

Elsa Morante Award Ceremony in New York: Campania Wastes Another Occasion

Marina Melchionda (December 15, 2008)



The Italian Cultural Institute of New York will host the event even though Bassolino's regional government allocated no funds to finance it. "Keeping culture alive in Campania is a constant battle. I am not going to fight this time," said the director of the awards, Tjuna Notarbartolo

The 2008 Elsa Morante Awards Ceremony, one of the most prestigious Italian literary awards, will take place at the Italian Cultural Institute of New York on December 16-17.

The decision to host the event abroad and not in Campania, the region where the award was first founded, is the result of a series of disputes between the organizers and the local government. "We do not want to engage in controversy. We have no time for it. But I need to say that it is useless to hide that Campania's local government is really ambiguous when it comes to money. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we found out that the funds destined for cultural initiatives go to the same people



who also control the sanitation sector. Keeping culture alive in Campania is very, very hard. We are obliged to make difficult choices because we do not want this prize to disappear after twenty-two years. And so we decided to hold the presentation in New York," said Notarbartolo.

This year's location is not the only oddity. Past ceremonies took place in September while this one, perhaps because of the controversy, takes place in the middle of December. It is also the first time that an Italian Cultural Institute abroad will host the ceremony. For years, a smaller event, which took place in Paris, was organized in collaboration with the Italian Embassy in France. The initiative was later adopted by Italian Cultural Institutes in Chicago, as well as Prague, Budapest, Warsaw, and Krakow.

The previous ceremonies were usually held in Campania: Procida, Ischia, Bacoli, and Sorrento have been the preferred locations. In 2007 the organizers transferred the ceremony to Rome and in 2008 they intended to return to Campania. Although Bassolino's administration had promised the necessary financing, it later admitted that there were no funds available, "while other types of events received no less than 500,000 dollars," said Dacia Maraini, president of the jury.

According to the Milan press agency [Eco della Stampa](#) [2], it is the jury itself that makes this one of the most prestigious events organized in Campania. The judges are among the most revered members of the Italian cultural and academic world. They include Nico Orengo, director of *Tuttolibri*, a literary magazine published by [La Stampa](#) [3]), Francesco Cevasco (managing editor of *Corriere della Sera*), Antonio Debenedetti (writer, [Corriere della Sera](#) [4]), Paolo Mauri (managing editor of the culture section of [La Repubblica](#) [5]), Emanuele Trevi (journalist and writer), the Tv showman and journalist Maurizio Costanzo, Tjuna Notarbartolo (journalist and writer), Santa Di Salvo (managing editor of "Il Mattino"), Teresa Triscari (responsible for the books sector of the Italian Cultural Institutes in the World-Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The jury votes to award prizes in the following areas: literature, essays, poetry, foreign literature, mass media and communications, young adult literature, and civic engagement. In twenty-two years, some of the greatest names in Italian literature have been honored: Annamaria Ortese, Stefano D'Arrigo, Lalla Romano, Mario Luzi, Ferdinando Camon, Alda Merini, Andrea Camilleri, Guido Ceronetti, Raffaele La Capria, and Claudio Magris. Susanna Tamaro, Lara Cardella, Elena Ferrante, and Luciano Ligabue have also received the prize for best first work.

This year the prize for best novel will be awarded to Lily Tuck for her work *A Woman of Rome: A Life of Elsa Morante* published by Harper Collins. The book portrays her as the mother of contemporary Italian literature and features an exhaustive account of her private and public life.

The award for Civic Engagement will be given to Rosaria Capacchione, a journalist for *Il Mattino* and to the magistrate Aldo De Chiara. They both have demonstrated courage and tenacity in denouncing the Camorra while demonstrating how deeply it controls civil and political life in Campania.

This year, Capacchione wrote and published *L'oro della camorra (Camorra Gold)*, while De Chiara coordinated criminal trials to prosecute regional administrators accused of being involved in illegal affairs. In past years, this prize was awarded to Gian Antonio Stella, Sergio Rizzo, Roberto Saviano, and Giancarlo Caselli.

The event will take place over two days. On December 16 the public is invited to the conference "Leggere Oggi L'Isola di Arturo" (Reading Arturo's Island Today) and to the roundtable discussion "Camorra, giornalismo e società civile" (Camorra: Journalism and Civil Society). The awards ceremony will take place the next day on December 17. The awards will be presented by the director of the Italian Cultural Institute Renato Miracco and the award statuettes were created and designed by the artist Lello Esposito.

Given the awards' significance and prestige both nationally and abroad, it can be said without a



doubt that Campania has lost yet another opportunity to redeem its image in the eyes of the world. The event could have helped to improve its reputation as a degraded region where political corruption and financial, as well as cultural, poverty prevail. For an area that was recently plagued by the garbage scandal and Camorra-related crimes, hosting such an event would have been a step toward redemption.

Finally, the forced relocation of this event ultimately means the loss of an untold number of tourists and their positive impact on the region's struggling economy.

Edited by Giulia Prestia

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