



Troubling Love

Elena Ferrante , Ann Goldstein (Translator)

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"A deeply observed, excruciatingly blunt novel."-*The New Yorker*

"The raging, tormented voice of the author is something rare."-*The New York Times*

Following her mother's untimely and mysterious death, Delia embarks on a voyage of discovery through the streets of her native Naples searching for the truth about her family. A series of mysterious telephone calls leads her to compelling and disturbing revelations about her mother's final days.

This stylish fiction from the author of *The Days of Abandonment* is set in a beguiling but often hostile Naples, whose chaotic, suffocating streets become one of the book's central motifs. A story about mothers and daughters and the complicated knot of lies and emotions that binds them.

Troubling Love Details

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From Reader Review Troubling Love for online ebook

Carmo says

3.5*

Não vale a pena fugir ao passado, quanto mais se foge mais ele nos persegue, até nos morder os calcanhares e nos moer de pancadaria, até o enfrentarmos e darmos de caras com a nossa própria cara. Às vezes, do que fugimos é de nós mesmos e o reencontro pode ser tão doloroso quanto necessário.

Escrita expressiva, de uma honestidade cruel que magoa e seduz.

Susan says

Susan: Europa Editions, is Italy as depressing and confusing as it appears to be from a survey of your catalogue?

Europa Editions: Unenlightened Reader, what makes you think Italy is depressing? It is MAGICAL, as these two books, *Troubling Love* and *From the Land of the Moon*, clearly show.

S: Can you explain how confusing illusion for reality because of severe emotional trauma is not depressing?

EE: It's not depressing because it's a way of coping with ugly emotions and problems. Sure, you Americans feel comfortable writing about brutal rape and abuse and the like; you have your Oprah's Book Club lists. But in the history-laden towns of Italy, these things cannot be mentioned. Instead they form parallel lives that live with the ghosts of ancestors. And that's beautiful, not sad.

S: But isn't Italy the same country that has a prime minister who paid women for sex at his "bunga bunga" sessions? How can Italy possibly be squeamish about dealing with these things?

EE: Pshaw. Bunga bunga sessions are for the youth, the 17-year-olds. Elena Ferrante's novella was about the older generation of Italians. Good people who grew up in traditional families where fathers can abuse mothers and women can gasp at the decadence of buying new underwear.

S: Again, marital abuse and repairing underwear for forty years because you can't afford to buy new...sounds rather bleak.

EE: Not really, because (a) marital abuse as the consequence is what makes romantic affairs so exciting, and (b) tattered and stained underwear is erotic—you did read the book, didn't you?

S: Yes, I read the book, and I'm still disturbed by the old man's fetish for the mother's patched panties. It played completely into the Gross Old Man stereotype.

EE: But old people are unfathomable in their old people ways! It's deep.

S: No, women who lie about their mother having an affair to deal with a Gross Old Man who molests her are unfathomable when they take a break from chasing their mother's "lover" in order to jump into bed with the lover's son. Especially when they've conveniently forgotten to mention that the sexual attraction is a

perverted lingering feeling from childhood sexual experimentation at the same time as the molestation.

EE: See, it really is thought provoking.

S: In the "wtf?" sort of way.

EE: But you learned something from it; there were such intricately developed themes! It was SERIOUS LITERATURE.

S: True, I did learn some things: the whole book was sick, modern Italian literature published by you is dark and too stream-of-conscious to be fun reading, and 127 pages of this sort of thing feels as long as 500 pages of any other writer.

Michela De Bartolo says

L'AMORE MOLESTO e' un libro sulle pene dell'esistenza , una narrazione raffinata dell'incomprensione, del dolore, di un insano rapporto di protezione e di accusa , di rancore e di amore tra una madre e una figlia.L'autrice è molto brava a celare l'evoluzione del racconto, e' un romanzo in cui si avanza con cautela perche' un presagio infausto si avverte ad ogni riga di questa penna viva, psicologica, sottile e tremendamente concreta. L'amore più doloroso e difficile, più ambivalente è senza dubbio quello tra figlia e madre. E' un amore minato dalla paura dell'abbandono, dalla sfiducia, dalla ambiguità della città figura materna e infine dal senso di colpa della figlia sia per la morte della madre che per la vita della madre. Il senso di colpa esplora anche il sentimento di gelosia per la madre, un sentimento maschile simile e quasi più forte della gelosia ossessiva paterna. Con la sua scrittura la Ferrante ,fulmina l'anima che si contorce come una serpe dalla testa mozzata, uno sbattere a terra nervoso che puzza di carne bruciata.

Auguste says

Ferrante has the unique ability to make you forgive - if not love - humanity at its most hateful.

Teresa says

Based on the two Ferrante novels I've read so far (the other being The Days of Abandonment), I predict the title of this one will describe my relationship with all her works. Though I wasn't as drawn in at first by the narratorial voice here as I was with that of "Days", I ended up feeling much the same about both. They are not novels I can say I've enjoyed as they are so unsettling, but each has gotten under my skin and stayed there. Here too are abandonment issues: an anxious child unreasonably (perhaps) fearing that the better parent will leave her; the bad parent feeling abandoned by those he'd terrorized, including the anxious adult the narrator Delia has become.

An abusive, controlling husband and a obsessive lover (or is he?) are not the only ones Ferrante seems to indict. The "casual" misogyny is horrifying too: men who stare at, or even rub up against, girls and women

on public transportation; men who follow teenagers on errands in their working-class neighborhoods, drawing close to the frightened girls to hiss obscenities, and laugh. Delia has heard these obscenities since she was a very young child and can no longer tolerate her local dialect, preferring to speak formal Italian instead, which in turn makes those in her hometown uncomfortable.

Though I feel anxiety doing so (I think this is what is termed an addiction), I've just requested *The Lost Daughter* from the library ...

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Miscellaneous:

I'd thought I was reading Ferrante's novels in publication order, but I discovered that this (1991) actually came before *"Days"* (2002).

I've noticed the same quirks in both books: instead of semi-colons, commas mostly are used to join complete thoughts; and the word "definitively" is used rather often.

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Updated (Feb 11):

I'd wondered if the first 'quirk' I noted above was due to the translator's trying to get a sense of the Italian into the translation. This is from the translator herself:

'... what we would think of as a run-on. But of course Italian can do that, I mean, for one thing there are genders, so you can have an adjective not near its noun, because you know from the ending that it goes with that noun, but in English you can't do that. Things have to be closer together or connected by clauses, like, "who is," "that is," "that was," whatever. But they're very full sentences ...'

<http://www.europaeditions.com/news.ph...>

Sherwood Smith says

A name that has recently gaining serious word of mouth, Elena Ferrante caught my interest, and here was this standalone book to try before attempting her series.

It's apparently her first novel, and of course is translated. It's also fairly short, though not the least bit a fast read. It took me a week, partly because of content.

Good: the prose, even translated, is a relief from the easy patterns encountered in so much genre storytelling, but at least genre books, even with pedestrian prose, don't leave me feeling degraded and weary.

Dispiriting, degrading, wearying, dreary, and sordid, about sum up the reading experience here. And in places I felt an unsettling sense of male gaze underneath the female POV, or maybe that's because I felt that for all the insight and self-examination there was too little indictment of the central male figure. He alone shifts the genre into psychological horror.

Fiona MacDonald says

Elena Ferrante has such a beautiful and lyrical way of writing. This time she tackles the painful subject of the death of Delia's mother from suicide. The novel plays as a love letter, interspersed with past and present memories Delia has of her life and relationships with her mother, her father and siblings. I think to be honest whatever topic Ferrante writes about is just a pure joy to devour.

William2.1 says

It's as if Ferrante were channeling Georges Simenon here, in her first novel, and doing quite a good job of it. Though the great fornicator never had this in depth take on women, being so terribly busy objectifying them.

A woman in her sixties is found in the ocean "at a place called Spaccavento, a few miles from Minturno." She's wearing nothing but an expensive bra, not her style at all, according to the narrator, the dead woman's eldest daughter. This daughter, Delia, is not sound. She is assailed by a quasi-Modernist stream of consciousness. She has hallucinations during her waking hours, or is it her imagination running away with her? She also spends a lot of time detailing her dreams. The writing hurtles along. I was going to say it has a certain velocity, but that would understate matters. The profusion of images and detail is often dazzling. But who is the old man, Caserta, and what was his relationship to the now dead mother, Amalia? Who is the fellow Delia meets in the lingerie store, from which the bra was purchased? Why was Amalia's crazy hack-artist husband driven to insane rages whenever another man would so much as look at her? Is that why she left him, taking her three daughters, 23 years ago? Was she, in fact, unfaithful, or were these the imaginings of a psycho spouse? And since Delia, our narrator, seems unhinged, too, well . . . I should add that meticulously worked into the narrative fabric is a harrowing story of spousal abuse. This should, hopefully, motivate you to get the book. At only 139 pages you'd think the reading would go faster, but it's so beautiful that it slows this reader down. After all, one doesn't gulp great wine.

Having read all 7 Ferrante novels, I now turn to her letters and essays, *Frantumaglia: A Writer's Journey*.

Michael Finocchiaro says

Elena Ferrante's first novel is gripping and very well-written.

Cheryl says

Those images of us from so long ago were yellowed, cracked, like the figures of winged demons in certain altarpieces that the faithful have defaced with pointed objects.

There's something devilishly chaotic about this first novel by Elena Ferrante. Somewhere in this infusion of memory and psyche wrapped in a blanket of refined language, are hidden clues and a mystery to be solved.

Somewhere in this mother-daughter relationship is a meshing of two generations of women and one quickly realizes that this is not only a story about the mother, that there are two stories occurring simultaneously. Memory is fragile, and oftentimes the past intertwines with the present and childhood recollections blends into a story told by an unreliable narrator. Sometimes it takes a visit from the past to bring forth truths and in this case, the story unravels as Delia seeks answers to a traumatic incident from her childhood, even if that incident is told in a fleeting paragraph that the reader must follow closely to uncover, even if that incident is hidden by the overriding story of a childhood with a father who was abusive to her mother. Things aren't always what they seem and as is her style, Ferrante elucidates a mood through stark imagery that at times is chilling. Yet unlike the structured messiness of *The Days of Abandonment*, the story arc here is a bit muddled, the inner workings of this narrator somewhat littered; however, if you want the brutal delivery of desire and emotion, this is it.

Emily says

I absolutely love Ferrante's writing style, but even that couldn't save the bizarre content of this book. The concept had so much potential: a daughter trying to learn the mystery of her mother's death with only a few clues. In 140 pages (which seemed more like 500), we basically read about a woman on her period running around Naples with a bag of her mother's underwear. When I wasn't confused about what was happening, I was just disturbed. Ferrante is a terrific writer, but please pass on this one.

Rae Meadows says

Readers of Ferrante's other books will recognize familiar themes in her first novel--estranged yet intense mother/daughter relationship, violence in the home, violence in Naples, poverty, lascivious and aggressive men, disassociation from self, the body, the body, the body, particularly a woman's body. This book definitely suffered for me having read all her other work and seeing the themes better developed in later work.

Delia's mother has drowned in an apparent suicide, and Delia goes back to Naples in search of her mother's essence, the mystery that surrounds her final days, her later life that may or may not have been spent with a (lewd) man from the old neighborhood who courted her forty years before. As in *The Days of Abandonment*, Delia is coming undone, so the reader never quite knows what is her warped perception and what is actually the case. Men are violent, abusive, disgusting, and sexual predators who spew crude filth in dialect, but Delia is no victim. (After a sexual encounter with a man she'd known as a child: *"But at the same time I was grateful for the small dose of humiliation and pain he had inflicted on me."*)

Ferrante is never far from the *"uneasiness of bodies"* in this book (and in all her work). A memory Delia has of her father and mother:

"Once he was certain that a man in the crowd had touched her. In front of everyone he slapped her: in front of us. I was painfully astonished. I was sure that he would kill the man, and I didn't understand why, instead, he hit her. Even now I didn't know why he had done it. Maybe to punish her for having felt in the fabric of her dress, on her skin, the warmth of that other body."

"Our father did not appear to us at all exceptional, slovenly as he was, fat, bald, unwashed, his sagging pants smeared with paint."

On poverty and her mother:

"Once, the sewing-machine needle pierced the nail of her index finger, came out the other side, went up and in again, three or four more times. Well, she stopped the pedal, then started it up, but just enough so she could get the needle out, bandaged the finger, and went back to work."

I'm tempted to bump the review up to four stars because of Ferrante's singularity alone, but I can't say I loved reading this book. It is almost entirely without light, which makes for a difficult read.

Maxwell says

3.5 stars While not my favorite of Ferrante's novels (it was her debut after all), I'm still impressed by her voice. Even from her very first published novel, Ferrante seems to be so sure of what she has to say—or at least confident in approaching touchy subjects and asking big questions. This book hits on a lot of major themes that resurface in Ferrante's later works: mother/daughter relationships, the male gaze, female bodies, identity crises, etc. And while it was a bit rough around the edges, literally and figuratively (Ferrante doesn't avoid 'crude' topics), *Troubling Love*—in Italian, *L'amore Molesto*, a very apt title—is thought-provoking, intense and riveting. Perhaps it is easier to appreciate after having read later works by the author, but nonetheless it's an impressive debut and Goldstein's translation is flawless.

Frona says

I started reading this after finishing the Neapolitan novels, hoping to extend the exiting journey that Ferrante took me on. With such high expectations, I was bound to disappointment. It's not that the book is bad, it just seems as a distant echo of her saga, with similar themes (closeness, domestic violence, clingy Napels), but without the captivating drive that would bind the reader to the pages. Maybe the problem lays in the outlines of her characters, which are too vague and dreamlike to give a novel a solidified reality that the author tries to convey. Or perhaps she grasped this reality in Neapolitan novels so thoroughly, that all her other work will feel as lacking something.

Marianne says

"Childhood is a tissue of lies that endure in the past tense: at least, mine was like that"

Troubling Love is the first novel by Italian author, Elena Ferrante. The drowning death of her sixty-three year old mother, Amalia, sends Rome cartoonist, Delia back to her hometown of Naples for the funeral. The circumstances of Amalia's death were a little strange: overdue for her monthly visit to Delia, she was found on the beach that was their childhood holiday destination, dressed only in an expensive bra. Suicide is assumed. Back in the town she fled years ago, the surroundings, events and people she encounters force Delia to re-examine her childhood and adolescence, and reassess her memories of that time.

Ferrante is described as one of the great novelists of our time, and she certainly has a talent for rendering powerful images and ideas ("Amalia had the unpredictability of a splinter, I couldn't impose on her the prison of a single adjective"), but one does not read this author for pleasure. In this, her first novel under this pseudonym, her characters are wholly unappealing: a flirtatious mother who takes her young daughter along to her assignations; a violent, jealous and insecure husband and father; an arrogant lover; an old man with a soiled underwear fetish. Their dialogue is occasionally difficult to follow, the intended meaning and

significance of their words obscure.

Ferrante sets her story in a male-dominated culture, where sexual harassment is commonplace, verbal abuse is the norm (“In fact, they had produced in unison a tumult of insults in dialect, a long list of words ending in consonants, as if the final vowel had been thrown into an abyss and the rest of the word were whining mutely in displeasure”), and domestic violence is routine.

Readers may well wonder just how reliable Delia is as a narrator: Was she really molested at age five by the grandfather of her playmate? Was Amalia really an adultress? Delia is difficult to identify with: she provides bizarre intimate details of her life, and the reasons for some of her actions, incomprehensible: “...I was grateful for the small dose of humiliation and pain he had inflicted on me”. Sometimes her thoughts are quite convoluted: “Maybe I couldn’t tolerate that the most secret part of myself used that solidarity to give weight to a hypothesis cultivated with equal secrecy: that my mother bore inscribed in her body a natural guilt, independent of her will and of what she really did, and yet readily appearing as needed in every gesture, in every breath”. Dark and powerful.

2.5 ★s
