

“Troubling Love” by E. Ferrante: Killing Mother for Keeping Her Love: The Psychoanalysis of Mother-Daughter Relationship by Hayriyem Zeynep Altan. Saarbrücken: Lambert Publishing, 2017. ISBN-13: 978-3330350403. \$ 23.

Hayriyem Altan's aim, which is to analyse the relationship between mothers and daughters following a psychoanalytic approach, on the basis of the book *Troubling Love* (New York: Europa editions, 2007) by Elena Ferrante, the pseudonymous Italian novelist, is commendable, especially as she combines this with a highly personal perspective.

In Ferrante's story, originally published in Italian as *L'amore molesto* (Rome: Edizioni e/o, 1999), Delia, the main protagonist, takes the reader on a journey to understand the death of her mother Amalia whom she lost in mysterious circumstances. Eventually, she reaches a stage where she is able to deal with her own femininity, desire, envy and oedipal complications, discovering that the main roots of the 'troubling love' between her mother and herself lie in the patriarchal, conservative society in which they live, and the social control that the environment exercises on them and which structures the whole family. This is seen through the eyes of family members, neighbours and childhood friends. Each individual in the story is affected by the social bond (*lien social*) that is inflicted upon them, including Delia herself, which she realises painfully, step by step. By learning to tolerate the grief associated with the loss of her mother, she is able to leave behind self-destructive defence mechanisms.

This short analytic work, has a clear well-arranged structure with an introductory chapter about the author's intention and gives us insight into her academic background (cultural studies, French structuralism and semiotics) and the plot of the book. But unfortunately, after the introductory chapter, we encounter some difficulties. For the psychoanalytic argument, Altan relies on two main figures and their ideas, both of whom influence all of us working in the field of psychoanalysis: Freud and Melanie Klein. While her argument, on the basis of Kleinian theory, is detailed and well referenced, when Altan works with Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, it is another story. Most informed readers will ask themselves why the author did not turn to Freud's original texts. Instead, she bases her arguments on secondary literature. This is a

little bit unfortunate because if she had turned directly to Freud's dream interpretation, his work on how unconscious fantasies function and why they underlie all mental activity¹, and their importance in the development of an individual, and his thinking on the drives, she would have built a far stronger foundation for her argument. Altan claims that Delia's development as a literary figure is mainly structured by her early sexual fantasies, by manifestations of the drive (especially oral), as well as the desire and narrative of the other (*desire de l'autre*). This interconnection between the fantasies of a small girl about her mother, the sexuality of her mother and her relations with men (or the other), and surrounding narratives of significant others become a tragedy for her and Amalia. All of which remained almost unconscious for the main protagonist until the death of her mother. Uncovering unconscious fantasies and structures are, in Altan's book, like a psychoanalytic journey of self-discovery for Delia (the book is written only from the perspective of the main protagonist and much as inner monologue) and shows Altan perfectly in her work. To understand the relationship between mothers and daughters, Altan is surely right in thinking we cannot do better than to turn to the work of Melanie Klein.

In Altan's Kleinian argument she refers to Winnicott as she considers how Delia's envy of her mother, the ongoing fear of losing her love, trying to protect her from the desire of others (of course, men) and the hard work of the child to develop from a paranoid-schizoid to a depressive position, and all complications when the mother-figure is not good enough or fails. And Altan does this with a true expertise and a deep knowledge of Kleinian object-relations.

In the discourse of Delia, we witness her struggle against anxiety. The little girl who has complicated emotions and fears, tries to stop the conflict between missing and mistrusting her mother by forcing herself to stay in darkness. She wants to suppress her anxiety.

In a second step, Altan uses her profession as a cultural scientist in underlining intertextuality with authors who focused

¹ Freud (1911) 'Formulations on the two principles of mental functioning' SE Vol. 12; Freud (1916-17) 'The paths to the formation of symptoms', Lecture 23 of *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* SE Vol. 16.

their literary work on a similar issue e.g. Jailene Vazquez in ‘Fictionalized Italian Gender Relations Through Ferrante and Ammaniti’ (thesis, Duke University, 2017); and cinematographic resources like the Spanish movie ‘Take my Eyes’ (Icía Bollaín, 2003). In this approach Altan succeeds not only mentioning parallels to other resources but comes up with a critical position against patriarchy in which women are made the scapegoats for male violence and harassment against them. Through this important criticism she figures out how Delia’s mother Amalia became, as a woman, the victim of the violent outbursts of her husband. In this Italian Catholic society men take control of the family and social issues via a religious and cultural imprint, and women are seen as the seducing object and that makes them dangerous. This is, in Altan’s mind, connected with psychoanalysis and structuralism. She argues that Delia is a figure in the field of discourses (the discourse of the other) and is structured by this, which is mirrored in her narrative as the daughter of parents, and as part of a social bond of patriarchy from which her mother could not escape. This social bond held her as a victim of her husband’s morbid jealousy and violence. ‘It is accepted that the natural manifestation of her entity is a seduction. She is blamed of all the violence in the family without any doubt. She is considered guilty because of her femininity’ (42), and no longer a subject because we cannot take a step out of the field of discourse or the desire of the other. There will never be an escape. Not for anyone.

It is a pity that in this small book with all positive arguments and strong points, there seems not to have been any proof reading prior to publication.

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