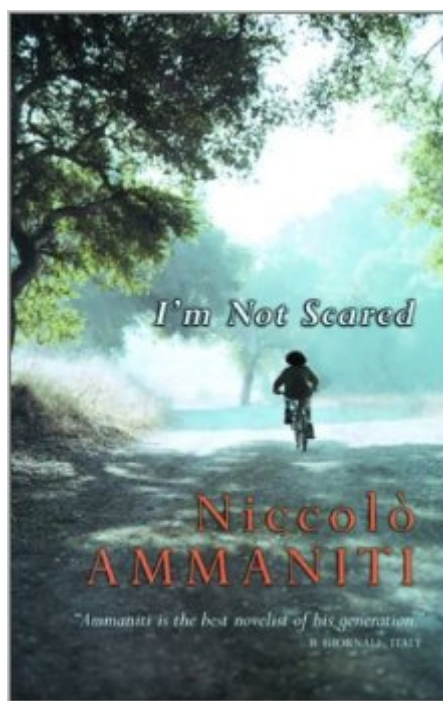


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I'm Not Scared



Synopsis

The hottest summer of the twentieth century. A tiny community of five houses in the middle of wheat fields. While the adults shelter indoors, six children venture out on their bikes across the scorched, deserted countryside. In the midst of that sea of golden wheat, nine-year-old Michele Amitrano discovers a secret so momentous, so terrible, that he dare not tell anyone about it. To come to terms with what he finds, he will have to draw strength from his own imagination and sense of humanity. The reader witnesses a dual story: the one that is seen through Michele's eyes, and the tragedy involving the adults of this isolated hamlet. The result is an immensely powerful, lyrical and skilfully narrated novel, reminiscent of Stephen King's *Stand By Me*.

Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: Canongate Books (February 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1841952974

ISBN-13: 978-1841952970

Product Dimensions: 8.7 x 5.3 x 0.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (59 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,433,979 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #88 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > World Literature > European > Italian](#) #20707 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Literature](#) #45654 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Contemporary](#)

Customer Reviews

Told through the thoughts and views of a young boy, *I'm Not Scared* is a searing look at the struggles and truths of childhood morality, the formidable situations many children's parents force them to face, and the untimely death of childhood trust and safety. Jonathan Hunt has translated Niccolò Ammaniti's disturbing story beautifully, capturing the hard realities of desperate and self-righteous people along with the sinister and surreal atmosphere that slowly descends around Michele and his family. A difficult book to discuss without revealing plot lines and endings, Ammaniti has, in an unusual sense, written a compelling psychological thriller and has created a story that does not end with the printed page but within the reader's own imagination.

I, too, read the novel in Italian and have not seen the English translation. In Italian, at least, it's an

intelligent, well crafted, exciting story with beautiful language and some real edge-of-your-seat scenes. The immature perspective of the unsophisticated, underinformed boy Michele (remembered by his adult self, who narrates) is very believable. I liked how the concept of not being afraid is inserted in several different aspects, among more than one character. The contrast between the seemingly pristine surface world of endless golden wheat and the filthy conditions inside the dark hole in the ground creates a perfect metaphor for a story that, in the end, is about not being afraid to grow up, for that is what Michele does, voluntarily leaving behind the innocence of childhood to enter the shadowier moral world of "i grandi," the grownups. The novel has been made into a movie in Italy that I saw recently on DVD. Like most movies, it simplifies the plot and alters the ending somewhat, but it follows the novel fairly closely. The all-important role of Michele was well cast, and the vast dreamy landscape was made a virtual character in the story.

Loose ends? Where? Obviously I read the novel in Italian--being Italian myself--and loved the book. Now I'm glad English-reading people may read it and possibly love it too. The novel is tight and has a perfectly wrought plot mechanism. Ammaniti does not explain everything, but on a second reading all that was not explained becomes clear. But what is important is the atmosphere of those years, when all those of us (Italians) who lived in rural areas felt that living there meant being imprisoned in a medieval world, and that everything good was to be found in big cities. That feeling is wonderfully rendered in the novel and that's what I like most. As for kidnapping yeah, it was a major industry for some regions of the Deep South (namely Calabria) and yeah, sometime whole smalltowns or villages were involved. And then the vipers, well, what's the problem? We don't have rattlesnakes and copperheads in Italy (luckily!), so everybody knows the only dangerous snake is the viper--and that's the snake everybody knows and is afraid of. Anyway, enjoy this novel... it is much better than Benigni's stale comedy, or musty stereotypes of mandolin-playing captains...

I'm Not Scared is a brilliant novel. The plot involves a group of young friends who go out exploring the Italian countryside around the village they live in. One of the friends, Michele, discovers a boy he believes to be dead in an abandoned outbuilding. The novel follows the story of what happens when Michele returns to the boy and finds out that he is not dead, but is chained up in the hole. When Michele discovers the reason why the boy is imprisoned, his whole world starts to crack and every last drop of his courage and bravery is tested. The book wouldn't be brilliant if the characters weren't so strong and recognisable from our own childhoods. The book shows with great skill the various sides of being young and realising that the world isn't perfect and that our family and friends do not

always behave as we would like. I felt like I knew Michele and his sister Maria and their little group of friends. Michele's character was so realistic, and all the elements of growing up were described with such clarity - the fear of the outside world coupled with reckless bravery, the love / hate relationship with his parents, and the struggle between right and wrong. I also thought that the characterisation of Michele's mother was spot on - a woman who is desperately tired and scared, whose personality is caring one minute and harsh the next. The use of language is light and beautiful. I read the book in a single sitting and am sitting at my computer in the early hours of the morning writing this review because I simply couldn't go to sleep without writing something down about it. Overall this book is a literary treat. It is absorbing, shocking, suspenseful, terrifying, touching. The end doesn't tie everything up with a nice little bow on top, but it is realistic and frightening and hopeful. I loved it. JoAnne

The publication of Niccolo Ammaniti's work in English is long overdue. "I'm Not Scared" lacks the black comedy and outrageous situations of his earlier work but, in this novel, one of Italy's most important young writers attains something close to perfection. Like "The Great Gatsby", this is a novel with zero padding. Every word has its place and contributes to the whole. The style, the sensitive descriptions of the hero's world and attitudes and the construction of the story are first class. The whole book unfolds like a movie (the first few pages brought back vivid images of Terrence Malick's "Days of Heaven" with the undulating fields of grain) in vibrant, striking images. And that's all that I'll say because any more about the plot could ruin the pleasure of discovering a great modern novel.

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