

Elena Ferrante's Italy: Family Saga & National History *ENG 200*

Siena 2018 (Fall Term)
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Course Description:

Elena Ferrante's "Neapolitan Quartet" is a sequence of four novels set in the southern city of Naples. This narrative of family saga spans six decades between the end of WW2 and the turn of the 21st century. The books follow the two major characters, Elena and Lila, from childhood to love, sex, marriage, adultery, divorce, as well as through their careers and political awakenings. Their paths shall diverge and reunite as dictated by circumstances and personal decisions. In tracing the decades long friendship of Elena and Lila's though the biological cycle of birth, youth, maturity and death, the "Neapolitan Quartet" also evoke the history of 20th-century Italian politics. Ferrante shows subtly how the struggles between fascists and communists on a national scale are rooted in deep-set neighborhood hierarchies. Last but not the least, the author challenges the corroding pull of the forces that shape us from birth, gender, class, parents, friends, location over the identities people aspire to create for themselves.

Required Texts:

My Brilliant Friend (2012) Book I: *Childhood, Adolescence*
The Story of a New Name (2012) Book II: *Youth*
Those Who Leave & Those Who Stay (2013) Book III: *Middle Time*
The Story of the Lost Child (2015) Book IV: *Maturity, Old Age*

Assignments & Grading Criteria:

1. Attendance and participation (10x2)= 20%
2. Pre-class reading journals (8x10)=80%

The class will be divided into Group A and Group B. For every other class, one group will turn reading journals essays. The approximate length of the journal will be 1 page double-spaced at 12 Font or between 250-300 words. The objective of the journal is two-fold. 1. It is to ensure your familiarity with the text (the assigned pages for the day). 2. It is to share your impression and ideas of the reading to enable a more specific rather than general discussion on the novel. Your individual grasp of the novel's elements of plot, character, and theme etc., however general, will drive a more productive dialogue for the class as a whole. It will also provide points of elaboration and clarification from the professor.

The grade of your reading journal will depend on the quality of your ideas and the intelligibility of your writing.

Syllabus:

Week 1: 09/20 (TH): Introduction

My Brilliant Friend (2012) Book I: *Childhood, Adolescence*

Week 2: 09/24 (T) and 09/27 (TH)
Week 3: 10/02 (T) and 10/04 (TH)
Week 4: 10/09 (T) and 10/11 (TH)

10/05--07 (F--S): Trip to Venice

The Story of a New Name (2012) Book II: *Youth*

Week 5: 10/16 (T) and 10/18 (TH)
Week 6: 10/23 (T) and 10/25 (TH)

Those Who Leave & Those Who Stay (2013) Book III: *Middle Time*

Week 7: 10/30 (T) and 11/01 (TH)
Week 8: 11/06 (T) and 11/08 (TH)
Week 9: 11/13 (T) and 11/15 (TH)

The Story of the Lost Child (2015) Book IV: *Maturity, Old Age*

Week 10: 11/20 (T) and 11/22 (TH)
11/24--26 (Fr--Su): Trip to Naples

Week 11: 11/27 (T) and 11/29 (TH)





