



PRESS RELEASE

Desire and reason in adolescent utopias in Paolo Giordano's new novel

"Divorare il cielo", a novel recently published by Einaudi and written by the Strega literary award winner and teacher of the Master's course in Science Communication at SISSA, will be presented in Trieste on 24 May.

17 May 2018

Just like in the most sophisticated forms of musical counterpoint, the plot of *Divorare il cielo* (Einaudi, 2018) unfolds among different voices within a unifying theme: **the conflict between desire and self protection. The latest book by Paolo Giordano** – Strega literary award winner in 2008 and teacher of creative writing at the Master's course in Science Communication "Franco Prattico" (MCS) at SISSA – **will be presented on 24 May at the Antico Caffè San Marco from 6 pm, in a meeting with the author and Nico Pitrelli, MCS co-director.**

***Divorare il cielo* first and foremost handles the discovery of others and the power they can exert on us.** Turmoil which reveals itself early, in the first lines of the novel, when the glance of Teresa, an adolescent from Turin who finds herself in Puglia for her summer holidays at her paternal grandmother's villa, is captivated by the bodies of three young men who are trespassing and swimming in the villa's pool. Teresa doesn't know it yet, but, from that moment on, her destiny will revolve around Tommaso, Nicola and, above all, Bern. Three brothers who are not actually brothers and who survive the irresponsibility of adults in the magnificent isolation of the farmhouse-sanctuary set-up by Cesare, a character with mystical features, supported by a faith which borders religious fanaticism, and yet caught between the reeds as he spies the power of adolescent life unleashed in the excitement between Bern and Teresa. Everything is new for the girl from a good family; everything attracts her of that microcosm set in a stunning rural Puglia, almost archaic, dotted with olive trees, without sea, so distant from the middle-class rituals that have governed her existence up to that moment. Teresa can't resist, her life changes irreparably, the mutual attraction is as powerful as it is obscure and will ask a very high price. However, Teresa is perhaps the only one who will find a demanding point of balance in the passage from the rebellion of her youth to the responsibility of adulthood, even though she will never completely give up trying to look for a time that can never return.

In another theme, which runs through the pages of the book, the contrast between what we would like to do and what it is possible to do moves onto an ethical-political level. The author presents several of the most significant current scientific controversies with the ability to fit



them seamlessly into the novel's plot. A painful road of assisted procreation that travels from Puglia to Ukraine and, above all, the battles of a community of young anarchic-ecologists led by Bern to prevent the felling of century-old olive trees infected by the Xylella bacteria seem apparently functional only to the story's unfolding. And yet, taking a closer look, in these parts *Divorare il cielo* makes it clear, better than any sociology manual could do, that the social conflicts which deal with science and technology cannot be resolved by appealing to the "facts" alone. This is because, very simply, ethical, political and social values come into play. The parties involved make different assessments about what is relevant and important, as the book's protagonists reveal. Some of them will bring to extreme consequences the tension between freedom of choice and the need for rules, between scientific research and tradition, between political priorities and environmentalist ideals. Once again, the book shows us that the aspiration to choose the world we want when it is indifferent to the "boundary conditions" can lead to disastrous, even tragic, results; it makes no difference if a technocratic answer prevails, or an ethic inspired by "non-negotiable" values takes hold.

Another path indicated by Giordano is finally perhaps the most appropriately literary one. The text is often pervaded by the feeling of a tragic turn, of a suffering experienced as atonement of secrets and unconfessable sins, by the tangible possibility of the experience of evil, which reaches its supreme test: the crime. A test that the author does not fear. If it is true that many of the protagonists do not shun the self-destructive spirals in which ideology or pain or a mixture of both have led them, it is equally true that for others the desire to suffer is the impervious road to find a real, though imperfect way, of staying in the world. Almost, as if to say, optimistically, that disintegration and annihilation are not inevitable, but that it is a very complex match for the human heart to play because, as described in the episode of the Grand Inquisitor by Dostoevsky, there is "nothing as attractive for man than the freedom of his conscience, but there is also nothing as agonizing".

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