

Subject: Italian Literary Fiction Report: Padreterno by Caterina Serra

Dear Friends,

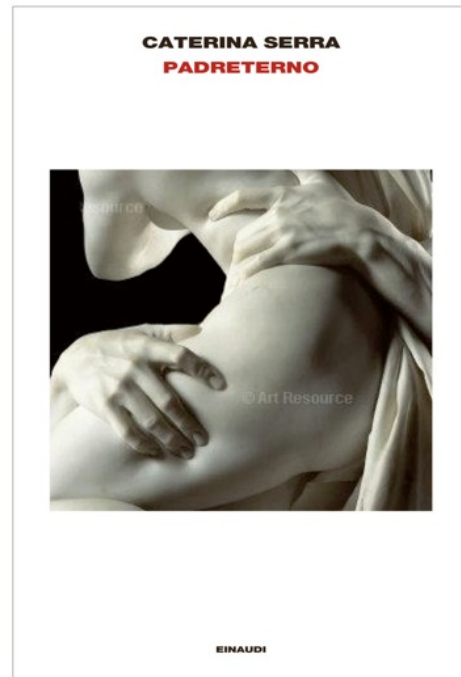
Einaudi published this very unusual book in April.

Padreterno is a profound and profoundly unusual novel.

Padreterno translates literally as eternal father but is most often used to refer to God the Father or God Almighty. In the novel the play on and with words and metaphors is long and curious. This novel is indeed the narration of a 'dialogue' between a man and his father - his eternal father and a man whose importance in his life, power over his life and his choices or happiness and unhappiness and relationships, has been immense and immensely symbolic, a man whose power and influence over his son has been limitless and crushing. Absolute possession. What's more the father here is in a coma, unable to speak or react, an oppressively silent force present like a menace of what was and what will remain as immutable as a marble statue within the son - defining him as sculpted by his father, not his father, in opposition to his father, in reaction to his father, a reflection of his mother. This enforced silence - the power dynamic that it both reveals, reflects and perhaps distorts is imbued with a symbolic meaning and significance that possibly has more to do with the authorial - authoritarian - idea of God Almighty standing in judgment, listening or receiving a confession and then holding the ultimate gifts of both understanding, companionship and then absolution. A monologue or a dialogue between himself and himself or the projection of himself or an idea of himself, and an idea of his father as a monolithic presence in his life.

Aristeo or Teo our narrator was named in honour of a minor Greek God and has lived his life in his father's shadow, wedged in between his mother's need of him - victim of both their personalities and a pawn in the power play between them. In the novel Aristeo is telling his father all the things he had never and could never have told him during his life time. He only has a voice because his father no longer has one. Simply put Teo is telling his father who he is, what his relationships are made of, how he interacts with people, whom he loves and how he loves them. He is giving his father - now that it is too late - the shorthand to know the man that he now is and he is simultaneously carving out - affirming even flaunting- his own identity (his identity as not his father). His masculinity, his needs, desires, loves, frustrations, his liberties and his absolute lack of thereof as liberty of course presupposes honesty, authenticity, truth, insight and understanding. It's all rather passive aggressive and taut. Both Aristeo and his father represent flawed, damaged but perhaps brilliantly mercurial examples of masculinity. How should a man be? How should a man love? Do or can men and women speak the same language - or simply understand one another - are all questions lurking or looming within this novel.

Padreterno is also a profoundly erotic book. It is a book of the flesh that you can't help but read with each of your senses competing alongside one another - jostling for space. Reading this book is a tactile, visceral experience - one in which the narrator takes you by the hand, walks you down an ostensibly confessional path - the novel is also littered with love notes from Nina, the love of the



narrators live - and then suddenly without warning flips you over backwards, confounds your expectations and tricks you delivering a real sting in the tail.

This is a small, beautiful and shocking book. Recommended.

Rebecca Servadio
(literary scout with Koukla MacLehose)