

## Elena Ferrante – My Brilliant Friend



Figure 1: Scenes of everyday life in Naples, 1960s

### Introduction

Since 1992, Elena Ferrante has been the pseudonym of a successful – and successfully anonymous – Italian author, whose works have received critical acclaim, been translated into various languages and, in some cases, been adapted for film. But last month – to mixed responses from the literary world – Ferrante’s true identity was revealed as that of Anita Raja, a Rome based translator whose life bears little resemblance to that of Elena, the protagonist of the Neapolitan series of which 1.2 million copies have been sold to date.

The fourth part of the series – *The Story of A New Name* – was shortlisted for the International Man Booker Prize 2016, and a 32 part Italian TV series is in production. Ferrante was included in Time’s 2016 list of 100 most influential people.

*“Obsessive ... borderline erotic ... childhood friendships are like the primordial soup of human relationships, messy and unformed but with the raw parts to make anything that might come after.... a beloved and an alternative self ... Ferrante’s subject is exactly this sort of friendship.”* – Molly Fischer, *The New Yorker*

- What did you think of the presentation of childhood friendship and female friendship in the novel?

*“A kind of quasi-feminist bildungsroman that also happens to be a history of Italy in the late 20th century.”* – Meghan O’Rourke, *The Guardian*

- Do you accept this classification of the novel? Is there anything you would add or remove?

*“I believe that books, once they are written, have no need of their authors. If they have something to say, they will sooner or later find readers; if not, they won’t.”* – Elena Ferrante, in a letter to her editor

*“We have to ask whether our assumptions about the personal nature of these novels are true – or if they get in the way of recognising the high sheen of their art.”* – Meghan O’Rourke, *The Guardian*

- Do you think there is any public benefit to the revelation of Ferrante’s real identity? Do you think the author has a moral right to privacy? Does it matter to you as a reader whether or not Ferrante is a true Neapolitan?



### **The Golden Question**

What do you consider to be the main appeal of *My Brilliant Friend*, as either a prize winner or a best seller?