

NONINO PRIZE

Intellectuals?

All at the nursery school.

It is nearly an institution. And now it even goes against the mainstream.

There are writers that never take part in prize-giving ceremonies. Authors who don't want to compete at the Campiello or the Strega, at the Viareggio or the Grinzane. Many communicate they don't want to be included in the sets of five of any awards. One of these, and it was almost a scandal, was Sebastiano Vassalli, who wanted to write it even on the cover of one of his books: "This book will never take part in literary awards". But the list would be long: Tabucchi, Eco, Calassi, Arbasino, Malerba, Citati and many others more. On the whole, a part of the pantheon of Italian writers.

Just one prize is an exception to this rule: the Nonino. This year celebrating the twenty-seventh edition, with great courage it awards, for the section "A Master of Our Time", the "Educational project for children of Reggio Emilia"; for the complete works the Rumanian writer Norman Manea, and the great essayist Tzvetan Todorov. But this is the Nonino. For the awarding ceremony, meeting in the distillery, exhibition of Kounellis and a great number of important people: Claudio Magris, Adonis, Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie, Ermanno Olmi and the recent Nobel Laureate Naipaul, all members of the jury of the prize.

But how could a quite young prize, which is awarded in Percoto, in the province of Udine, every year at the end of January, reverse the trend that sees the most traditional and important Italian awards decline more and more? Through a series of wise and coherent choices that follow the careful direction of the jury's president: Claudio Magris. And through a mix that isn't banal at all, which sees the awarding of the best of the world's culture: Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jorge Amado, Luigi Meneghello, René Girard, Alvaro Mutis, Norbert Elias, Hans Jonas, Piero Camporesi, Henry Roth, and Luca Cavalli-Sforza, just to quote some.

But the Nonino is above all a prize that is the farthest from the Italian cultural power, the farthest from the friendship games that have ruined our most celebrated awards. This is why it works; and it works also on the society side because the Nonino is a compulsory appointment for intellectuals and powerful people that meet in the distillery of Giannola, Benito, Cristina, Antonella and Elisabetta to toast to the winners.

But this year with the prize to the nursery schools of Reggio Emilia there is once more a choice against the mainstream. They are 13 kindergartens and 21 nursery schools: "In a world crossed by temptations of inhumanity it is indispensable to show a great civil commitment for the formation of the new generations", the motivation quotes. Beyond criticism. And if the other awards could learn from the Nonino, wouldn't it be good?

DIDASCALIA FOTO

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Tzvetan Todorov and, above, Giannola Nonino, the promoter of the prize.