

Host: Sara Marinelli:

Authors' Voices from La Piazza. The micro-litcast of the inaugural edition of the San Francisco Italian Literary Festival—"La Piazza"—2026. Presented by the Italian Cultural Institute of San Francisco and the Cultural Association Librai in corso.

I am Sara Marinelli, and I posed three questions to the authors participating in the festival.

In this episode: Emanuela Anechoum.

I believe that, in today's pervasive media culture, we are constantly exposed to narratives that are fast-paced, self-referential, and often instrumental to power. Yet literature possesses a power of its own: the power to let us look at contemporary reality with keener eyes. What narratives do we need today to navigate the present time and imagine the future?

Emanuela Anechoum: I believe that what we need most is to relearn how to use imagination and empathy in our stories. For a very long time, we focused heavily on narratives that were—in a sense—navel-gazing, highly self-centered, and autofiction. Now, I personally enjoy this style and find it interesting. However, I also see it as a mirror of what was simultaneously unfolding in the world of social media. It represented an absolute exposure of the self and the ego, leaving very little room for imagination. Instead, we need to return to imagining—and, by extension, return to speaking about the "other," the stranger, the mysterious, that which is different from ourselves. We must learn—or rather, relearn—how to feel empathy toward that difference—an empathy that we may truly have lost along the way, and of which we are now in absolute, profound need.

Sara Marinelli: We are at a festival of Italian literature abroad, and our stories are crossing borders thanks to translation. From the landscape of contemporary Italian literature, what would you like to see travel out into the world? And who is an author—whether contemporary or from the past—whom you always recommend reading?

Emanuela Anechoum: Besides writing, I work in the copyrights department of a publishing house, and, over the last few years, I have been delighted to witness a shift in how both readers and foreign publishers perceive contemporary Italian literature—specifically, in the growing interest in narratives that do not necessarily reinforce a certain type of stereotype, or a style of Italian storytelling still heavily rooted in the literary traditions of the 20th century. Therefore, what I would like to see even more of is an exploration of genre within contemporary Italian literature; I

want to see fantasy; I want to see complex, multileveled, and multilayered stories; I want to see novellas. I want writers to truly claim their full creative scope— partly because I fear that, over time, we have grown unaccustomed to investing real effort in reading—something that young people, in fact, do far more than we do, given their avid consumption of sprawling fantasy sagas. I do not view genre as a matter of quality; rather, I believe that genre is always a fascinating avenue to explore. Consequently, I would love to see out in the world everything that contemporary Italian literature has to offer—in all its forms and across all its genres.

Sara Marinelli: Share a word that recurs in your writing—specifically, an Italian word you love, or one that is fundamental to the imagery of your novels.

Emanuela Anechoum: I would like to say three words. The first is **mare**—Sea—perhaps the most pervasive word in the novel. And I want to pair it with two others to complete the concept: **Mediterraneo** —Mediterranean— (understood here as an adjective) and **meridionale** —from southern Italy.

For, in my view, at the very heart of the novel lies the Mediterranean—and, by extension, southern—culture, which in reality creates a profound bond between North Africa and Southern Italy. I grew up in Reggio Calabria, and my father is Moroccan; consequently, I am aware of how many surprising things we share with North Africa, and how similar we are in so many respects.

Thus, beyond the—shall we say—political dimension concerning migrant rights and immigration, there is a distinctly cultural aspect. This, I believe, constitutes the focal point of the novel—a theme I hold very dear. So: *mare, Mediterraneo, meridionale.*