

FRANTUMAGLIA: A WRITER'S JOURNEY BY ELENA FERRANTE



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Review

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From the author of *My Brilliant Friend*

This book invites readers into Elena Ferrante's workshop. It offers a glimpse into the drawers of her writing desk, those drawers from which emerged her three early standalone novels and the four installments of *My Brilliant Friend*, known in English as the Neapolitan Quartet. Consisting of over 20 years of letters, essays, reflections, and interviews, it is a unique depiction of an author who embodies a consummate passion for writing.

In these pages Ferrante answers many of her readers' questions. She addresses her choice to stand aside and let her books live autonomous lives. She discusses her thoughts and concerns as her novels are being adapted into films. She talks about the challenge of finding concise answers to interview questions. She explains the joys and the struggles of writing, the anguish of composing a story only to discover that that story isn't good enough. She contemplates her relationship with psychoanalysis, with the cities she has lived in, with motherhood, with feminism, and with her childhood as a storehouse for memories, impressions, and fantasies. The result is a vibrant and intimate self-portrait of a writer at work.

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2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

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By Bookreporter

I devoured the first three installments of Elena Ferrante’s Neapolitan series in early 2015, soon after the publication of the third book’s English translation, and awaited the last with baited breath. Like many, I was swept up in the passion described in and elicited by the series --- a story in four parts that follows the lives of two friends from girlhood to late middle age. The enthusiasm surrounding the books stemmed from disparate sources: some admired Ferrante’s intensely affecting and insightful account of women’s interior lives and friendships, others were drawn to the vivacious energy spilling off each page, while others were more

captivated by the mystery surrounding the author's identity.

Although she still has not disclosed her real name, the author reveals as much of herself as we are likely to ever know in *FRANTUMAGLIA*, a collection of letters and interviews done over nearly 15 years. With her signature verve, Ferrante discusses the cotton wool of an author's life: her writing habits, habitual struggles as a writer, mother and woman, how stories develop over time. The letters also include guidance to directors undertaking her books' transformations into movies, conversations with publishers and editors about current and future work, and relevant unpublished snippets.

Even without having read the entirety of Ferrante's oeuvre, a reader will thrill to learn in more depth of certain themes that haunt her. The close observation of the way material comes together to form clothing, its transformation from a piece of lifeless cloth to something that speaks volumes. The relationship between dear friends who vacillate between crushing and supporting one another. The deep ambivalence of a woman losing her individual identity to motherhood and the realization to which a daughter comes as she crosses the same bridge.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many variations of the same questions come up again and again regarding Ferrante as a female and feminist author and her stance on maintaining personal distance from her work. Both subjects are intensely personal for Ferrante the writer, and one must assume for whoever she is off the page as well. She decries the difficulty female authors have breaking from the modifier, eloquently describing how the media and literary world compare women only to each other, denying them their rightful places within the greater canon. Her thoughts on the decision to maintain a separate identity as a writer indicate an unusual and easy-to-admire perspective: that of a person who believes that what the reader needs to know about an author is already present in her work. If anything, her staunchness in this belief suggests that she has taken care to imbue her books with the power to stand on their own. From personal experience, I believe this to be true.

FRANTUMAGLIA comes at a particularly interesting time for English-speaking audiences. Elena Ferrante has served as the author's pen name for decades in Italy, and her refusal to be unveiled continued even after she achieved international renown. Recently, a sleuthing journalist pinpointed the Italian woman who is most likely Ferrante. An uproar around the author's privacy and frequently expressed intentions ensued, with most readers reacting with disgust and anger to her outing and refusing to acknowledge or change their relationship with the incognito author. *FRANTUMAGLIA* indicates that the author would surely gracefully accept the display of fierce loyalty on the part of her readers, but that she is someone who can defend herself. The pen, as they say...

Reviewed by Rebecca Kilberg

1 of 64 people found the following review helpful.

Helena Ferrante novels

By Joyce Mary Zurcher Blen

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