ff. See also par. 1.3. of this paper.

entire neighborhood searching for Lila. The first menstrual blood stands out on her skirt: a stain of abjection of which she is unaware (and which is broadcast in prime time by the Italian state television, co-producer of the series).

The history of matrophobia is also the history of its resolution, even if it is only a temporary one. This storyline is so important as to be associated with a chromatic shift. The dark chromatism of the first season is in fact momentarily interrupted by the sixth episode (*The Island/L'isola*), relating to Elena's first experience in Ischia. Here the summer light and the blue color of the sea burst into the scenes, and after a long period of distrust they are welcomed by the girl. The sequence (04:40-06:06) during which a teenage Elena enters the sea and recovers a remote childhood memory of her mother teaching her to swim possesses the value of a temporary escape from the trauma area. The camera shot persistently focuses on the girl's uncertain steps and on the liquid surface, so that it initially pushes the viewer back into the habitual area of tension and traumatic hyperarousal. However, immediately afterwards it floats back euphorically through the waves, together with Elena. With the final aerial shooting, the young female body is finally free in the ever-expanding marine space.⁸⁰

3. *Americanah* and the blog inside and outside the plot

3.1. The novel

In 2013 Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published the first edition of *Americanah* in English (the official language of post-colonial Nigeria), with New York-based publishing house Alfred A. Knopf.⁸¹

Adichie's experience of American migration and education is transposed into the fictional dimension of *Americanah* itself through her main character, a Nigerian girl named Ifemelu. Encompassing, at the same time, the protagonist's *Bildungsroman* and her sentimental education, the story is set between Nigeria and the United States, stretching from the first half of the Nineties until the first election of Barack Obama, in 2008. The novel takes place between two Nigerian cities (the megalopolis Lagos, and the university city of Nsukka), and several American cities (New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Haven, up to the austere Princeton). Ifemelu spends 13 years in America, where she decides to emigrate in order to attend a non-precarious university, unlike the Nigerian one. Like many Afropolitans and Nigerropolitans, and like Adichie herself, Ifemelu eventually decides to return to her country of origin and finds new transnational roots in a diasporic «Third Space».⁸²

3.2. Sexual trauma

At the beginning of her American experience, Ifemelu faces months of desperate and unsuccessful search for a job, as well as a persistent racial discrimination. The uprooting from Nigeria has already provoked a strong psychological distress in her: a constant cognitive displacement in which «there were slippery layers of meaning that eluded her»; «the world was wrapped in gauze; she could see the shapes of things but not clearly enough, never enough» (am 131). With barely anything to survive on, she decides to

⁸⁰ Faienza, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311.

⁸¹ I'm quoting from the British edition, and will be using the abbreviation am henceforth. C.N. Adichie, *Americanah*, 4th Estate, London 2013.

⁸² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 56.

accept the proposal of a white male tennis coach. During an earlier interview for a personal assistant job, this unnamed man had instead suggested in a measured tone that he would pay her in exchange for a «help to relax», implying erotic services («look, you are not a kid» am 143-144): the first act of a double «grammar of violence».⁸³ In effect, the proposal is already a multi-layered frame of power and exploitation, in which the economic vulnerability of immigrants is intersected with the Western myth of hypersexualized, hence available black women.⁸⁴ The scene of their second and last meeting is represented by the extradiegetic narrative voice as a grey zone where the «boundaries she would not cross» are suddenly no longer visible, and she feels «already tainted» (am 154). In the «grammar of violence», Ifemelu's deep disorientation is generated by many layers of structural ambiguity. On the one hand, the massage performance hides a refused self-prostitution (««I can't have sex with you», she said. Her voice felt squeazy, unsure of itself»), which hides a frightened vulnerability («her own words had deserted her»; «she wondered if he had a gun» am 153), which in turn hides a male sexual abuse; the abuse itself is consequently concealed by the abuser through the language of «consensual intimacy»⁸⁵ («I just need some human contact to relax» am 153), a linguistic abuse. On the other hand, at the height of her bewilderment in this labyrinth, a «sickening wetness» takes shape from within her disgust and her fear («she did not want to be here, did not want his active finger between her legs, did not want his sigh-moans in her ear, and yet she felt her body rousing to a sickening wetness» am 154).⁸⁶ The experience will push her to break, without any explanation, the engagement with Obinze, her Nigerian boyfriend – a decisive plot change⁸⁷ – and pave the way for a deep depressive phase. At the core of the trauma there is her «self loathing» (am 158; «I felt like I had [...] betrayed myself» am 439) for her own «wetness», for having felt our body as the Subaltern.⁸⁸

The unspeakable trauma («she would never be able to form the sentences to tell her story» am 158) – a central narrative device in Adichie's poetics – will then shape her migration. In her American years, Ifemelu is indeed a liminal figure. After the experience with the tennis coach, she keeps herself on the edge of a lived life, by standing on the threshold of all the emotions and thoughts that a lived life generates. Since she cannot expose herself to her inner chaos of feelings and emotions, her American sentimental education with white upper-class Curt and Yale Afro-American professor Blaine will be, for her, intertwined with a sense of detachment and a search for social status. Throughout this plot-strategy, *Americanah* enlarges the realistic tradition of the classic novel of

⁸³ Daria Tunca, *Unscrambling the Grammar of Violence. Sexual Assault and Emotional Vulnerability in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, in *Narrating Violence in the Postcolonial World*, ed. by Rebecca Romdhami and Daria Tunca, New York, Routledge, 2021, pp. 59-78.

⁸⁴ Evelyn M. Hammond, *Towards a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality*, in *Feminist Theory and the Body*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, New York, Routledge, 1999, pp. 93-104. On the «narrative emphasis» of the two tennis coach scenes as part of Adichie's «engagement with Black American radicalization» see Dominique Haensell, *(Post-)Independent Women. Romance, Return, and Pan-African Feminism in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, in Ead., *Making Black History. Diasporic Fiction in the Moment of Afropolitanism*, Berlin-Boston, De Gruyter, 2021, p. 113.

⁸⁵ Tunca, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁸⁶ A coexistence of disgust and excitement towards the white predatory male already present in *Jumping Monkey Hill*, a tale by Adichie included in *The Thing around Your Neck* collection (2009).

⁸⁷ Caroline Lyle, *Afropolitanism for Black Women: Sexual Identity and Coming to Voice in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, «aspeers», 11, 2018, p. 107.

⁸⁸ According to the mechanism of «symbolic violence» or «epistemic violence» codified mainly by Pierre Bourdieu and Gayatri Spivak.

manners «with the twist that it maps class and romance onto the wider and more directly political terrain of nation and race».⁸⁹

3.3. Trauma and blog

This liminal position becomes creative only when Ifemelu opens a successful blog on the topic of race, provocatively entitled *Raceteenth, or Various Observations About American Blacks (Those Formerly Known as Negroes) by a Non-American Black*.⁹⁰ Mostly thanks to the pseudonymity of her hybrid identity (Ifemelus signs as «a Non-American Black») and to the mediatic connection between «exposure and anonymity»,⁹¹ the blog will become for her a freeing space of lived experience and reflection, spontaneous orality and humour. Talking about white people means talking about her physical complicity with whiteness and Americanness, involving her body, her hair, her language, and the novel's title itself. Rewriting the racial or Afro-American speeches also means to rewrite the unspeakable speech of her sexual trauma.

As it has already been pointed out,⁹² in the novel the blog is in fact an anticensory narrative device, which finds both its own specific space in the text narration (with different fonts and graphics), and a significant refraction in both the plot and the inner life of Ifemelu. It allows to unbury the truth of a private and public word otherwise inaccessible not only to her, and to her traumatized silence, but also to the complex chorality of American and African-American characters who take part in it. Through its audience feedback, the blog stages and deconstructs the racial false consciousness differently declined by white Americans and Afro-Americans, transforming itself into a true «social commentary»,⁹³ and into a «shared space»⁹⁴ of cultural debate. For Ifemelu, the cultural dimension of the blog is also a form of redemption from the inauthenticity she experienced both throughout her university education and during her subsequent hanging out with Blaine and the Yale intelligentsia: an experience of self-censorship (the «vague terror» of the professor during the class discussion on the word «nigger» am 138), of stolid specialization («academics were not intellectuals; they were not curious, they built their stolid tents of specialized knowledge and stayed securely in them» am 323-324), and of conformity («they ticked the boxes of a certain kind of enlightened, educated

⁸⁹ Kirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

⁹⁰ The first title was *Raceteenth, or Curious Observations by a Non American Black on the Subject of Blakness in America* (am 296, 315). «Raceteenth» is a neologism ironically related to Juneteenth, short for June Nineteenth: the formula marks the day when federal troops arrived in Texas in 1865 to take control of the State and ensure that all enslaved people be freed. Juneteenth honors the end of slavery in the United States, and is considered the longest-running African American holiday. On June 17, 2021, it officially became a federal holiday.

⁹¹ Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory. Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010, p. 72. For an extensive analysis of the blog in *Americanah* see Serena Guarracino, *Writing «so raw and true»: Blogging in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, «Between», 8, IV, 2014, pp. 1-27.

⁹² See *ibid.*, pp. 12-15. See also Lokangaka Losambe, *Post-Hybrid Conjunctive Consciousness in the Literature of the New African Diaspora*, in *A Companion to African Literature*, ed. by Olakunle George, Hoboken NJ, Wiley, 2020, p. 374.

⁹³ «I wanted this novel to also be a social commentary, but I wanted to say it in ways that are different from what one is supposed to say in literary fictions» (Chimamanda Adichie, *Americanah – International Authors Stage*, ed. by Sinne Rifbjerg, 20 May 2014, 43:59-44:0, web, last access: 26 March 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8r-dP9NqX8>>).

⁹⁴ Guarracino, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

middle-classness, the love of dresses that were more interesting than pretty, the love of the eclectic, the love of what they were supposed to love» am 334). The dynamics of interactivity and equilibrium is described as an outcome: it is the result of Ifemelu's ability to negotiate even with toxic feedbacks and aggressive dynamics.⁹⁵ This positive energy is deeply connected with Ifemelu's need to circumvent, on the one hand, her own private silence and, on the other, the racist or politically correct use of the public word. However, the experience gradually runs out, transforming Ifemelu into a predator of other people's stories («she began, over time, to feel like a vulture hacking into the carcasses of people's stories for something she could use» am 5).

The decision to return to Nigeria will soon lead her to the choice of opening a new blog, *The Small Redemption of Lagos*. This mediatic «Third Space» differs from both the rhetoric of the «shared space of (...) Africanness» (am 107), as well as from the African American lefty rhetoric: it provides her with the potential to live consciously and happily as an insider/outsider. But the media dimension is always insufficient vis-à-vis real life. Although the *Raceteenth* blog works as a tool for re-elaborating real life, in its final parable it becomes a vampirism of reality. Something similar emerges from the tension between Ifemelu and Ranyinudo for an invasive and judgemental Ifemelu's post in the second blog *The Small Redemption of Lagos* (the final word is up to Ranyinudo: «your problem is emotional frustration» am 423). In the metamodern dimension, the reality represented by the media is «marked by a continuous and fruitful tension, between order and entropy, enunciation and enunciated, truth and incoherence».⁹⁶

Once in Lagos, for the first time she will tell the trauma experienced with the tennis coach – occurred thirteen years earlier – to someone: Obinze. Her tale will dwell on the unexpected appearance of an erotic excitement: «I couldn't believe that I got wet» (am 439). Significantly, the overcoming of silence will reconnect the past to the future, reopening their relationship and creating a circular structure in the plot.⁹⁷ Finding the words to say, finding the words to narrate the tennis coach scene, means placing herself consciously in a space that is, at the same time, fluctuating and rooted: the space of the Nigeropolitans, the Nigerians who emigrated mostly in the US and eventually returned home with a mark of foreign belonging and undeniable diversity.

Starting from 2014, Adichie's second blog – *The Small Redemption of Lagos* – is located outside the novel, within Adichie's website.⁹⁸ The meaning of the operation

⁹⁵ Felix Mutunga Ndaka, *Rupturing the Genre: Un-Writing Silence in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah*, «Wagadu. A Journal of Transnational Women's and Gender Studies», 18, 2017, p. 118. Miriam Pahl, *Afropolitanism as Critical Consciousness: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's and Teju Cole's Internet Presence*, «Journal of African Cultural Studies», 2016, 28, 1, p. 79.

⁹⁶ Vittorini, *Raccontare oggi*, cit., p. 194.

⁹⁷ This ring-like closure is a variant – one that is more camouflaged in the plot, but no less significant – of the striking circularity given by the analytic structure in which two thirds of the plot are arranged. From the first to the forty-first chapter (corresponding to four out of seven parts of the novel), the story takes place in Ifemelu's flashback, as she tells is while about to return to Lagos, during her appointment with an African hairdresser, in a suburb of Princeton. The incipit shows Ifemelu traveling from Princeton to the suburb of Trenton, where the shop is located, while his stream of consciousness, focused by the heterodiegetic narrator, brings the *Raceteenth* blog, now closed, onto the scene as the first relevant character. The analeptic structure emphasizes an ordinary space: a hairdresser's shop in which Ifemelu's words and thoughts are intertwined with female gossip, allowing her to differentiate her new Afropolitan position.

⁹⁸ «Ifemelu's Blog», web, last access: 26 March 2022, <<https://www.chimamanda.com/ifemelus-blog/>>. In the website, the masthead of the blog is the visual embodiment of a photo of which a verbal description is given in the novel («Ifemelu was full of sanguine expectations for *The Small*

consists in transcending national borders by mixing localities and globality through the use of cyberspace and wider accessibility. This is a further extension of the narrative development, since the posts refer to exchanges, for example with Obinze, of which there is no trace in the novel. This extension between fiction and reality, between character and author, also allows readers to further specify the contents of this second blog, much less grafted into the narrative fabric than *Raceteenth*.⁹⁹ On the other hand, however, here the blog is not open for public comments, but is only located within Adichie's site, which in this way demarcates the discontinuity between real and virtual, between author and character.

4. *The Handmaid's Tale* and the homonymous TV series

4.1. The novel and the TV series

The Handmaid's Tale was first released in 1985, by Toronto-based publishing house McClelland & Stewart. In the novel, a nuclear war and a consequent ecological catastrophe – both occurred in a not too distant future at the end of the twentieth century – progressively and simultaneously result in the collapse of American birth rate and democracy. Following a coup, the American parliamentary system and its government are overthrown and replaced by the Gilead regime, a puritanical and caste-like theocracy inspired by a reproductive obsession. The regime reduces all fertile women that are identified as single women or adulterers (single mothers and/or mothers in relationships not sanctioned by marriage) into maids. They are deprived of their children and bound to be slaves, solely destined for mounting and procreating. Instead of her own name, each handmaid is forced to bear a slave-like patronymic that changes according to the Commander who owns her as personal property. The narrating voice belongs for example to a handmaid who is called Offred throughout the plot, because her assigned Commander's name is Fred (hence, «of Fred»; with a phonetic allusion to both her being «offered», as well as being dressed «of red»). In the TV series, at the end of the pilot episode Offred openly declares that her true name is June. In the novel all women, and not just the maids, are forced into caste-like roles, with different types of uniforms, the colors of which are related to their degree of fertility, starting with the bright red of the handmaids.¹⁰⁰ The entire female population of Gilead is divided into categories, inspired by the Old-Testament repertoire, such as Wives (women united in marriage to men belonging to the superior male caste of the Commanders), Econowives (women married to lower caste men), Aunts (educators and overseers of the entire female caste system), Marthas (housekeepers), Unwomen (women who are no longer of childbearing age and are inadequate, or have refused to be Aunts).

Over these past decades, *The Handmaid's Tale* has already enjoyed a notable fame. In 1985, the novel got the *Governor General's Award*, and in 1987 the first *Arthur C. Clarke Award*. It has been translated for the screen, as well as in operatic, choreographic,

Redemption of Lagos, with a dreamy photograph of an abandoned colonial house on its masthead» am 421).

⁹⁹ Guarracino, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ Laura Cortés-Selva-Susana Martínez Guillem, *Blessed be the Flight. Mysoginism ad Antifeminism in «The Handmaid's Tale»*, in *Hate Speech and Polarization Society*, ed. by Marta Pérez-Escolar-José Manule Noguera-Vivo, London and New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 90.

radiophonic and even graphic versions and, in 2019, in a sequel: *The Testaments*.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the novel has conquered a definitive global relevance and sold more than 8 million copies worldwide¹⁰² thanks to the TV series directed by Bruce Miller, to the point that we can consider 26th april 2017 – the day in which the TV series, now in its fourth season, first premiered – as the definitive transnational date of the novel itself. To confirm the transmedial presence of Atwood's imaginary, that same year marked the airing of a six-episode mini-series entitled *Alias Grace*, adapted from Atwood's homonymous novel (1996) and directed by Mary Harron.

The TV series presents itself as a particularly plastic form, since it is at the same time a remake, a paraquel¹⁰³ and a sequel. On the one hand, the first season presents itself as a significant extension of the novel's story (a paraquel), while on the other hand it revises the 1990 film adaptation (a remake), in a radical way.¹⁰⁴ With some exceptions, the remaining four seasons instead develop an original story, in spite of being initially based on the plot and on the novel's system of characters reproduced in the first season (a sequel). As a paraquel, the script introduces in the first season new female subjectivities and new perspectives, based on a choral dimension that is absent in the novel. This is the case, for example, of one of the many original contributions of the script that are evidently close to contemporary lgbtqi+ issues: the character and narrative parable of Ofglen (whose real name is Emily), gets punished with clitoridectomy because she is a lesbian (season 1, episode 3; 40:00-50:00). In the three remaining seasons, a decisive part of the plot will be determined by Ofglen/Ofstevan/Emily's story. Furthermore, a great portion of both paraquel and sequel articulates the envious and violent symbolism of coerced motherhood in Gilead, as it is inspired by the contemporary debate about the so-called «surrogate motherhood», while also describing the educative system of the Aunts and their Red Centre.¹⁰⁵ At the time of the coup, women with a higher education and who are no longer fertile, or are legally single or widowed, are subjected to particular restrictions due to their lack of marital status, just like young fertile adulterers. For this particular type of educated women, the regime requires for them to become the tutors – the so-called Aunts – of the entire Gilead training system. Thanks to the privileged access to books and reading – allowed only to them and the Commanders – the Aunts are therefore transformed in the most gileadean zealous perpetrators. In Atwood's storyworld, this female caste – a truly separate semi-military order – has a great symbolic importance that is connected with the crucial risk, for women, to identify themselves with all neo-patriarchal structures. For this rea-

¹⁰¹ *The Handmaid's Tale* (1990), directed by Volker Schlöndorff, script by Harold Pinter; cast: Natasha Richardson, Robert Duvall and Faye Dunaway; Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale. The graphic novel*, art and adaptations by Renee Nault, Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 2019; Ead., *The Testaments*, Penguin, London 2019.

¹⁰² Coral Ann Howells, *Introduction*, in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Ead., Cambridge and New York, Cambridge UP, 2021, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Meneghelli analyzes the relationship between hypotext and paraquel in a very original and in-depth way, by focusing in particular on the «plural network, where there is almost invariably an excess, an exuberance, a populous world of possibilities, which remains on the threshold of a story, and in which the text loses its stability, its 'definitive' character» (Meneghelli, *Senza fine* cit., pp. 113 and ff.).

¹⁰⁴ Dennis Tredy, *Shifting Perspectives and Reaccentuation. Adapting The Handmaid's Tale as a Film and as a Hulu TV series in 2017/2018*, in *Teaching Dystopia, Feminism and Resistance Across Disciplines and Borders*, ed. by Karen A. Ritzenhoff and Janis Goldie, Washington, Lexington Books, 2019, pp. 207-221.

¹⁰⁵ Heather Latimer, *Reproductive Acts. Sexual Politics in North American Fiction and Film*, Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013, p. 47.

son, the first season of the series has also welcomed, in a memorable cameo, a performance by Margaret Atwood playing a sadistic, slapping Aunt (season 1, ep. 1; 27:54). Among the Aunts, Aunt Lydia – who, during the pre-Gileadian time, was a divorced judge – stands out. Through her in particular, the TV series highlights a typical symptom of totalitarian societies, i.e. dissociation, staged through the uncanny coexistence of ferocious sadism and tenderness towards victims. In this sense, two complementary sequences are extremely meaningful: the sadistic scene of the torture inflicted by Aunt Lydia on Offred for educational purposes (season 1, ep. 4; 43:06), and the «tender» scene of the empathic protection towards another handmaid, Ofwarren, who has been previously scarred by the tortures of the same, diligent Aunt (season 1, ep. 1; 22:50-22:54; ep. 6; 26:00-30:00). However, in the remaining seasons, we are witnessing an excessive and quite implausible¹⁰⁶ crescendo in Aunt Lydia's uncanny empathy. Such a variation was perhaps also urged by the eventual adaptation of *The Testaments* into a TV series. In this sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale* novel, Aunt Lydia emerges, in fact, as a decisive, and even positive character.

4.2. The novel, the TV series and the cultural trauma

The dystopia of *The Handmaid's Tale* falls into the category of speculative fiction, thus providing a narrative form that interrogates a plausible sphere, rather than an imaginary one. In order to amplify the effect of a dystopian realism, Atwood has come up with a functioning regime such as Gilead by recurring to a montage of events and historical facts that have already occurred.¹⁰⁷ Already at its first release, in 1985, the novel shows this speculative quality. On the one hand, the postnuclear catastrophic scenario of dystopia is inspired by the coeval environmental threat, which is connected to the nuclear weapons of bipolar geopolitics. On the other hand, it anticipates by only one year the fulfillment of this threat, coinciding with the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe that occurred in 1986. Another speculative quality consists in the fact that, already in 1985, the novel had also intercepted the first traces of the historical connection between the capitalist crisis and activist white fundamentalism in the United States (Fields, 176). Then again, this speculative dimension was destined to become more intense with the TV series and its international audience, with 81 awards of high international importance and 249 nominations (imdb). This enormous recognition has its roots in the intersection of the TV series with a much broader variant of this white primordialist connection: the historical trauma of Trump's election and his fundamentalist and supremacist policies inspired by «normalization»¹⁰⁸ of misogyny, homophobia and xenophobia. On January 21, 2017, the day after Trump's presidential inauguration, at the Women's March on Washington, a written slogan appeared: «make Margaret Atwood fiction again»,¹⁰⁹ an evident remaking of Trump's

¹⁰⁶ See comments of staff writer Costance Grady, a member of the «Vox Culture» team, on Aunt Lydia's character in season 3, episode 7 and 8 («Vox Culture», 10 June 2019, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/7/10/20687647/the-handmaids-tale-season-3-episode-8-unfit-recap>>).

¹⁰⁷ Atwood, «Interview with Margaret Atwood (Hay on Wye, Wales, 26 May 2001)», ed. by Margaret Reynolds, in *Margaret Atwood. The Essential Guide to Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, New York, Random House, 2002, pp. 20, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Cortés-Selva-Martínez Guillem, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁹ The slogan must be connected to the fact that, four months before the TV series was aired, on 26 april 2017, the novel had already reappeared on best seller list.

*slogan «make America great again».*¹¹⁰ This historical traumatic backlashes seem to concretely accomplish the dystopia of the novel and its iconic and visual translation in the TV series. The intersection has generated a series of feminist political recognition practices, born from the TV series aesthetics (Gámez Fuentes-Maseda García 77; Latimer 40), and has translated in many cultural icons,¹¹¹ to the point that we can define the whole phenomenon as a «Gileadverse».¹¹² The negotiation between real and fictional is therefore one of the fundamental aspects of the success of the TV series:¹¹³ one that must be connected with the category of «cultural trauma». According to Alexander, cultural trauma is in effect a form of recognition that takes place only when «social groups, national societies, and sometimes entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering, but may also take on board some significant responsibility for it».¹¹⁴

From this perspective, a decisive plot twist is the evening with the Commander (season one, episode 4, 40:00-42:00), during which Offred finally discovers the macaronic Latin source of the suicidal handmaid's sentence («Nolite te bastardes carborundorum») and its meaning («Don't let the bastards grind you down»), thus decoding its salvific and supportive meaning (one that is more precious than ever in a society that has prohibited writing and reading). In the TV series, this evening takes on an even more exemplary and ideological meaning.¹¹⁵ As a matter of fact, in the sequence here illustrated, Offred is followed by a travelling shot as she is walking outdoors together with a group of maids. The symbolic value of the scene is revealed precisely by the arrangement of their bodies, which are not disciplined in pairs or in rows, as they usually appear in the series. While the bodies are gradually framed by the travelling shot, Offred's voice off declares:

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Mead, *Margaret Atwood: The Prophet of Dystopia*, «The New Yorker», 10 April 2017, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/04/17/margaret-atwood-the-prophet-of-dystopia>>. Another sign of the US reactivation of Atwood's dystopia, prior to the TV series, was the demonstration on 20 March, 2017, in Austin, in front of the Texas State Capitol, against the restriction of the Texas state legislature on abortion: a group of women demonstrated dressed as handmaids (David Canfield, *Activist Dressed as Characters from the Handmaid's Tale to Protest Texas' Anti-Abortion Measures*, «Slate», 21 March 2017, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://slate.com/culture/2017/03/texas-women-gathered-dressed-as-characters-from-the-handmaid-s-tale-to-protest-anti-abortion-measures.html>>). Starting from this demonstration, the handmaid's clothes become an integral part of global demonstrations in defense of the right to abortion.

¹¹¹ Antonella Mascio, *Tra fiction e realtà. L'uniforme di The Handmaid's Tale come icona culturale*, «Ocula», 21, 22, 2020, pp. 253-263.

¹¹² Amanda Howell, *Breaking Silence, Bearing Witness, and voicing Defiance: the Resistant Female Voice in the Transmedia Storyworld of The Handmaid's Tale*, «Continuum», 233, 2, 2019, pp. 216-229.

¹¹³ I take up the category of TV series as a space for negotiation between real and fictional from Dusi (Nicola Dusi, *Introduzione. Universi seriali, ecosistemi, forme di vita, semiosfere*, in Id., *Confini di genere. Sociosemiotica delle serie tv*, Perugia, Morlacchi, 2019, p. 9). The context within which the producers of the film version worked was instead quite different: «Wilson would take the Pinter's script in every studio in Hollywood, encountering a wall of ignorance, hostility and indifference» (Sheldon Teitelbaum, *The Handmaid's Tale*, «Cinefantastique», 20, 4, 1990, p. 19).

¹¹⁴ Jeffrey Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2012, p. 6.

¹¹⁵ As Atwood herself underlines, «the Hulu team made their Offred more active than my Offred. [...] Partly because it's a television series, and partly because it's an *American* television series» (Atwood, *Margaret Atwood Annotated Season I of The Handmaid's Tale*, ed. by Jennifer Vinejad, «The New York Times», 14 June 2017, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/14/watching/the-handmaids-tale-tv-finale-margaret-atwood.html>>).

There was an Offred before me. She helps me find my way out. She's dead. She's alive. She is me. We are handmaids. Nolite te bastardes carborundorum, bitches (season 1, ep. 4, 50:36-50:56).

Starting from this sequence, the sentence of the suicidal handmaid has become a viral hashtag of our contemporaneity: «a narrative device that connects the present with the past, the novel with the TV series, fiction with reality, by configuring itself as a sort of guide, of value-related instruction for the reader».¹¹⁶

But there are also simplifications. By removing a structural aspect of *The Handmaid's Tale*, namely *The Historical Notes on the Handmaid's Tale* appendix, the TV series prevents in fact the viewer from experiencing that disorientation between «two futures» on which Atwood had firmly insisted.¹¹⁷ In the course of the TV series' five seasons, these elements of disoriented temporality and unreliable narration find no space, because from the historical perspective of the primordialist trauma embodied by Trump, Offred's testimony instead assumes a woke orientation, tuned by her strong reliability.

4.3. Trauma, storyworld of cinematic realism and narrative estrangement

The novel, the TV series and the election of Trump converge in overturning the relationship between ordinary and anomalous, as it also revealing that the unthinkable can normalize in a short time, whereas long-acquired rights become exposed to disappearance and/or they get perceived as utterly eccentric claims. And yet, while the real event emerges as a trauma and a still open laceration in the American social and political fabric (renewed by the 2021 United States Capitol attack), both the novel and the TV series are forms of «retelling» of the trauma: they work as a potential healing device for this wound. In particular, viewers are provided with resources to process the trauma of intertwined temporalities throughout the immersive experience of cinematic realism:¹¹⁸ a central device of worldmaking adopted by the TV series.

The 1990 film version was inspired by an expressionist aesthetics, based on strong colors in continuous contrast, thus evoking the improbability of the events narrated. The TV series instead produces an impressionistic realism, based on a substantial continuity between the light of the exteriors set in the past, and the one used to visually mark the present. Between the two dimensions there is a slippage, not a contrast: «Gilead is always not more than a cut away from those scenes that portray our world and our society as we know it».¹¹⁹ This shift is also made possible by a central space of dystopia: Harvard University, the cradle of American liberal thought and research. In particular, the staircase where students' graduation ceremonies are celebrated becomes, during the dystopian time, the seat of ferocious ritual executions, known as *Salvagings*.

Hyper-realism also aims at increasing the cracks on the smooth surface. The handmaid's sentence engraved on wood («Nolite te bastardes carborundorum») is one of these

¹¹⁶ Mascio, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

¹¹⁷ «there are two futures in the book» (Atwood, *Haunted by The Handmaid's Tale*, «The Guardian», 20 January 2012, web, last access: 18 August 2022, <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/20-12/jan/20/handmaids-tale-margaret-atwood>>). On the structural dynamics generated by Appendix see de Rogatis, *Bewitched Worlds*, cit.

¹¹⁸ «Cinematic realism is also established through a film's (or a TV show's) interaction with the sensing and feeling bodies of spectators» (Eileen Rositka, *No Light without Shadow. The Question of Realism in Volker Schlöndorff's The Handmaid's Tale and Hulu's TV Series*, in *Teaching Dystopia* cit., p. 198).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

tiny fractures, as it gives Offred access to a double bottom of realism that oscillates between the verisimilitude of social control and the deep space of trauma. The luminosity of the exteriors characterising both the past and the present contrasts with the rich, crepuscular interiors of the Gileadian élite.¹²⁰ In the first five minutes of the pilot episode, the contrast between two consecutive sequences stands out. The exterior shots of June and her little daughter's desperate, albeit vain, car escape, followed by their running across the woods, are followed by the first interior shot, where we see June already transformed into a handmaid. Sitting with her back to a window in her newly assigned bedroom, in Commander Waterford's house, Offred is irradiated by the external light and immersed in a «Victorian hue»¹²¹ chiaroscuro. The handmaid's face is composedly enclosed by a white cap; the body is imprisoned by a long, old-fashioned, gaudy dress; the setting is a Nineteenth century attic. It is a hyper-realist space,¹²² which embodies the Gileadian cult of traditional values, and therefore also the recovery of archaeological modernity. The attic is also the humble space of a rich house: in the Gileadean hierarchy is the environment decorously suited to the servile role of the handmaid. Offred's first words as a voice-off assimilate it as an object among other «objects frozen in time»:¹²³ «a chair, a table, a lamp» (a quotation from the novel incipit: 04:49-04:56). The estrangement of this worldmaking confuses the readers, who will have to reverse their expectations about the present and the past: the first sequence (June's car escape) is a flashback of the lost past, while the second one (June's metamorphosis into handmaid) is the anachronistic present. Here the spectator is dealing with a visual reworking of the primordialist trauma.

In the oscillation between the free past and the theocratic present, this temporal intertwining articulates the mutual estrangement of the two dimensions. While Offred insists with her flashbacks on her being «a refugee from the past»,¹²⁴ Aunt Lydia underlines that «this may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will» (tth 39; season 1, episode 1, 19:46-19:50). In a perfect introjection of Aunt Lydia's statement, one of the handmaids (Ofwarren) will suggest in the TV series that «the Wall» – the place where daily executions are held in Gilead – «looks kinda weird without all those dead bodies on it» (seas. 1, ep. 6, 02:27). In the TV series, the estrangement also emerges through the contrast between the free bodily movements of the past, and those stiffened inside the uniforms of the various caste levels, as well as located across the urban landscapes of the theocracy, which are emptied of any graphic sign due to the prohibition of writing. The estrangement emphasizes the plausibility of an established order composed by corporeal practices: the gaze as a strong control device, the geometrical and chromatical disposition of female bodies in interiors, ceremonies and rituals. For this reason, the cinematographer Colin Watkinson has created a

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-203.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹²² Elisabeth Moss – the actress performing Offred – stresses the importance of this room in Julie Berghoff's set design: «The color is so incredible [...]. The detail of the age of the house. The floor. It's its own world, existing out of time and space. Julie [...] somehow made that room the safest and saddest place in the world all at the same time» (Elisabeth Moss, *Interview with Elisabeth Moss*, edited by Warren Littelfield, in *The Art and Making of «The Handmaid's Tale»*. *The Official Companion to MGM Television's Hit Series*, London, Titan Books, 2019, p. 17).

¹²³ Rositka, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

¹²⁴ «Like other refugees I go over the customs and habits of being I've left or been forced to leave behind me, and it all seems just as quaint, from here, and I am just as obsessive about it» (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* [1985], London, Vintage, 1996, p. 235). See also Elisabeth Grabiner, *The Handmaid's Tale. The Optics of Dystopia*, in *Teaching Dystopia* cit., pp. 228-229.

totalitarian aesthetics of everyday life that is able to embody the power and its disciplining and distorting effects on human bodies through a visual phenomenology.¹²⁵

5. Conclusions

The fictional and cinematic works analyzed in this paper can be interpreted as a transmedia constellation sharing the conceptual elements listed below.

a) primordialist trauma and worldmaking

These five transmedia works intercept the traumas of contemporary global primordialisms and rework them in their narrative and visual structures, translating them into intense experiences of immersion. These works give life to a «storyworld» converging in the representations of large paintings or visions of traumatic reality, reconstructed from a gendered point of view. This cinematic and narrative realism focuses in particular on the following elements: the aesthetics of tension that in the TV series based on the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle translates, on a chromatic, iconic and environmental level, the matrophobia and claustrophobia of the two protagonists, their trespassing practices, and the consequent punitive dynamics; the need to inoculate an uncensored and unspecialist social discourse on suprematism and race in *Americanah*, through the insertion of the blog and its new language into the narrative fabric; again in *Americanah*, the ability to construct the plot on the junction between the utterability of this shared public space and the unspeakability of a sexual and racial trauma, positioned at the crossroads between the personal and the political; Trump's suprematism and the shaping of this cultural trauma in the TV series *The Handmaid's Tale*; the strengthening of Offred's ethical charge and reliability, achieved even at the cost of silencing some polysemic parts of the novel that are more oriented to generate a disorientation in the reader.

b) readability and obscurity of trauma in narrative and cinematic realism

These five transmedia works are presented as narrative devices capable of adhering to a principle of narrative readability that can never be reduced to simplification. This ability to measure readability and obscurity depends on two contiguous aspects of duplication that the three novels, despite their extreme diversity, share. On the one hand, the three novels' narrative structures are split between the protagonists' transparent and empathic testimonial energy and the enigmatic, anti-edifying and antipathetic background of their actions. On the other hand, the three novels share an analogous dichotomous structure, in which the traumatic memory simultaneously generates a full surface and an empty internal nucleus, a superfetation of unrelated traces and an ellipsis, a communicative and media elocution and a silencing of language. At the same time, some structural choices of the two TV series accentuate the trend towards a greater readability, but without necessarily reducing it to an act of connivance with the global market and with a mainstream idea of storytelling.

c) trauma as a meta-representation of female storytelling

these five works are also linked by the meta-representation of a female storytelling of trauma. In *Americanah*, it is articulated as the blog counter-story of what male and/or colonial domination has transmitted; in the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle and in *The Handmaid's Tale*, storytelling is instead established as «relating narratives»: narrative recogni-

¹²⁵ «[*The Handmaid's Tale*] is a study of power, and how it operates and how it deforms and shapes the people who are living in that kind of regime» (Atwood, *No Balm in Gilead for Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Mervyn Rothstein, 17 February 1986, «The New York Times», last access: 18 August 2022, <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/00/09/03/specials/atwood-gilead.html?_r=5>).

tion of the other and of her uniqueness through the story of her life and/or her dramatically lost traces.¹²⁶ On the one hand, in fact, *Americanah* takes shape as a public digital counter-story, which rewrites in a blog the private and unspeakable story of the sexual abuse perpetrated by the tennis coach at the expense of the protagonist. On the other hand, the *My Brilliant Friend* cycle and *The Handmaid's Tale* are narratives of hybrid recognition that are formulated by a woman who identifies herself by relating, even if ambivalently or at times in envious or doubtful ways, to the story or the mark left by another woman.¹²⁷

d) a social negotiation of trauma

In our current deeply fragmented and diversified social context, the social negotiation of trauma – expressed by this transmedia constellation – becomes «an immunological model against the dangers of destabilization».¹²⁸ In a dizzyingly changing anthropological and cultural landscape, the cognitive ability to decipher «frames» and «scripts»¹²⁹ through an embodied and experienced story can be defined as a form of enrooting. The constellation of works here examined associates this aspect of permanence with an opposite, nomadic ability to be placed within a transmedia space: a mobile border area between literary and cinematic, between narrative and visual structures. The transmedia world of stories allows us to see our current inability to define this aesthetics of the border, but also to express our deep need to develop research in this direction.

English version revised by Serena Todesco

¹²⁶ On the feminist counter-history, see the category of «re-vision» as an act of «survival» and defiance in a seminal essay by Rich (Adrienne Rich, *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision* [1972], in Ead., *Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected prose (1966-1978)*, New York, Norton & Co., 1979, p. 35). See also Blau du Plessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending. Narrative strategies of Twentieth Century Women Writers*, Bloomington, Indiana UP, 1985. See the category of «polyphony» of female storytelling identified by Adriana Cavarero as originated from the historical practice of feminist consciousness-raising (Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives. Storytelling and Selfhood*, translated by Paul A. Kottman, New York, Routledge, 2000).

¹²⁷ Ferrante explicitly takes up Cavarero's idea of «narrative self» as the founding inspiration of her *My Brilliant Friend* cycle (Ferrante, *In the Margins*, translated by Ann Goldstein, Europa Editions, New York, 2022, pp. 56-59).

¹²⁸ Calabrese, *Introduzione*, in *Neuronarratologia* cit., p. 18.

¹²⁹ Id., *Neuronarrazioni*, cit., pp. 32-36.