

Ricciardi

Finding Ferrante

Authorship and the Politics of World Literature

Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels achieved stunning global success in part because of the mystery surrounding their pseudonymous author. English-speaking readers were tantalized by her enigmatic biography as well as what they took to be her authentic portrayal of working-class Naples. However, we now know that the person behind the writing is most likely Anita Raja, a prominent translator of German literature whose background is very different from Ferrante's supposed life. In *Finding Ferrante*, Alessia Ricciardi revisits questions about Ferrante's identity to show how the problem of authorship is deeply intertwined with the novels' literary ambition and politics. Going beyond the local and national cultures of Naples and Italy, Ricciardi reads Ferrante's fiction as world literature, foregrounding Raja's work as a translator. She examines the novels' engagement with German literature and criticism, particularly Goethe, Walter Benjamin, and Christa Wolf, while also tracing the influence of Italian thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Carla Lonzi, and the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective. Considering central questions of sexuality, work, politics, and place, Ricciardi demonstrates how intertextual resonances reshape our understanding of Lila and Elena, the protagonists of the Neapolitan Quartet, as well as the characters and language of Ferrante's other books. This bold reconsideration of one of today's most acclaimed authors reveals Ferrante's works as fiercely intellectual, showing their deep concern with feminist and cultural politics and the ethical and political stakes of literature.

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