

My Brilliant Friend: Growing Up a Girl in 1950s Naples

Natasha Lardera (July 18, 2014)



Elena Ferrante's novel, *My Brilliant Friend*, was presented at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York as part of the New York European Book Club, a collaborative project of 7 European cultural institutions to promote leadership of each country's literature in English translation. *My Brilliant Friend* is the story of two little girls who become friends in the first grade and grow up in the same neighborhood in Naples in the 1950s.

This is the story of two little girls who become friends in the first grade and grow up in the same neighborhood in Naples in the 1950s. Both children are from relatively impoverished households. Lila Cerullo is the daughter of Fernando Cerullo, a shoemaker; Elena's father works as a porter at city hall.

But this isn't just a coming-of-age story, there's more. There's violence and an unresolved search for love and knowledge. [Elena Ferrante](#) [2]'s [My Brilliant Friend](#) [2] (*L'amica geniale*, 2011), published in English by Europa editions, is a "unique representation of family relationships and friendship, private and public spaces in the city, and the changing social and economic landscape of modern Italy."



The novel was presented at the [Italian Cultural Institute](#) [3] of New York as part of the New York [European Book Club](#) [2], a collaborative project of 7 European cultural institutions (the Austrian, Czech, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, and Spanish cultural institutes in York City) to promote leadership of each country's literature in English translation. The Club tries to meet monthly in a different cultural institute and discuss a well-known, contemporary novel of the respective country.

Participation to the European Book Club is free, no matter how many sessions you want to attend. "All you have to do is register with us, then buy or borrow a copy of the book(s) you want to discuss," representatives of the Club have said.

Elena Ferrante is the author of several novels and of three works of critically acclaimed fiction: [The Days of Abandonment](#) [4], [Troubling Love](#) [5], and [The Lost Daughter](#) [6]. With *My Brilliant Friend* she proves herself to be one of Italy's great storytellers. She has given her readers a masterfully plotted page-turner, abundant and generous in its narrative details and characterizations, that is also a stylish work of literary fiction destined to delight her many fans and win new readers to her fiction. Though one of Italy's most acclaimed contemporary authors, Elena Ferrante has successfully shunned public attention and kept her whereabouts and her true identity concealed. Speculation about Ferrante's identity is a big deal in Italy, where it has been suggested that Ferrante may be a pen name for an established writer, who could even be male.

The first installment of a trilogy, *My Brilliant Friend* "may remind the reader of neorealist movies by [De Sica](#) [7] and [Visconti](#) [8], or perhaps of [Giovanni Verga](#) [9]'s short stories about Sicilian poverty," James Wood wrote in an article in *The New Yorker* back in 2013. "There is a kind of joy in the book not easily found in the earlier work. The city of Elena's childhood is a poor, violent place (the same city is found in Ferrante's first novel, *Troubling Love*). But deprivation gives details a snatched richness. A trip to the sea, a new friend, a whole day spent with your father ("We spent the entire day together, the only one in our lives, I don't remember any others," Elena says at one point), a brief holiday, the chance to take some books out of a library, the encouragement of a respected teacher..." continues Wood.

My Brilliant Friend currently is one of the best books about being a girl out there, because it is real. These girls are fierce in life, in family and with each other... even good friends aren't always kind to one another. This is a book worth reading that leaves the reader asking for more. Indeed, the entire trilogy will cover about fifty years in the lives of these girls as they grow into maturity, marriage and motherhood, and it promises in addition to be the story of a society and a nation.

My Brilliant Friend and several of Ferrante's novels are available on Amazon.

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