

## My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante

Review by Claudia

While reading this book I spent a lot of time asking myself what was wrong with it. Its success made me feel that I had to like it. How not to like it? It's Italian, it's about the relationship between two girls and it's written by a woman.

As the reading progressed I felt that I was reading one of those photo novels that were popular among the uneducated in my childhood: a printed soap opera of sorts in black and white, where drama and love troubles prevailed.

It has the grit of place, a poor neighbourhood in the outskirts of Naples is well depicted with all its miseries. But is that enough?

Sold as a novel, this book reads as a memoir so it lacks structure. One tale after another one, like an open tap. The water flows, no doubt, it is readable, but we go into a false contract with the author. This is not a novel.

The characters are not well developed, so it's hard to keep track of who is who. I always shudder when I see a list of characters at the beginning of a book, it spells lack of confidence on the part of the author. They should stick in one's mind once the narration progressed enough that one knows that the book will be finished. I knew I was going to finish the book and the characters didn't stick, but I didn't care. It's not a good outcome when the reader doesn't care and thinks nothing of not going back to check the list. There isn't a compelling need to know who is who.

It's difficult to criticise the language in translation, but one could say that it's plain and the feelings intense, so it doesn't measure up. I could blame the translation, but probably not.

In *My Brilliant Friend* everything centres on the relationship between the two girls Lenu and Lila, and they are boring. Most women can relate to this kind of childhood and teenage crush, and it would work if there was more to it than pure obsession. Obsessions are only interesting to the people involved, or is it just me? Besides Ian McEwan did it better in *Enduring Love* and that was a novel.

I wouldn't have finished this novel if I hadn't chosen it for the book club, and I'm pretty sure that I won't read the following parts, or maybe one night when I'm looking for something European and easy to read, that won't make me more sleepless.

How people compare this series to *My Struggle* by Karl Ove Knausgaard is a mystery to me, but that is another story.