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Nota di contenuto

Introduction -- 1 The quiet novel -- 2 '9/11' and the aesthetic of noise in contemporary fiction -- 3 Quiet in time and narrative -- 4 The quiet novel of cognition -- 5 The novel of '(dis)quiet' -- Conclusion -- Bibliography -- Index

Sommario/riassunto

This book explores the concept of 'quiet' - an aesthetic of narrative driven by reflective principles - and argues for the term's application to the study of contemporary American fiction. In doing so, it makes two critical interventions. Firstly, it maps the neglected history of quiet fictions, arguing that from Hester Prynne to Clarissa Dalloway, from Bartleby to William Stoner, the Western tradition is filled with quiet characters. Secondly, it asks what it means for a novel to be quiet and how we might read for quiet in an American literary tradition that critics so often describe as noisy. Examining recent works by Marilynne Robinson, Teju Cole and Ben Lerner, among others, the book argues that quiet can be a multi-faceted state of existence, one that is communicative and expressive in as many ways as noise but filled with potential for radical discourse by its marginalisation as a mode of expression.

"What does it mean to describe a novel as 'quiet'? The quiet contemporary American novel defines the term as an aesthetic of narrative that is driven by reflective principles. While, at first appearance, 'quiet' seems a contradictory description of any literary form, because it risks suggesting that the novelist has nothing to say, this book argues that the quiet of the novel is better conceived as a mode of conversation that occurs at a reduced volume than as the failure to speak. The quiet contemporary American novel makes two critical interventions. Firstly, it maps the neglected history of quiet fictions and argues that from Hester Prynne to Clarissa Dalloway, from Bartleby to William Stoner, quiet characters fill the novel in the Western tradition. As a phrase, 'the quiet novel' also has a long and untraced history, dating back 150 years. Throughout its long history, many critics have used 'the quiet novel' as a phrase that dismisses and derides the work of writers whose novels seem disengaged from the 'noise' of their wider society. The quiet contemporary American novel finally takes up the long referred to idea of quiet fiction to ask what it means for a novel to be quiet and, through discussion of a diverse selection of contemporary writers including Marilynne Robinson, Teju Cole and Lynne Tillman, asks how we might read for quiet in an American literary tradition that critics so often describe as noisy." -- Back cover.