

**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: Matteo B. Bianchi:

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?

**Matteo B. Bianchi:** I am convinced that the power of literature—and of storytelling in particular—lies in its ability to bring us closer together as human beings, fostering empathy and understanding. Often, through a novel, I have been able to grasp the nature of reality, to understand, for instance, what it truly means to live in places vastly distant from my own world.

For it is through the protagonists' stories—through what they feel, what they say, and the emotions they experience—that I attain a profound level of empathy. This is something, for example, that does not happen when I read journalistic reports, which may be more precise—perhaps offering greater detail regarding specific situations—but that certainly do not evoke in me this same powerful sense of identification and empathy.

I believe that the fundamental task of literature remains, as always, telling stories; yet I also believe that these stories possess the power to bring us closer to one another.

**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?

**Matteo B. Bianchi:** Right now, I would be inclined to choose two names—and both of them are Paolo: Paolo Cognetti and Paolo Giordano. These are two authors whose work has already been widely translated across the globe, yet I believe they serve as excellent representatives of contemporary Italian literature. Paolo

Cognetti, because in his books he explores the relationship between humanity and the mountains—a relationship involving the rediscovery of nature and, ultimately, the importance of returning to a union between the individual and the natural world, which strikes me as absolutely vital. And Paolo Giordano, who, particularly in his recent works, (and also by drawing in part on personal experiences), examines the crisis of the contemporary individual, who is called upon to confront unsettling and frightening issues of a global scale.

Therefore, I believe these two authors are speaking a universal language and addressing themes that resonate globally.

**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.

**Matteo B. Bianchi:** If I had to choose a single word, I think that word would be *\*onestà\**—honesty—a quality I am not sure appears explicitly in my books, but which is certainly a concept I keep very much in mind whenever I set out to write, especially when crafting stories of an autobiographical nature.

I believe that honesty is what a writer truly owes to their reader. It is a concept distinct from that of truth, for truth implies historical accuracy, the precise sequence in which events unfolded, and perhaps that is a concept more closely associated with journalism or reportage.

A writer, on the other hand, must tell stories. To tell stories—even those drawn from one's own experience—it is sometimes necessary to make alterations or transformations; yet what must never change is the story's profound essence. And I believe this, precisely, constitutes the honesty with which one tells stories: an honesty ensuring that, however varied the forms those stories may take, they never betray the true meaning and genuine emotions that lie at their very core.