



Me & Mario: Love, Power & Writing with Mario Puzo, Author of THE GODFATHER

Carol Gino

Aaha! Books (Oct 15, 2018)

Softcover \$19.95 (298pp)

978-1-936530-33-5

Me and Mario is a thoughtful and intimate memoir about life with a famous writer.

Carol Gino's engaging memoir *Me and Mario* dishes on the details of the bestselling author's longtime romantic relationship with Mario Puzo, who wrote *The Godfather*.

Gino's book forwards an intimate perspective on Puzo, the son of Italian immigrants who dramatized the mafia arguably better than anyone. She chronicles their lively exchanges of divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed ideas. Puzo, Gino reveals, had serious literary aspirations but felt like he sold out with his famed novel, though it created indelible characters who captured the public's imagination for generations.

The traditionally structured memoir proceeds chronologically, quickly capturing the decades that Gino spent as Puzo's girlfriend after his wife died. They talk, savor fine meals, visit casinos, and travel the world in five-star hotels. The text sheds much light on the inner mind and life of Puzo, including his preferences for sweat suits and copious buffets. Scenes are fully rendered, cohering into a complete and satisfying story.

This "different kind of love story" also reads like a dialogue between Gino's contemporary, enlightened feminism and what she describes as Puzo's own patriarchal notions of romance. Across their years together, their found commonalities through art, and their separate, strong personalities merged. Scenes of domestic intimacy abound.

Descriptions are palpable; no words are wasted. The text attains a lean, poetic grace. It is authentic and sometimes funny, as when the couple laments that maids in five-star hotels are classier than them.

Dialogue carries much of the narrative and is continually interesting and revealing. Puzo is recalled discussing how he bluffed his way to a big payday for screenwriting. Lively conversations are reproduced with revealing disclosures, including about the underlying motivations behind some of Puzo's most memorable creations and his confession that he has trouble writing women characters because he doesn't truly understand women. In these memories, Puzo expounds upon his worldview, too, especially on the subject of power.

At times, the narrative's sense of drama gets the best of it, as when it details Puzo's health scares in excruciating detail. More appealing are its insights for established and aspiring writers; Puzo's many tips on writing punctuate the couple's time together. Even for a casual audience, the book's goodhearted, relatable tales hold appeal, though. Whether she is recapping mundane occurrences or philosophizing, Gino is an entertaining storyteller.

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JOSEPH S. PETE (October 19, 2018)

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