

The Baron in the Trees Study Guide

The Baron in the Trees by Italo Calvino

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Plot Summary

Italo Calvino's "The Baron in the Trees" is the story of an Italian boy who leaves his aristocratic childhood home in favor of the expanse of adjoining trees that cover the surrounding town and countryside and lives the remainder of his life in the world he finds there. His name is Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo, and he applies his ingenious and free-thinking perspective to finding ways of continuing to learn, innovating both for the betterment of his own lifestyle and for the people who live below him, and to cultivating a one-of-a-kind, passion-filled love life. He lives at once removed from and intimately bonded with his family and fellow townspeople, and dies as creatively and note-worthily as he lived, leaving his friends and family inspired by his story.

Cosimo's story is told from the perspective of his younger brother, Biagio, and early partner in mischief and exploration. He recounts the events both as he remembers them, and as they were recounted to him by his brother, since he was not present to observe all of them. His admiration and that of the townspeople remain and spur the reader on to falling ever more deeply in love with the story's hero.

His early youth finds Cosimo befriending and becoming teacher and defender to a group of poor boys who climb into the trees to steal fruit, and a young girl who lives in the house with the exotic garden next door to his own. He makes an arrangement with the local book seller to keep himself in steady supply of books, and so becomes a student of the same philosophers and thinkers who fed the ideals of the French revolution. The same arrangement allows him to befriend and pass lighter reading along to a famous thief, the engrossment in which replaces his love for the life of crime.

As he grows, he becomes protector of the trees against fire, uniting the townspeople in the cause. He foils pirates and saves the reputation of his father's half-brother when he discovers he had been cooperating with them. Cosimo loves telling his stories, in widely varied versions, and thereby becomes a rather beloved character among the townspeople. In a particularly long adventure, Cosimo has his first taste of love among a group of Spanish exiles, and among the same group gets his first chance to solidify and defend the philosophical perspective he gleans from his books against a monk intent to bow to the prejudices of the Catholic Church.

As a young man, Cosimo returns to his hometown, and continues to apply his ingenuity, now to the goal of entertaining girls in his trees. Several are attracted to his singular lifestyle and lovable nature, and his legend grows even more as a result. It is not until the return of his childhood neighbor, however, that his own heart is captured and permanently fastened to one girl above all others. She remembers him and their childhood games with as much fondness as he does, and the two of them establish a highly hospitable household complete with bed, curtains and everything else needed for their regular rendezvous. Their love is strained beyond their willingness to admit their faults, however, when Cosimo's brother realizes that, while she is devoted entirely to Cosimo, the girl Violente also remains determined to encourage strings of other men to court her extravagantly. Thus ends his life's romance.



Cosimo's aging years find him ever more eccentric, caring with his siblings for their sick mother, still from his perch in the trees, and involving himself with secret societies such that their traditions take on a flavor distinctly his, while he remains free and unconstrained by any of them. When he must finally admit that he is too ill to live much longer, he leaps to catch a passing hot-air balloon and drops from his hold on it into the lake below, flamboyantly ending his passionate life without ever touching his feet to the ground.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Italo Calvino's "The Baron in the Trees" is the story of an Italian boy who leaves his aristocratic childhood home in favor of the expanse of adjoining trees that cover the surrounding town and countryside and lives the remainder of his life in the world he finds there. His name is Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo, and he applies his ingenious and free-thinking perspective to finding ways of continuing to learn, innovating both for the betterment of his own lifestyle and for the people who live below him, and to cultivating a one-of-a-kind, passion-filled love life. He lives at once removed from and intimately bonded with his family and fellow townspeople, and dies as creatively and note-worthily as he lived, leaving his friends and family inspired by his story.

The first chapter of the book opens with Cosimo and his family sitting down to the last meal Cosimo will eat on the ground for the rest of his life. It is a meal of snails fashioned into the shapes of swans prepared by the boys' sister, Battista. Biagio takes the opportunity of everyone being gathered at the table to introduce the members of the household. Amongst the children there are the two brothers—Cosimo, the hero, and Biagio who tells the story—and Battista, their homely sister who has a talent for horrifyingly preparing rodents and animals for family meals. The adults are the children's father, the Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondo, who spends all of his time trying to restore his Baron-hood, something less relevant to the changing ideas and organization of Italian culture following the Wars of Succession than he would like; their mother, the Baroness Corradina di Rondo, nicknamed the Generalessa for having grown up the daughter of a General, spending all of her time memorizing battles in the Wars of Succession; the children's teacher, the Abbe Fauchelefleur, there to escape the Inquisition; the Baron's half-brother the Cavalier Avvocato Enea Silvio Carrega, an intelligent but dependent man who manages the town's waterworks and is otherwise mysterious.

The meal to which they are sitting is made of snails that, three nights previously, the boys try to lure out of a barrel by means of a trail of honey and grass. Much to their dismay, however, the boys are discovered and foiled by the grown-ups and locked in their room for three days as punishment, only to be let out to sit begrudgingly through this celebration of inhumanity to man and beast alike.

It is Cosimo who refuses to eat, being the brother with the firmer resolve, while Biagio eats filled with guilt, both for abandoning his brother to his principals and for taking part in the digestion of perfectly nice snails. Cosimo's refusal to eat inspires his father, determined to raise his eldest son to be worthy of the title of Baron, to demand he leave the table. So Cosimo marches from the table, still dressed in his formal dinner coat, boots, wig and rapier, to the holm oak in the back yard. It is a tree the boys have spent countless hours learning to climb in, and that displays its proud branches in easy view of the dining room, allowing Cosimo to exhibit his disdain to strong effect.



Chapter 1 Analysis

The descriptions of the family members are undoubtedly the most telling explanation for Cosimo's feeling of otherness and the ease with which he separates himself from his family. His father's priorities are all about succession and fashioning his boys into men suitable for lifestyle he longs for, but which has been lost following the Wars of Succession. In effect, he is a distracted man with very little interest in his boys as they actually are. The Generalessa is equally distracted by the past, obsessed with the battles she saw and memorized as a little girl from her place in the tent of her father the General. She closes herself off in her private rooms to needlepoint battle strategies and trajectories of cannons. The other adults are no easier to identify with, separated from the boys by years and constitutions alike.

Biagio and Cosimo are left to identify their priorities and moralities on their own, basing them on the way the world appears to them. Their camaraderie is perfect until Biagio does not join Cosimo in his boycott of the meal of snails, and Biagio changes status to astonished observer of Cosimo's single-minded resolve. His principals are much clearer and trustworthy than the muddled teaching of the Abbe or the outdated and selfish priorities of their parents.

There are also stories of injustice and skewed moralities to create distance between the boys and the people with whom they share a house. The Abbe, for example, underestimating the boys' ability to slide down bannisters and stop in time to spare the busts balanced at the bottom, dives to save the bust from Cosimo's perfectly-controlled flight and in so doing knocks it from its place, causing Cosimo to be blamed for recklessness. Their sister Battista, it is revealed, is confined to the house to live the life of a nun after making an attempt on the virtue of a young man too weak of will or constitution to stop her, and whose family refused to let the two marry. Their family is, in short, a collection of people in whom the boys find very little to admire or with which they can identify.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The second chapter finds Cosimo still in the holm oak the morning following that fateful evening. The Generalessa has gotten over her initial panic, and she and the Baron decide to take a nonchalant stroll through the garden so they might ignore Cosimo and thereby antagonize him out of the trees. The most helpful affect of their stroll is that it allows Biagio to lay out the geography of the trees into which Cosimo has climbed. The trees, because they are mature and growing so close together, enable Cosimo to pass easily from one to the next. An adept climber, he spies quite happily on all of the goings-on below him. The Abbe Fauchelefleur passes below is too distracted to notice Cosimo tossing bits of nature down at him from his perch.

Cosimo follows his nose to the exotic scents coming from the neighbor's garden behind a high stone wall, and there discovers a collection of plants from all over the world. Playing among them, he also discovers a golden-haired little girl about his age, singing and swinging from a swing tied to a tree in her garden. When she drops her apple, Cosimo draws his rapier to pierce it and return it, from his lofty perch, to the intriguing girl to whom it belongs.

In talking with the little girl, he learns she is acquainted with a group of fruit thieves—Cosimo has always considered his distance from such boys a point of pride. She is quite good friends with them, and with their leader, the infamous thief Gian dei Brughi. Cosimo is intrigued by this group of boys who, according to her report, spend quite a lot of time up in trees, but is decidedly more intrigued by the little girl herself. Their conversation turns to his having trespassed on her family's land, and it is in defending himself against the accusation that Cosimo reveals he has not yet nor does he intend to set foot on their land, but to remain in the trees above her land. As long as he is in the tress, he explains, he is in his own territory.

Now intrigued herself, the little girl asks how far his property reaches, to which he answers with names of countries he knows from his mother's stories about the Wars of Succession. He learns her name is Violante Ondariva and Viola for short, and he tells her his own. The two agree that though he will not come down, he can still push her in the swing successfully, and so they occupy themselves until the little girl is called in by her own nurse. Cosimo remains hidden while Viola tells the woman about the boy she met who was born atop the trees and is under a curse that says he can never set foot on the ground. He refuses an invitation to a cup of chocolate with his hidden silence, and the little girl skips merrily inside.



Chapter 2 Analysis

The description of the yard and the trees filling the town and countryside begins to establish for the reader a world they can admire, one that fuels their imaginations. Trees of great age, size and variety fill the area and Cosimo seems happily in his element, filling the space the trees open up to him. His perspective on his parents and the Abbe as people he would just as soon hang above as submit to on the ground is also a pleasing shift for the reader. He begins to take on characteristics of the free-spirited little boys of legend, like Peter Pan, embracing the play of childhood in order to refine it as a skill, and Huckleberry Finn, closely communing with nature as the most pure and trustworthy of characters one might encounter in life.

The neighbor girl also holds engages for the reader's imagination. She embraces the imaginary world possible in the trees and sets herself up willingly as his heroine, guide and interesting antagonist all at once.

She is delicate and feminine, and her affectations of adulthood make for a fascinating foil to her very evident youth and imagination. Cosimo is drawn to her immediately, and at the same time confused by her constant changing from inviting him to repelling him. She is also more informed than he about whom else he might encounter while in the trees. As unlikely a link to the shady characters of Ombrossa as she seems, she tells him about a whole band of boys who climb the trees to steal fruit, and about the notorious Gian Dei Brughi who leads the thieves and brings her presents at Christmas and Easter. She is also a source of sneaky temptation, trying to catch him off his guard and get his feet back to earth where he will become her slave, according to their game. Both she and Cosimo are singular and strong characters, cunning and imaginative, and complement one another well.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter three contains the account of Biagio's first venture up into the trees to visit his brother, as well as the beginning of his understanding that Cosimo does not intend to return to life on the ground any time soon. He enters by way of the mulberry with an offering of pie. He assures Cosimo that he stole the pie under his own initiative and that he was not sent with it by any of the grown-ups. He apologizes heartily for his lapse in solidarity with his brother and assures him that the meal of snails was wretched, explaining he simply could not endure the scolding.

Cosimo begins, upon softening, to describe the exotic garden he has discovered over the brick wall, and Biagio asks if he could please be allowed to come on a guided exploration. Cosimo wants him to prove he can be trusted, and so requests he prove himself by smuggling up some things that will make it possible for him to establish a shelter and some creature comforts in the trees. Biagio agrees and so returns inside with the promise to act as Cosimo's spy and find out what the family thinks of forgiving Cosimo. This is only for his own satisfaction, for Cosimo remains firm in his own indifference to their forgiveness.

The family makes one final attempt to inspire Cosimo's return in the form of afternoon cake and hot chocolate, inspiring Battista to lock herself in her room, and Biagio to come running from the house to tell Cosimo of the offering of peace. Rather than rejoice at the white flag, Cosimo sends Biagio back into the house with an order for the items necessary for a comfortable sleeping arrangement in the trees. Astonished, Biagio returns to the house for the first family dinner without Cosimo. Dinner finds the Baron yelling to Cosimo out the window that if he stays in the trees, he will starve, the Cavalier praising the strength of the wood for lack of anything else to say, and Battista dismayed at the loss of her place as the most shocking family member. The Generalessa is finally able to shed her maternal panic at the displacement of her son by settling down with the memory of soldiers able to save whole camps of men from their places high in the trees from whence they could spot the approaching enemy. She suddenly becomes quite proud of her son, and captivates the Abbe with stories of heroic sentries.

After dinner, the family resolves to ignore Cosimo and let exhaustion bring him in out of the trees, save for Biagio, who leaves his candle burning in hopes that a warm light from his own room might keep him company. Putting himself to bed, Biagio becomes more aware than ever before of the very comfortable place a bed with clean sheets in a sheltered room can be.



Chapter 3 Analysis

Cosimo's singularity is made even more concrete in the mind of his brother as Biagio begins to understand his brother's intention to remain in the trees far beyond his initial protest. Even when the family assures Biagio that if he can get Cosimo to come inside for their afternoon cake, he will be forgiven and the incident never spoken of again, Cosimo remains unmoved. Biagio wants all the more to assure him of his loyalty despite his remaining on the ground, and so agrees to supply him with everything he requires to set up a more permanent dwelling in the trees.

The unwillingness of Cosimo to say out loud that he intends to stay in the trees is evidence of the sacredness of the promise he is making only to himself and not for the sake of anyone else. He dodges the question of why he is so determined not to set his feet on the ground by diving back into stories about the magical world in the Ondarivas' garden and distracts his brother with the declaration that he will have to go explore it with one of the other horrible family members, since he may not come with him. Biagio begs, and therein becomes even more committed to his promise to provide Cosimo whatever he needs.

The close of the third chapter is particularly touching as it follows Biagio to bed and to the revelation that he will be there without his brother and lifelong companion. Not only will he be in their room alone, but he will be worlds more comfortable, naked between clean, soft sheets in a warm room while his brother stays outside to forge a life in the trees, also alone. In a way, this revelation makes their union even more secure, as he reveals his deep caring for and commitment to the happiness and well-being of his older brother.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

In chapter four, the world of trees into which Cosimo has climbed grows in the reader's perspective from covering their yard and the neighbors' to reaching well beyond even Ombrossa. As Cosimo bragged to Viola, they stretch from Rome to Spain throughout all of the countryside between. Biagio laments the loss of that thick and ancient cover of trees in the years since he watched his brother in the trees, and blames the French invasion for the transformation of the European countryside. In a hypnotically lovely set of paragraphs, he describes in palpable detail the varieties of trees and thickness with which they filled the sky.

Cosimo, he explains, is the first to really delve into the possible mobility this lush collection of trees provide. He describes the strategy and skill with which Cosimo begins devising routes through the trees, and the agility he brings to and gains from the practice. In the course of his exploration, he gains a perspective on the world below and around him unlike any he ever experienced on the ground. One revelation in particular is that cherries talk.

Or, as he later discovers, the boys who climb the trees to pick the cherries talk. With the very boys Viola described all around him, Cosimo introduces himself. Standing out in his exaggerated finery while all of them are barefoot and in rags, Cosimo eventually senses they are preparing to trap him, and in defense draws his rapier. The motion tears from their hands the burlap sack the boys are lowering over his head, and the boys are astonished.

Their cry of astonishment reveals their location to a group of orchard farmers who have been trying to find and catch the little fruit thieves. The farmers are posted below the tree with dogs and ladders, preparing to capture the boys as soon as they find the right tree. What neither the farmers nor the boys expect, however, is Cosimo's calm escape, tricorne hat proudly perched on his head, by way of the same route, tree to tree, that got him there. Neither the boys nor the farmers ever guessed such maneuvering would be possible, so when the boys follow Cosimo's example, the farmers have no planned recourse. They can only stand, aghast, watching the thieves escape like so many birds hopping from branch to branch and tree to tree above their heads.

Following their narrow escape, the boys return undeterred to their gathering, this time in cherry trees, only to discover Cosimo far above their heads gathering the fattest and hardest to reach of the cherries. Not knowing any way to respond except to mock his fancy attire and apparent desire to become one of them, the boys begin to do so. Unmoved, Cosimo listens to the ensuing discussion of the last "cake-eater" to have interacted with their circle, the Sinforosa, they called her, who betrayed them. His asking who she was inspires gales of laughter that, once again, give away their location to the men with pitchforks below.



The boys scatter, and the men from town recognize Cosimo and implore him to come down, lest he be molested by the group of vagabonds sharing his apparent napping spot. When Cosimo replies that he knows the way home and their help will not be necessary, disappearing through the trees, the men ask the member of the Piovasco staff among them whether his master is a man or a wild animal. So Cosimo of the trees is introduced to the townspeople.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Cosimo is already stepping into his role as an independent thinker, making him inevitably a leader among the directionless and a conundrum among the traditional. The boys who have been thieving in the trees for the majority of their lives have never conceived of moving about in them with the agility and efficiency Cosimo uses to move from one tree to the next. Immediately they recognize the value of the skill, and tell him in the only way they, being thieves, know—that if he intends to be one of them (which he clearly does not), he must tell them everything he knows (information they clearly need). The adults who discover him, still finely dressed and looking out of place among the fruit thieves, assume he has lost track of time taking a nap, and that they ought to help him home. They are baffled to see a young man from a fine family moving as easily through the trees as a monkey, and have no response but to dismiss him as an anomaly.

The opening of the chapter reveals a deep sentimentality in Italo Calvino for the arboreal countryside that once characterized much of Europe. The reader begins to see the nurturing, life-giving, imagination-fueling things trees can be, and how the world they create for Cosimo will be held in high regard. The story begins to take on the feeling of a king discovering his kingdom. He is worthy by every test of his domain, and respected in the view of the reader as a character worth following into whatever world he might create.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Chapter five opens with a return to the briefly introduced Sinfrosa. She is revealed as a little girl from the villas who rode a white horse and commanded and protected the little band of boys. She told them where the ripe fruit was, and blew a horn around her neck when they were going to be discovered. She betrayed the boys, however, turning two of her favorites against her when she revealed them to her servants to be beaten. Upon asking, his suspicion that this mysterious and treacherous creature is his friend from the swing, Viola, is confirmed, and Cosimo determines that the best course is to perform some feat of daring that might reach her ears indirectly.

Meanwhile, his father's dismay continues to grow to the point that he scolds the Abbe for not yet having exorcised his obviously demon-possessed son. His mother spends her time training the lenses of her telescope on all of the places she is sure he is, and making flag signals to him. Biagio is saddened every so slightly that their mother had this fantastic skill all along and never taught her boys, that they might share in the secret language themselves. Her anxiety is finally relieved, apparently once and for all, when one day Cosimo sends some signal of reply to his poor mother, and she remains thereafter happy for her son to remain in whatever state he may choose.

The fact Cosimo has befriended the band of ruffians fascinates Biagio, who listens constantly for their scampering through the trees. It is no great surprise, therefore, that Biagio hears Viola's horn when it sounds again. The announcement of her presence provokes Cosimo to speak aloud of his resolve never to come out of the trees—he confesses to her that he has not been on the ground since the day he told her he never would. He so instantly and completely regrets his confession that when he loses his footing during a fit of rage at the boys' laughter and falls, he does nothing to stop himself from landing hard wherever he may. Fortune snags his coat on a branch, and Cosimo remains hug there, firm in his resolve never to speak of his private law ever again.

Cosimo recovers and a game of chase ensues between him and the girl, a game that loses its appeal for Viola as soon as the other boys are no longer around to see it. Cosimo and the girl are interrupted from the silence settling in around them by a hail of gravel from the spying boys, and chase the boys all the way back to the homes of their scolding mothers. It is here that, to Cosimo's surprise, he learns that these mothers do not scold their children for stealing, but for not stealing enough, and therefore demanding that they be fed at home, where there is scarcely enough to eat as it is.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The first blurring of the line between grown-up wisdom and childlike wisdom begins in chapter five. The adults relapse into childish rants about imaginary demonic possession



and into games of secret messages sent with flags, trying to comfort themselves with what worked in their worlds before they lost control of them. The Generalessa is the only character among the adults who, once she sees that her son still watches for her and all communication is not lost, is able to accept Cosimo joyfully just as he chooses to be. Even that, however, comes from a simplistic romanticization of her childhood world of soldiers and sentries. The Baron allows no possibility that there might be something amiss with the household Cosimo has apparently left behind, but holds firm to the notion that control of Cosimo's mind has been seized by the devil, and blame falls squarely on the head of the simpering Abbe Fauchelefleurl.

Cosimo, on the other hand, is just beginning to turn his hopes and energies toward love, leaving his childish pride behind him in favor of the fascinating Viola. He exposes his vulnerability to the boys for the final time, and resolves never to do it again, leaving the only creature to which he would ever be vulnerable, Viola herself. He is introduced to the harsh difference between the classes existing on the ground below him. Whereas, in the trees, he and the boys are quite able to exist as equals, on the ground the boys return to sad, filthy places to be scolded and beaten by mothers who refuse to feed them if they have not been able to steal enough to feed themselves. This is the beginning of social awareness in young Cosimo.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Chapter six finds Cosimo restlessly stalking about his kingdom, intent on catching a glimpse of the girl who has captivated him. She is under the close watch of her aunts, except for the time she spends on her horse when there is no one who will follow her. No one, that is, except Cosimo. He spends so much time above the Ondarivas' garden, and the Baron blames the family on that side of the brick wall so entirely for the state of his son's mind that he send servants with ladders under the command of the stammering Cavalier to go over there and capture him.

The rescue attempt is as unsuccessful as the reader might expect. The adults of the neighboring household are just as baffled as they ought to be, and when the Cavalier does manage to climb the ladder into the tree in which he spotted Cosimo, Cosimo is already atop a different tree altogether, leaving the servants and the Cavalier at their wits' end, and the aunts shoing Viola inside so as not to see the shameless display.

In the first real demonstration of the strange personality possessed by the Cavalier Eneo Silvio Carrega, the Cavalier, instead of admitting, or even reacting to defeat, turns and engages the Marchese of Ondariva in a discussion about the fountains on his property, and so engrosses him that the search is abandoned by the servants, who return home. Viola, unaffected by the agility Cosimo displays during the repeated attempts at his capture, opens her high bedroom window merely to poke out her head and tell Cosimo that it is his fault she is where she is and inspires Cosimo to desperation in an attempt to impress her.

Cosimo finds his chance in the form of a ferocious cat that shares the trees with him. He kills the yellow cat in a fierce battle and, in spite of shrieks from his mother who sees him covered with blood in the trees, enters proudly into the Ondariva garden to display the spoils of his hunt. It is at this moment Cosimo witnesses something he never expected to see and for which he is utterly unprepared. The aunts are busy about the task of loading up a carriage and the beautiful young Viola to send her away for school. Too late for any quality good-bye or inquiry about how long or how far, Cosimo only manages to yell, "I've killed a cat!" and to hear the reply from Viola, "How clever of you!" before the carriage pulls away.

Cosimo is taken by a violent fit of grief and despair at losing the object of his affection, and throws the cat into the faces of onlookers below. When Biagio sees the state his brother is in, he gathers the things to clean his wounds, and a fishing pole, so Cosimo can get the cat from the dung heap onto which it has been tossed. His wounds cleaned, Cosimo skins the cat and makes himself a cap. It will be the first of many he will wear for the rest of his life.



Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter Six resolves the childhood connection Cosimo has had with Viola, and foreshadows the intensity of the admiration he will have for her. The freedom she is allowed on her horse, the fervor with which she takes advantage of that freedom, and the fascination she maintains for the goings-on of the boy in the trees are all tastes of the forces that ultimately make her what she will become.

The desperate attempt by the boys' father to capture his son reveals his state, still uncomfortable with the son to whom his title will pass being the permanent and widely recognized resident of the town's trees. The other adults in the household, however, seem resigned. The Cavalier himself, trusted intimately by the Baron and sent to lead the rescue, seems half-hearted in the attempt and much more eager to foster a business relationship with the wealthy neighbor than to spend too much energy revealing the family's idiosyncrasies.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter seven opens with the account of the final attempt by anyone in the family to bring Cosimo home. Battista sneaks out in the night to the tree on which Cosimo perches every morning and covers it everywhere she can with glue. The morning finds the tree covered with birds and feathers of birds, squirrel tails, leaves, and the corner of Cosimo's coat, but no Cosimo. The tree remains in its pitiful state for quite a long time, and eventually dies, and with it, the family's hope of every having Cosimo home with them as before.

The Baron, having lost hope of his eldest son following exactly the path of nobility he hoped he would, inspires Biagio to an explanation of why it was so silly for his father to hope as he did. The land over which he hoped his son would one day rule is simply not organized as it once was, and no one thinks of it as being so except him. The Ondarivas own most of the land, and the rest is essentially the town's—no one's and everyone's. Noble relations have not been maintained by the family for fear of revealing their meager financial state and community relations are poor because they have very little in common with the business-minded townspeople.

So, the Baron paces about the grounds at night, confiding in and seeking council from the Cavalier, to whom he is strangely devoted and whom no one else entirely trusts. Here Biagio gives the colorful background story of the Cavalier, born to their father's father by a woman none of them knew, but apparently enough in the man's affections for him to make him a lawyer and a Cavalier. He spent years of his life in an unknown Mohammedan country learning and practicing the science of hydraulics before he mysteriously fell into disgrace and was sold as a slave. From there, he was freed by the Venetians who discovered him rowing a slave ship, and he became a beggar in Venice. After being jailed for fighting, he was ransomed by the Baron and has lived as an authority-less authority among the family ever since.

His role is to keep the family accounts, something he either does badly and is blamed regularly for, or tries to do well and is scolded regularly about. Whichever is the case, there are nights regularly when yelling, stomping out of the house and sulking back in together are the evening's occupation for the Baron and the Cavalier, and no one completely understands why.

Chapter 7 Analysis

The mysterious Cavalier is either enormously intelligent and immensely distracted by something the family does not know but holds the Baron in fascination, or as feeble-minded and aimless as he seems, and it is the Baron's wish for familial greatness that inspires him to admire him so ardently. The only clue to his past comes in a later

chapter that reveals more about his present life in the village, but the description here only serves to deepen the mystery that surrounds him.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

The eighth chapter finds the Baron Arminio riding on horseback out to where his son is in the trees. He opens the conversation by scolding his son for making a spectacle of himself before all of the townsfolk, but very shortly reveals his true purpose for coming, no surprise to Cosimo. He requests that Cosimo to come down out of the trees and assume his duties as the young Baron. Cosimo replies respectfully that he has no intention of obeying his father's request. His father is not surprised by his answer, either. The two discuss Cosimo's taking up with the ruffians, and Cosimo explains that he remains his own, and acts independently of the whims of the boys. Next, his father asks him about school and religious observances if he is going to stay in the trees, to which Cosimo declares that teaching can still reach him in his present situation, and he remains quite willing to receive it. Finally with something to satisfy him, the Baron leaves.

For the first time since Cosimo entered the trees, there comes a rainstorm, and Biagio worries for his brother. Having inspired his mother to prepare some food for his warmth and ready with two umbrellas, Biagio finds Cosimo in the trees as much in need of supplies as he supposed. He has fashioned for himself an impressive tent with a floor and everything, but only designed to balance with one person, and with holes in the roof that benefit from the umbrellas. The discussion the two boys have in the shelter starts with Biagio's complimenting the place, moves to the importance of the secrecy of the place and ends with Cosimo's confessing that if the secret of the shelter's location is to be shared with anyone, it is Viola that he would bring to the place.

The following day, the Abbe Fauchelefleur climbs a tree in the yard from which he will resume the education of Cosimo, and Cosimo will begin the education of the Abbe.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Chapter eight marks a significant turning point in the relationship between the Baron and Cosimo in that the Baron is finally willing to proceed on Cosimo's terms. He meets him out in a tree because that is the only place he can be found, and sends the Abbe out to teach him there for the same reason. They come to an agreement that allows for the continuing of Cosimo's education because the Baron is finally willing to approach his son like a free-thinking individual whose agreement is needed in order to know how to proceed.

The relationships between the boys and their mother continue to improve as she becomes more willing to cooperate with Biagio and provide for the well-being of Cosimo. The relationship between the boys remains tentative, however, as Biagio seeks the good of Cosimo with all his heart and energy, but Cosimo remains unsure he wants

to trust his brother who still remains comfortably at home. The one note of comfort comes when he confides to his brother that he would share even his most intimate dwelling place with Viola if he were given the chance.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The ninth chapter describes Cosimo's quest to make and learn from relationships with the people living immediately below him. He makes himself as helpful and friendly as possible, giving them his perspective on projects they are doing, and listening intently to their stories, learning new languages and putting them as much at ease with his peculiar presence as he can.

For the Baron's part, in spite of whatever improvement has been made in his own relationship with his eldest son, the desire to hide Cosimo's lifestyle from the world is still strong. This means that when a particular important family visits the family home on their way to France, the Baron tried to keep their attention as far from his eldest son as possible. His plan is, of course, foiled when Cosimo strolls casually up on a tree in the back yard, dressed for the hunt and the visiting gentleman takes notice.

The count is fascinated and impressed with Cosimo's ability to move and function in the trees, and in spite of the Baron's falling all over himself to explain that it is just the play of children, insists that the boy be allowed to stay up there, and enjoys him very much. He even promises to tell the story of the boy in the trees at court. In the end, it is due to the height of Cosimo's perch that he is able to spy on the young count's unfolding encounter with the infamous Battista, which he narrates for the group with great enthusiasm.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Cosimo is beginning to develop his skills as a socially active young gentleman in those few social situations to which he has access. To the simple locals doing their work outdoors, he is both friendly and helpful, and to the nobles his father ties himself in knots to impress, Cosimo is his unaffected and unapologetic self and leaves them charmed to the point of leaving with the intention of telling about this peculiarly remarkable young man at court.

Both of these insights into Cosimo provide insight into the kind of society there would be if he were able to convert people to his way of seeing the world. While he never tries, he lives with an unapologetic conviction that life can be lived fully, selflessly, even nobly, in unbroken communion with nature.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Chapter 10 opens with a discussion of which trees lend themselves best to climbing and for what reasons. Olive trees, for example are wonderful for climbing because of good traction on the bark, slow moving or still branches and their overall shapes. Fig trees, on the other hand, make Cosimo uneasy because with time, he starts to feel himself saturated with the same gummy texture and all too aware of the swarming hornets all around him. Praise for the nut tree follows and concludes a discussion of the trees in which Biagio himself confesses that he sometimes wishes to join his brother. He describes how much a part of his everyday world the trees have become for Cosimo, being the characters he watches, the objects he fiddles with, the markers of the passing of the seasons, almost members of his extended family.

When winter arrives, Cosimo fashions for himself a coat made of a collection of the animals he hunted in the warmer months, as well as pants of similar fabrics. He sleeps in a fur bag he hangs from a branch and curls up inside like a child in the womb. Similarly, Biagio describes the ingenious collection of amenities Cosimo has devised for himself—collecting rainwater to eat and bathe with, having hauled a tub into the trees, fashioning a spit on which to roast his hunted prey, devising a place where he can relieve himself and let everything be carried away by the river over which that particular branch hangs.

Through his own ingenuity and his ability to be a gentleman and barter with the peasants, he manages to gather for himself everything he needs to exist quite happily, even through a winter. Everything that is, but man's most trusted companion: a dog. One day, along comes a hunting party, the hounds perfectly formed and trained flawlessly to the commands and patterns of their masters. Trailing along behind them, however, Cosimo sees a dachshund as eagerly after the trail as any of the other dogs, but apparently not accepted by them as one of their own.

Wanting to be a gentleman in this matter as well, Cosimo is eager to abide by the rules of the hunt, even when he sees that this rejected but enthusiastic dachshund has put up a fox that the bloodhounds have passed by. So, while the dachshund below him howls his victorious announcement, trying to capture Cosimo's attention, Cosimo asks the hunters whether the dog belongs to them. When they reply that he does not, and he can have whatever he has put up, Cosimo fires to kill the fox and the dachshund and Cosimo are instantly friends. Cosimo names him Ottimo Massimo.

He follows Ottimo Massimo to wherever he may lead to see if he can find out where the dog comes from, and the pair end up at the garden wall of Violante Ondariva's garden. Cosimo carves his name under the spot where he carved his and Viola's name the day she was taken away, and he and the dog remain constant companions from that day forth.



Chapter 10 Analysis

In keeping with the theme of Cosimo's becoming a gentleman, he applies his ingenuity to civilizing the trees only enough to keep himself healthy and presentable, in a way respectful to the people below him and to the trees themselves. He also happens upon a gentleman's companion in the little dachshund Viola leaves behind, and trains the dog to be as civilized and adept at their outdoor life as he is himself.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Chapter eleven begins by describing the accomplished huntsman and fisherman Cosimo has become since his time in the trees began. He and his dog spend long hours patiently waiting out various creatures and he becomes more and more attuned to their rhythms as he lives so close to them. The family, however, still thinks of him and pines for him as their very own. For a long time, he walks along the trees to accompany the family to mass, and sits on a tree at the end of the family row, the sacristans leaving the window open so he can hear. He stops joining them after a while, though, and the window is closed to keep out the cold.

A particularly poignant evening is the night the family celebrates Battista's engagement with a grand affair. Everyone celebrates boisterously, but every member of the family also demonstrates signs of thinking about Cosimo and checking to see if he is in the trees outside looking in. It is not until afterward that Biagio learns that he was, hiding in the darkest part of an ilex throughout and beyond the party.

The one family member with whom Cosimo spends long periods of time in this period is the Cavalier, whom he follows out of interest to see where he goes off by himself on so many days. He discovers he has obtained permission from obliging farmers in the area to keep bees on their properties, and so sneaks off to tend his charges there instead of on the Baron's land, as the Baron entertains an irrational fear of being stung. Cosimo watches with great interest, and even offers his help one day when the bees are swarming. The Cavalier instructs him to climb a certain pomegranate to which they are all headed, and wait for his signal. When he gives it, Cosimo bounces the tree ever so slightly, and the bees drop into a box the Cavalier has prepared below them. Thus, they are captured and the Cavalier's next season is prepared.

It is through this series of interactions that the Cavalier first takes notice of the cleverness of the waterworks system Cosimo has devised in the trees. Cosimo proposes the idea of the Cavalier's applying his knowledge of hydraulics to the task of devising a system of irrigation for the fields of the local farmers. The Cavalier is giddy with excitement and so pours over drafts of systems that might work. He becomes so engrossed in the project that he becomes to Cosimo the embodiment of the importance of protecting himself against loneliness.

Chapter 11 Analysis

This is the first time Biagio seems to grieve the absence of his brother in the same ways he described his parents grieving. The engagement party is a joyful occasion, but tainted by every member of the family wishing to know that Cosimo is close and taking part in the celebration with them.



It is even more peculiar, then, that the family member in whom Cosimo invests his energies is the one the family seems to care the least about. Simply because he is the one spending his time in the outdoors, the new temple in which Cosimo is worshiping, he is the one to whom Cosimo attaches. Cosimo also sees the possibility of learning something from him, and this proves to be so, both in the fields of beekeeping and hydraulics. The most valuable lesson he learns from this eccentric recluse, however, is the importance of guarding himself against the loneliness to which his recent trend toward isolation might possibly lead.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter twelve begins the story of Cosimo's fascination with the character Gian de Brughi. His curiosity arises from having heard so many nights the cries of people claiming Gian de Brughi, the leader of the thieves, is the man who has robbed them. So many stories would mean that this one man is responsible for nearly every robbery in the area, and that his itinerary is nearly completely full of robberies. Driven by his curiosity, Cosimo listens to every story, legend and rumor about the man. When he finally concludes that the man is nothing like the stories people tell, but the means of scaring the locals into handing over their possessions to a hundred different thieves, Cosimo gives up the search.

Then, one day, he hears the man himself has been captured at last. The man he sees is nothing like the one he expects, and he cannot resist the opportunity to rescue him from his captors and learn everything he can about this legend. He throws his captors off the trail and begins his interview of the man. It is on the topic of books that the two find the most fruitful common ground, and they devise a plan for Cosimo to provide a steady diet of books to the brigand, who will remain in hiding and in need of entertainment during his solitude. The system works well, but for the soiled state in which the books return to Cosimo. They arrange meeting places and Cosimo comes to understand the types of light reading Gian de Brughi likes best, so he retains access to and time for the philosophical and revolutionary writers he likes for himself.

The trouble arises when the brigands who have been using him as a cover begin to discover he would rather spend his time with his nose in a book than out pillaging the countryside. As soon as people notice Gian de Brughi has retired, they will cease to be so afraid of the men who claim to be him. Two of his particularly talented protégés come one night to solve the trouble. They plan to force the man out into the world to commit a good and fearsome robbery whether he wants to or not. They threaten him by tearing out pages from the end of the novel currently gripping his attention, and drag him in a bag to the location of the planned crime. They instruct him carefully and hide outside. Much to their dismay, Gian de Brughi's style of delivery has lost every bit of its fearsomeness. He is rather pleased with the fact, but his delay gives time to the men who gather outside the door to carry him off to jail.

Cosimo takes mercy on the old man and reads him the end of the novel as he awaits his execution in the tower. At the conclusion of that novel, he reads him Fielding and Wilde during the days of the trial, and allows him to be hanged with tremendous pride and satisfaction when he announces that the hero of the story they were unable to finish is hanged. Gian de Brughi is so proud to share the fate of the hero that he kicks away the ladder himself and dies happy.



Chapter 12 Analysis

The story of Gian de Brughi is a helpful insight into the tastes and motivations of Cosimo as he matures. He is more interested in the truth of things than in the beliefs and legends among the populous. Similarly, he prefers to read the great thinkers who motivate revolutions than devote his time to the traditional teaching of the Abbe and the Father doing Mass for his family. His determination to see the best in everyone, to magnify people's potential, allows him to befriend and come to the hidden part of the infamous Gian de Brughi, and to allow the parts of his imagination that have atrophied to flower.

In an admirably insightful act of compassion, the time he invests reading to the condemned man allows him to change the end of the story in such a way that allows Gian de Brughi to die with pride and satisfaction, holding his head high among heroes.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Chapter thirteen tells the story of Cosimo's passion for reading leading him to teach Abbe Fauchelefleuret. He is so full of startling ideas and stories that the Abbe listens with rapt attention, and even when his years of Jansenist training overtake him and he is swept into a bout of absolutism and legalistic ranting, he is fascinated and so changed by what the young man is telling him that word spreads to the Ecclesiastical Tribunal that an Abbe is reading all of the most forbidden books, and he is hauled off between two burly men.

Without his old teacher to discuss his overflowing ideas with, Cosimo begins a written correspondence with the writers of the books that have so captured his attention. It exercises his mind both in the contemplation and discussion of new ideas and enables him to practice foreign languages. He hides most of the letters in the hollow trunk of a tree never to be found again, and builds a sturdy and protected bookcase in the trees for his most treasured tomes.

The other major activity to which he gives himself in this time is the pruning of trees, a service he offers to the men in whose trees he exists, and to which he devotes himself passionately.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Cosimo is a young man now, and thinking differently from everyone around him proves he is able to think more and better than if he had remained under Abbe's tutelage. Revolutionary lifestyle and revolutionary thinking lead to revolution, and this begins to take shape in Cosimo's world when he causes the Abbe's arrest. That his love for trees finds further outlet in the pruning of those trees is further demonstration of the social consciousness he cultivates in himself, making him a selfless and benevolent member of his community.

There is never any hint that rebellion is his motivation. Though protest was his motivation for entering the trees, the lifestyle he cultivates while in them is in every way selfless and dedicated to the improvement of his own state and the state of every aspect of the world with which he interacts.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Further opportunity to make himself useful to his community comes to Cosimo when his only enemies, the burglars foiled in their plan to resurrect the wilting Gian de Brughi and wanting revenge against the boy who helped him to his end, set fire to the tree in which he sleeps. Cosimo is able to isolate the fire with barley water he keeps in the trees with him. When it threatens to spread, Cosimo calls into the night that there is a fire, and attracts the attention of the townspeople living close by. Together, they are able to subdue the fire.

Consequently, Cosimo is inspired to create an entire system of barrels of water high in the trees, strategically located throughout the woods. He enlists the help of the Cavalier to draw up plans for reservoirs and dykes, and gathers the manpower himself to make their plans a reality. Their camaraderie as well as their desire to better their mutual situation make them give their hearts to the project. In the end, the project proves a success and the brigands who started the first fire predictably try again and are arrested.

To his family, the high regard in which Cosimo comes to be held is enthusiastically received. His mother wants to know whether the teams he organized were armed and whether they went on maneuvers. His father asks whether the men he led were noble, and when Cosimo replies that they were bakers, gardeners and blacksmiths, he merely reminds him that as a nobleman he can exercise his gifts for leadership with much more illustrious followers. In a touching show of acceptance, however, the Baron gives his son his sword to aid in his defending his trees against those who would harm them.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The organization of the people living in the countryside is the first demonstration of Cosimo's having the notion and the ability to lead people. He does it in a way that is respectful of everyone's gifts, and organizes them behind a cause that every one of them will benefit from defending. The lesson he learns is that a problem that unites people is a powerful force for good as long as it exists. Once the problem is gone, it is far better to be a solitary force than to have to submit to a group without a cause.

The response of his family is significant for two reasons: his father shows his endorsement of his son's undertakings in such a respectful manner, being a man who reserves his respect for the noble; and when his mother asks whether the men are armed for their defense, his father addresses her concern himself in the first demonstration the reader sees of him respecting her perspective.



Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

The fifteenth chapter describes the Cavalier via Cosimo's most insightful view into the mysterious man's life. It opens with Biagio's explaining that piracy is quite common in Ombrosa's ports because Mohammedan countries feel they are cheated out of certain payments by European countries for things they trade, and so decide to take their repayment piecemeal by stealing it from the ports before it can be delivered. The Cavalier's place in that system is revealed in Cosimo's narration.

Cosimo confides in Biagio, and in several versions to the people of the town, that he frequently sees the Cavalier, normally not social, walking to the ports late at night. There he meets men wearing turbans and talks with them in great detail about the schedules of the boats and what cargo each will be carrying. When he is sure of his half-uncle's status as the most miserable of traitors, he devises a scheme to catch him and the pirates in the act and expose them all. He decides to post himself on the pine very near the spot in which he overhears them planning to meet, and hangs various guns in the trees around. When the men approach the spot, he will make them think they are surrounded by armed men and so scare them all away and make his uncle think he has been exposed. Thereby, he will end their association without having to actually expose his uncle.

When the night of their meeting finally arrives, however, things are different than Cosimo expects. The men begin unloading barrels of cheeses and other foodstuffs and stashing them in a cave. No doubt they intend to come back for them later, avoiding the risk of their being discovered on the boats. Instead of allowing the stolen cargo to remain there to be stolen later, Cosimo goes and rouses the townspeople so that they might come and get it before the pirates do. News that the pirates' treasure has been found motivates a sizeable group to gather, and they set off for the cave.

Unexpectedly, there is a meeting of pirate chiefs underway at the cave, and so the horn of the sentinels brings them out of the cave where battle ensues. When the townspeople eventually make a break for the inside of the cave, the pirates decide their best course is to make a run for their boats. Trying to thwart their escape, Cosimo leaps from the trees to the mast of the ship and crosses swords with the pirates until he sees his uncle emerge in a panic from the cave. Shoving the boat now free of pirates from the shore, the Cavalier laments only with the name of a woman Cosimo cannot identify. Could it be a lover, a daughter, a wife taken from him he fears he will never see again? She remains the subject of his bleary-eyed attempt at escape. The Cavalier is finally overtaken by the Moors who have been chasing him in another boat. Cosimo remains hidden high on the mast but hears the cry of "Ah, Zaira!" the mysterious woman's name, followed by a splash in the water which means his uncle has been defeated.



From his vantage point high on the mast, hope is briefly rekindled when he sees the fez-capped head of his uncle floating in the water. Urging Ottimo Massimo to rescue him, however, he discovers the head is no longer attached to the body that used to carry it about.

Chapter 15 Analysis

The story of the secret life and adventurous demise of the Cavalier may reveal more about Cosimo's imagination than about the character and life of the introverted Cavalier himself. It is certain the uncle lived a mysterious life in exotic, far away countries, and that he died as mysteriously as he lived, but exactly what his relationship with the pirates, whether slave or paid informant, and exactly the reality or relationship of the woman Zaira whose name Cosimo reports he cries repeatedly until his demise remain mysteries to everyone but Cosimo himself. The story reveals much, however, about Cosimo's desire to protect or embellish the legacy of his uncle, as does the report from Biagio that the story was told in several forms and to several groups of people.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

The opening of the sixteenth chapter reveals a little more of the truth behind the story of the Cavalier's end as Biagio recounts the much simpler story Cosimo tells when he first returns to the trees with Ottimo Massimo carrying the truncated head. In that story, the Cavalier is merely kidnapped by the pirates, but that story saddens his father so observably that he later invents a story of cunning on the part of the Cavalier in order to entrap the pirates, but it is too full of holes to be sustained. He also wishes to suppress the fact of the hidden treasure in order that the colliers be able to keep it and feast upon it, and not be regarded as thieves.

This is also the chapter containing the recounting of the Baron's decline and eventual death. Sadness over the loss of his half brother, the absence of his daughter as she becomes the wife of a man with a terribly unpleasant family, the fact that Biagio's youth keeps him from being a satisfactory companion and loss of his dream of a noble lifestyle for his family all mean that he declines quickly, making Cosimo the Baron of Rondo. The title changes nothing for Cosimo save the occasional necessity to conduct estate management business in town. He becomes a beloved and well-known storyteller, and the people call him Lord Baron.

The stories he tells captivate people, as does his lifestyle. His stories are fantastic and true, simultaneously and interchangeably, and inspire him to aggressively seek adventure, in order that he might gather more stories to tell to his rapt audience. His adventures never satisfy the now growing need in him for love, however, and while he watches with fascination the lovemaking of animals, even Ottimo Massimo is more successful at actually making a successful conquest than he. His daydreams are wildly successful, however, and the chapter closes with a hint of promise coming in the form of news of a whole community of Spaniards living in the trees of Olivabassa.

Chapter 16 Analysis

Cosimo's transformation into a learned and accomplished young man is complete. He is respected and an adventurer and can scratch those items from his list of to-dos, allowing his attention to turn to his appetite for female companionship. His conundrum, however, is the pronounced deficiency of girls at his altitude, compounded by his lack of knowledge of how a courtship in the trees might be conducted. That is why the news at the end of the chapter that there is an entire society of Spaniards living a life like his own falls so sweetly on his ears.



Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

In two days' journey, Cosimo reaches the town of Olivabassa and the community of Spaniards who have made their home in the trees of that interior township. He finds them to be finely dressed and somber, civilized and simultaneously very well and very ill adapted to life in the trees. He learns they are exiles, nobles who rebelled against King Charles III, and that a loophole in the wording of Prince Sanchez' sentence allows them to abide unmolested in the trees even while they are not allowed to set foot in the soil of the territory.

The Father Sulpicio de Guadalete is the interpreter who is first among them to tell him their story, and walks him through their adaptations to life in the trees. The Spaniards, by virtue of having been packed for a journey, are able to maintain much of the same standard of living as the one to which they wait to be allowed to return. They offer him coffee, the men sit on saddles, the women embroider and sit on cushions, and while their bodies remain dirty, their clothes are occasionally cleaned by a local obliging washerwoman.

Amidst the nobles there are two characters who stand out to Cosimo. One is a man called El Conde who is an exile even from among the Spaniards, previously held and tortured in one of King Charles' prisons. The others depend on him to show them what it is to be an exile and to remind them of their motivation to appeal to the mercy of the Prince. The other is a young girl sitting apart from the others, and unlike them, in that her eyes are the color of periwinkles, and she is much more adept at moving about in the trees than the others.

The two are entranced by one another at first glance, and play games in the trees until their proximity entices them at last to kiss. Cosimo is amazed, and Ursula, the blue-eyed girl, is not amazed at all. That is because nothing, Biagio explains parenthetically, happens to girls by chance.

Chapter 17 Analysis

Characters of significance in the seventeenth chapter are the Father, who will ultimately serve as a mouthpiece of the Roman Catholic Church, El Conde, who is not afraid to be a revolutionary since he is already an outcast, and Ursula, who will be Cosimo's first significant experience of nearly-grown-up romantic love.

This trip to another town is Cosimo's first solo journey far from home, and so like so many of his adventures, is only recounted by Biagio as it was recounted to him. The quirky and fantastic qualities of a collection of nobles living exiled to the trees, then, are indulged in fully—this is just the type of story for which the reader has been primed and enters into willingly and with great interest.



Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Cosimo arrives in Olivabassa in the winter, and by spring, he has become a useful teacher to them, helping make them more comfortable and even providing a place for Don Sulpicio to sit and listen to their sins. For himself, he contacts the bookseller back in Ombrosa to have a few books sent to him in his present location.

The Spaniards meet regularly in a sort of parliament in which they draft letters of appeal to their sovereign in order that they might be able to return home. They draft several versions of this letter until El Conde rises and speaks, and mysteriously silences the desire in them to write any more letters. El Conde, Ursula and some of the more thinking girls share Cosimo's enthusiasm for the ideas of the thinkers he shares with them. El Conde in particular is continuously eager to discover new ways of thinking and behaving. None of this sits well with Father Sulpicio, who does not mind particularly himself, but receives a letter reminding him of the Church's stance on revolutionary ideas and he resolves to squash the new ideas. One night, the Father sneaks over to where El Conde is sitting and tries to seize him by force. Cosimo fences with him to save El Conde, and becomes more watchful of both old men.

Meanwhile his affinity for Ursula is growing, and when her father Prince Fredrico Alonso asks Cosimo his intentions, he is forced to confess to him and to her that he loves her, but has no wish to leave his home in the trees. It is in the course of that conversation that Don Sulpicio levels his first overt accusation at Cosimo as a follower of revolutionaries. When the Spaniards receive word that their exile is over, El Conde rejoices that now they can make real the revolution they have heretofore only discussed. Cosimo, however, reminds them that despite enthusiastic invitations from Prince Fredrico, he will resist and remain in the trees as his chosen form of protest, and Ursula tries to stay behind with him as well but is pulled away by her sisters.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Among the first marks of his pending manhood is Cosimo's steadfastness to his convictions, even to the point that he will fight valiantly to defend the weak against those who would try to squash them. He proves himself again as able to effectively communicate the ideas that inspire him and to spread that inspiration to the people around him. He holds ideals with more fervor than he does love. Ursula is a pure and happy introduction to love for Cosimo, but he demonstrates no passionate disappointment that she cannot stay behind with him in the trees.

There is a good amount of foreshadowing surrounding the character of Father Don Sulpicio and El Conde. Each of them are passionate advocates of opposing ideas,

making them fertile ground for inevitable conflict in the future as each pursues their ideals as free men.



Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

The nineteenth chapter recounts the tales of Cosimo's many successful pursuits of romance on his return to Ombrosa. Having been introduced to the art of love and gained in experience and maturity, he applies his charm to what maidens can be found just under his feet. Stories and daydreams mix with rumors to become legends about the exotic nature and number of Cosimo's lovers, as the townspeople are fascinated with his success at conducting such a successful love life in the trees. Young girls in the area are swept away by his romantic singularity and so are completely happy to offer themselves up to him as lovers for even a single evening. The reader gets the impression, however, that each girl comes away from her experience of Cosimo feeling they had a romance different from any other, an experience she will remember and prize her whole life.

Older women even step out on their husbands to rendezvous with Cosimo in the trees. When he does not have a woman for the night, he wails and yawns, inspiring the people who hear him to yawn in their beds and hope the Baron finds a woman soon so they can all get some sleep. Cosimo sets up a whole world for love making in the trees, complete with a mattress Biagio sees him carrying up one day.

The end of the chapter finds Cosimo is finally caught by the jealous suitor of one of his maidens, however, on his way up to be with her, and the suitor fills Cosimo's leg with grapeshot. During his convalescence, Cosimo writes "Project for the Constitution of an Ideal State in the Trees", addressing it to Diderot himself and describing the felicity in which humanity can exist if it follows his example and exists in the trees. Diderot thanks him with a short note.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Cosimo exercises another aspect of his manhood by becoming an artful and accomplished lover. The townspeople tolerate him fondly, save for the men whose girls allow their attentions to be diverted and their minds, hearts and bodies swept up into the romance in the trees. There is even the sense that among the women, he is a particular treat—a gourmet indulgence reserved for only the finest of lovers, and the memory of their time with Cosimo remains for each of them a treasure. The reader may easily suppose, then, that he is a generous and doting lover, and recognizes in each woman, as he does in each of the other people with which he has interacted in the reader's observation, the things that make her valuable and unique, and in so recognizing it, helps her to recognize and celebrate it also.



Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Chapter twenty opens with Biagio recounting the stories he hears of the legend of his brother when he takes a year to travel. As far away as Paris, and from mouths as famous as Voltaire's himself, Biagio hears about the fascinating man in the trees. Usually keeping his connection with the legend to himself, in the presence of Voltaire, he cannot resist confessing that he is the man's brother. "Once it was only Nature which produced living phenomena," replies Voltaire. "Now 'tis Reason."

Biagio is called home, however, with the news that their mother's asthma has gotten much worse. This season reveals a sweet relationship development between the Generalessa and Cosimo when Biagio is surprised to observe that their mother asks Cosimo to fetch comforts for her that she knows he can harpoon from his tree and give to her. She is observably comforted by this, and Cosimo is observably happy to help in what ways he can. Cosimo stays close by her window and entertains her until her death. Soon after that, Biagio marries a woman who believes their children's proximity to Cosimo will be a bad influence on their education, and for that reason they stay much more at the family castle than at Ombrosa, and so ends the era of the family house.

The passing of time manifests in Ottimo Massimo, too, who lies about more and more until one day he sets off with a purpose to some unknown spot, catching a scent on the breeze. Cosimo follows him to the edge of the trees and the boundary of a huge field without a single tree to let him across. He has no choice but to sit in the tree and wonder what or who is on the other side of the field from whence his beloved dog might never return. He learns from a man walking below him that the only soul there is the widow of an ancient duke who has recently died, and she is the frequently absent and particular owner of all that was once his. The fact that the dog stays so faithfully at her side and that the man who tells him about her says she was the Marchessa as a little girl makes him wonder even more intently who she might be.

Chapter 20 Analysis

Cosimo's family obligations are now satisfied to the point that he can throw himself fully into exploration of his own long-term life. His relationship with his mother has ended happily, and his brother is now married and raising children. So, the timing is perfect for his attention to be fixated on a potential romance. The obvious question in his mind and the reader's is whether the demanding and irresistible girl is the one of that description from his youth. The fact that the dachshund has attached himself to her, recalling that her garden was his home, makes Cosimo eager to find out.



Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Cosimo catches his first glimpse of the girl when she comes riding from the opposite side of the field chased by two male riders, and zigzags so erratically that they are unable to catch her until at last she disappears through the trees. Cosimo follows her, a blonde and an accomplished rider, to the point that he can finally see her face, and his hopeful suspicions are confirmed. She rides deep into the forest, and he goes to where he is sure she will head to escape the hopeful suitors behind her: to the Ondarivas' garden.

When he arrives, he finds her wandering among the fountains and then ordering servants to various tasks of cleaning and arranging the place to her liking. When she spots Cosimo up in his tree just as she left him, her pleasure shows through her surprise. She alternates between asking him nonchalantly about his stay in the trees and ordering the servants around, in order to disguise her interest. Finally she names a time and a meeting place for them, and returns to the task of ordering her servants.

She arrives punctually and the two move quickly from catching up to pledging their love for each other. They move easily among the trees and begin to make love as they explore. Biagio observes that they know themselves better for knowing each other; that their relationship is in every way an ideal fit for them both.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Cosimo's big personality demands that, in order for a woman to hold his interest, she be as singular, well-read and adventurous as he, and that match is well made in Viola, his childhood ideal. She is now worldly wise and accomplished in everything she will need to live comfortably, and she is pleased that he has spent his time in the trees bettering himself, becoming a skilled lover and waiting devotedly for her. It is evident from their conversation that both of them were thinking of the other as their ideal match during the whole of their separation, and that they know each other as if by instinct now that they are reunited. The only amount of foreshadowing comes in her question, "And will you always love me, absolutely, above all else, and will you do anything for me?" and in the fact that when Cosimo replies instantly in the affirmative, she makes no such promise in return. She is only pleased that he will make the promise to her. He does so with all his heart.



Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Their romance flowers in reminiscences about the dog and the day of their separation. Biagio observes, however, that as mutual a passion as the two share, Cosimo has no taste for the more wanton perversities Viola enjoys. Their unity is best when it is mutually adventuresome in their acrobatics in the trees, love suspended in the air, pure and as sacred as the nature that surrounds them. When Viola toys with him, tries to spark jealousy, or demonstrates her capriciousness in any other way, Cosimo is only confused and frustrated in wondering why she cannot simply be happy.

Their world in the trees is beautiful, made even more so by Viola's taste for luxury and immediate gratification. Hammocks and curtains hang around them, and they exist in a world of sensual beauty and pleasure they both love. She loves his singularity and stories of his adventures, and of course he loves telling them. The only trouble comes when she chooses to interpret a comment to mean a lessening of her importance to Cosimo, and so tortures him with the withdrawal of her affections. Cosimo throws himself into fits of begging regret until she switches back to the lover from the torturer and all is restored.

The townspeople come to identify the two nobles as lovers, and spread stories of the white horse being up in the trees, a sign that the Duchess is visiting her lover, and the two are celebrated as an ideal match.

Chapter 22 Analysis

Cosimo is so pure an idealist that he is unable to understand Viola's desire to wring passionate yearning from him at her whim. She is accustomed to multiple elaborately pining lovers, and so lacks fuel for her imagination in one who will love her so willingly and completely, not requiring nor experiencing great agony in the act. The world they create is beautiful, and they are supremely happy there when they are happy, but she is changeable as the wind, and when she desires that they be unhappy, she simply pouts, and sends Cosimo into hysteria. Cosimo loves without condition or reservation, and so expects that love without condition is what he will receive. His intentions are pure and so he attributes pure intentions to the people around him. In seeing the best in people, he allows Viola to move as close to him as anyone has been, and receives the sweet and the bitter in equal strengths.



Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

The twenty-third chapter chronicles the climax of Viola's torture of poor Cosimo. The townspeople come to recognize that whenever they see Cosimo in the ilex tree in the center of town, it is because his lover has left for one of her long absences. Her escapes coincide with her not being able to get Cosimo to understand something about her strange version of love. Cosimo occupies himself with all of the things that used to fill his time and refuses to admit that he is affected by her absence at all. When she returns, the passion of their love still carries the taint of the mystery inspiring his jealousy.

The mystery of Viola's activities when she is away is solved once and for all when Biagio sees her on a visit of his own to Paris. She is dressed elaborately and the report from the people who know her is that she is reputed to have lovers in infinite numbers and rapid succession. Biagio returns heavy-hearted to tell his brother what he has learned. Cosimo refuses to blame Viola in Biagio's presence, but his jealousy on seeing her again is irrepressible. She insists he has a narrow idea of love and is evidently pleased by his jealousy. He argues that it just does not make sense for her to keep multiple lovers and still claim to love him, and she argues that love should not submit to reason, but should burn painfully inside its most ardent devotees.

It is a lesson she wants to drive home to Cosimo, and she chooses as her object lessons two ridiculous soldiers who stumble into Ombrosa's ports from an English and a Neapolitan fleet. She poses as the attractive and lonely widow before them both, lets them know they are competing for her, and then makes them each think they have been invited exclusively to dinner with her. When they both arrive, Cosimo arrives at the same time to spy, having intercepted a note and being sure that he can foil the one to whom it belongs. He never imagines the invitation is identical for them both!

It becomes clear as the group shares their mixture of chagrin, confusion and, on the part of Viola, delight, that the Donna intends to keep them both as lovers at the same time, and thinks their instinct to fight for her unnecessary. Cosimo is horrified. The two will not bend their chivalry to such a preposterous whim and ride off too late for Cosimo to remove the traps he laid for the suitors. Porcupines in their saddles satisfy him very much when he realizes that they would share her with each other, but not with a third.

Left to face his long-time lover, Cosimo asks what her intentions are such a ludicrous scheme, and she explains that it is clear by their willingness to share her betwixt them that they love her ardently enough to satisfy her. Why, then, will he not do the same? Cosimo points out the error of her logic to no avail. There ensues a conversation in which Viola asks whether love ought to be a renunciation of self, and Cosimo should learn from their willingness to share her. Cosimo replies that love is best served when each can remain themselves completely, and seek the happiness of their lover without



having to transform for them. He wants to pledge his unswerving devotion to her, but sticks with his point. She wants to tell him that he is the reason she does everything she does, but sticks with her point. At an impasse, the two part, never to see each other again, and both wishing to be together more than anything else.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Here the tortured romance of the Baron Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo reaches the climax beyond which it will not survive. The Donna Violante (aptly named) insists that love ought to mean the selfless abandoning of Cosimo's desires for hers, and refuses to sacrifice what she desires for him. As happy as they have made each other, her desire to keep the lifestyle of being chased by ridiculous men but belonging to no one means that Cosimo must remove his heart from her path or let it be torn to shreds. Both of them are idealists, but with such fundamentally disparate ideals they can never be compatible unless one of them is willing to open themselves to adopting the other's point of view. So the strength of will and personality that attracts them to each other and makes them such fascinated companions becomes their undoing.



Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

The inevitable result of Cosimo's unforeseen abandonment by his dear Viola is that Cosimo takes leave of his senses for a time. He dresses himself in furs and elaborate head dresses like the "American aborigines" and takes on the mannerisms and bodily feathery coverings of the birds that surround him, boasting of riches when he is able to pull a worm with his teeth. He even becomes an outspoken advocate and ambassador for the birds, and people gather below while birds gather around to hear him speak. He also takes to hanging pages of poetry, women's clothes and various tools and other random objects from the trees. Finally, he put into simplistic publication a periodical entitled the Biped's Monitor, full of the imprints of spiders and lizards that got on the page as it was being stamped.

When winter falls, he confines himself to his sleeping bag and moves only far enough on occasion to do his daily duties over the Merdanzo torrent. People take to bringing him offerings of food from their own tables and begin to regard it as lucky to give food offerings to the Baron in the trees. Even Biagio, who thought it sad and not his responsibility to feed the brother who had always taught him and made a life for himself by nature only, sends a servant with a generous gift of turkey and Bordeaux which Cosimo accepts to Biagio's great surprise.

Cosimo's salvation comes in the form of a marauding pack of wolves descending from the mountains in search of food. The townspeople wish for their old Baron, who would know just what to do, but are left to despair. Then, just when they think he does not understand or care, he suggests an ingenious plan. He ties sheep high in the tree to attract the wolves and thereby lures them close enough to himself that he can take a shot. The plan is implemented brilliantly, sheep and guns tied strategically throughout the trees so Cosimo is able to leap from spot to spot and shoot down whatever wolves are in the area.

Of course the stories he tells about that night vary with each telling, and Biagio is perhaps the only one able to recognize the holes. Cosimo falls ill following his daring night of adventure and endures a long convalescence, but is thereafter restored to his old self. As evidence to the fact, he even changes the name of his weekly paper from the Biped's Monitor to the Reasonable Vertebrate.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Cosimo never offers any explanation for the state of the trees, which he strings so conspicuously with things, rather they offer an explanation of him. Pieces of poetry, women's corsets, as well as various and sundry implements of the male life hang scattered about him like the scattered state that dominates the inside of his soul in this



season. They become, however, these nonsensical mobiles, the very inspirations for the plan that rescues the village from the wolves and Cosimo from his decline into despair. Just as living adventurously in previous years filled him with stories and spurred him on to bigger and more adventures, this adventure has the same effect, and motivates Cosimo to re-enter life and begin telling his stories again.



Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

This is the chapter in which Father Don Sulpico from Cosimo's days in Olivabassa re-appears, still up to his old schemes of cleansing the countryside of free-thinkers. He is part of a group of three meeting under the cover of trees, thinking they are hidden from prying eyes. Cosimo comes up above their heads and greets them quite politely, clever making sure he learns more about them than they about him. Introducing himself as a Freemason, he is able to learn they are an illegal branch set on putting up an armed chapter behind the back of the church. When his suspicions are confirmed that the Father is indeed among the three, Cosimo challenges the Father to resolve their dispute once and for all. Cosimo bests him by wit and strength alike and is regarded ever after as a Freemason.

As a result, Cosimo drops freely in on several secret meetings, behaving as if there are rituals he knows that they do not, and establishing a collection of tree-honoring ceremonies that inspire names like Woodpecker Masons to be used, and that, for all Biagio knows, might still be in use in Masonic chapters today.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Cosimo is continuously challenging conformist thought, and would therefore naturally challenge those who sought to create it by force. Particularly the Father who had been such an antagonist to him and El Conde only after his conviction was stirred by the letter from the Church and not at all as a result of his own inner convictions.

Cosimo also plays amusedly with the somber proceedings of the secret societies, revealing the solemnity of their meetings as meaningless, or at least so far out of date with the things that made them meaningful that no one can remember, by imposing rituals that pay more homage to him and his stories than to anything to which they might be pledging their allegiance.



Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

The twenty-sixth chapter finds Cosimo passionately supporting the cause of justice and fairness, this time in regards to the tithes the nobles collect from the townspeople whenever they harvest grapes. He spreads word walking along the vines from vintner to vintner that this is the year the nobles will collect nothing from them, and instructs them how to ensure this. When the day comes and the bailiff asks for the tithe everyone knows he is there to collect but no one offers up, the sound of conch shells being blown arises from every direction with the chanting "Ca ira!" When he threatens violence against whoever sings, guns sound, shooting into the air from the surrounding hilltops and the bailiffs retreat without having collected a thing. The nobles lock themselves in their houses until the sweetness of victory against them has gone out of the air, even inspiring Biagio to stay indoors.

The victory is short-lived and troops are sent to put down the rebellion. Reputed revolutionaries are arrested, save for Cosimo who no one can catch, and later released because no one they are able to arrest is responsible for inciting the rebellion. The worst effect on the family is that the gathering of troops brings Battista, her family and her family horses back to Ombrosa, so she may share with everyone demonstration after demonstration of executions, using rodents as live models.

Chapter 26 Analysis

Biagio demonstrates his first desire to distance himself from association with his brother now that Cosimo is leading a revolution against the system that protects Biagio's security. The effect of Cosimo's rebellion can only be viewed as positive, however, since their point is made with gusto and unifying pride, and no one can be blamed, since no one can catch the actual culprit. The only ill effect is Battista's return, and the presence of the soldiers on every street. Even that seems, however, to hold the promise of more adventure.



Chapter 27

Chapter 27 Summary

The fun Cosimo has with the soldiers is just what a man of his convictions and ingenuity could have with a group of occupying soldiers wandering aimlessly underfoot. He observes the contrast between one Austrian regiment smartly dressed with a punctilious sergeant at the lead, but with no idea how to manage in woods as thick as Cosimo's, and a French regiment, so thoroughly soaked in the winter months that when spring came, their hats and coats begin to sprout moss and lichens. They seem as much a part of the forest as the trees themselves, and so it brings Cosimo pleasure to help them out.

He lures the Austrians into traps, getting them so bug-bitten and crazy with being out of their element that any decorum they try to maintain dissolves. For the French, he reports the movements of the Austrians and suggests the best strategies for staving them off. His reputation grows among both camps, the Austrians spreading the rumor that the woods are full of Jacobins, and therefore rerouting themselves several times to steer clear. Among the French, he becomes their anonymous benefactor by covering them secretly with fleas and thereby inspiring them to delouse.

Chapter 27 Analysis

Cosimo shows himself to be an idealist of the most unique and ingenious sort, not doing what he does for praise. He demonstrates this when he secretly infests the French with fleas in order to inspire them to wash, simply to bring about the most positive results.



Chapter 28

Chapter 28 Summary

The twenty-eighth chapter ushers in the Republican army, arrest by whom Battista and her husband only narrowly escape. They establish a French-style government in which Cosimo is even nominated to serve for a short time, and it is during this stint that he writes his "Constitutional Project for a Republican City with a Declaration of the Rights of Men, Women, Children, Domestic and Wild Animals, Including Birds, Fishes and Insects, and All Vegetation, whether Trees, Vegetables or Grass". Sadly, it never garners much notice.

Cosimo spends his time continuing to protect the underdogs, now the locals with livestock or crops the French might take for taxes, and the young men who flee to the woods for shelter from conscription. He remains loyal to the French out of principal only in his refusal to retract his previous actions, but protects the people and their belongings out of compassion. He helps the French lay out roads, but only because in doing so he can protect his trees and the people who live around them.

The chapter closes with a sort of cameo appearance from the conquering Emperor Napoleon on his way from being crowned in Milan. He stops under Cosimo's tree when Cosimo asks if he can help him in any way. Following a brief conversation on Plutarch, he says, "If I were not the Emperor Napoleon, I would like to be the citizen Cosimo Rondo!"

Chapter 28 Analysis

Biagio comments in this chapter that perhaps Cosimo does not resist the impositions being made by the French the way he might have as a youth because he was too old and does not put himself out for very many people any more. However, the reader definitely gets the impression that he does not care much for Napoleon upon meeting him in person. He addresses him respectfully, but their only conversation is about a role-reversal that does not flatter the Emperor at all, and at one point Cosimo corrects him for blundering. The Emperor's whole visit is a show of his wealth with no compassion for nor even interest in the people who live there. Cosimo shows himself the better man by far, by humble, understated contrast.



Chapter 29

Chapter 29 Summary

In Chapter 29, Cosimo daydreams that a wilted and disillusioned Napoleon comes riding back to his tree, and having realized the error of his ways, asks Cosimo for the Constitution he wrote, and that everything starts again from the beginning, so that the ideals that bring about a better society can be the motivation and fruit of whatever struggle men give their lives for.

Instead, he meets three Frenchmen with whom he has no affinity at all, seeking only to get drunk and congratulate themselves, as well as the illustrious Prince Andrej of Yugoslavia. Cosimo meets the Russian after he has just sent the French soldiers to bathe with his soap, riding with a group of Cossacks. They converse for a while in Russian and Italian, Cosimo having learned some of nearly every language over the course of his life. They eventually understand that they both hold ideals they do not think they could even explain to themselves, but to which their whole lives are devoted. The Cossacks eventually bring back the dead bodies of the Frenchmen and the Prince, sad, rides off with his soldiers.

Chapter 29 Analysis

Cosimo is now older and sees the fruit of the revolution spurred by ideas that so inspired him as a youth. However, he is saddened to see that the ideas are casualties of the war, as well as so many people. He is encouraged to learn in meeting Prince Andrej, however, that there are men of power who still hold to their ideals.



Chapter 30

Chapter 30 Summary

Biagio reflects on the life his brother lived and his motivation to demonstrate a way of understanding and interacting with people he could only communicate completely by living it. He wishes the ideas that inspired them as youths in the eighteenth century made more of a footprint on the systems of the nineteenth, but is dismayed to see they have not.

He describes the one time he climbed the tree to ask his now 65-year-old brother whether he would come down, now that his point was so thoroughly made, saying there is a time for landing even for men who spend their whole lives at sea. Cosimo refuses, and sits still and silent for long periods, people gathering below him to talk amongst themselves but only addressing Cosimo occasionally, understanding that he no longer wishes to talk. His health continues to decline until at last they raise a bed up into the tree for him.

One day, they find him perched high in a tree, nearly rigid and non-responsive. They send up a doctor to no avail, and then a priest. They ask the priest if he took the sacraments, and he answers that Cosimo told him that for him it was alright. Nothing anyone can do moves Cosimo from that spot, until the aeronauts.

Coming into view of the whole group is a hot-air balloon elaborately decorated. When the wind catches it and threatens to take it out of control, the Englishmen inside lower it to get it out of the gust, and then Cosimo, agile as a boy, leaps from his perch on the tree and grabs hold of the anchor rope. Before anyone can react, he drops from there into the sea below, and so ends the singular life of the Baron Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo.

Biagio recounts in closing that Ombrosa is no more, nor are the trees, all leveled as a part of the civilization of the countryside that follows the Napoleonic victory. He wonders if it ever really did exist, it is now such a distant memory. He closes the story of his brother with a beautiful analogy of the ink with which he pens his memories to the limbs and leaves and berries that filled the sky above them as boys.

Chapter 30 Analysis

The close of the story easily ushers the reader into nostalgia for youth, when everything is still possible and one has not yet allowed oneself to be disillusioned. Cosimo lives with courage until the very end, though, and thereby invites everyone who watches his life to the same passion for their convictions that he maintained to the last. Not even death set his feet on the ground. His lifestyle and the nature he loved remain the things for which Biagio pines, and represent the most beautiful parts of Europe's past.



Characters

Baron Cosimo Piovasco di Rondo

Cosimo takes to living in the trees in order to live his life in the way he determines is best. He enters them because he can no longer abide life in a household where his sister Battista is allowed to lavishly execute and serve to their family all of the creatures of the forest. His protest is not against eating animals, for he remains a hunter and meat-eater all his life. It is against the pleasure she takes in their death, and disrespect with which she serves them, displaying them horribly on the table in humiliating and grotesque arrangements. His relationship with the animals around him is very like that of the Native American tribes, killing only what is needed and using every part of the animal.

His relationship with the trees and the people with who he interacts is principled in a very similar way. He sees the good that can come from everyone and everything and he sees and does his best in his dealing with them to bring that good out of them. He prunes the trees in order to bring about maximum healthy growth, he cultivates relationships among people that bring about the healthiest and most beneficial cooperation, and he orchestrates his personal relationships in such a way as to make them as positive an influence on each member's well-being as possible.

In his personal cultivation, he reads as many books by the great thinkers and historians of his time as he can get his hands on. This being quite a lot, he fosters a thriving and visionary set of ideals that he applies both to his own affairs and to his vision for the world in which he lives. Having developed such a vision of living harmoniously with nature and other people, Cosimo unselfishly shares his ideas by example, in his written word, and in the changes he makes in the community in which he lives.

His romantic relationship with Violante Ondariva reveals much about his desire to live blissfully and without complication, as well as a certain inability to cope with nonsensical manipulation of his emotions. Indeed the only time he demonstrates a lack of self-control or of losing his temper is when Viola withdraws her affection because she cannot get out of him the behavior she wants.

Cosimo's political vision, his relationships with the authors whom he admires, his storytelling and passionate pursuit of pure happiness in the trees all come from a desire to live ideally. The ideal is his own, and he is the only one to whom he answers for how well he attains it.

Biagio Piovasco di Rondo

Biagio is Cosimo's younger brother and the narrator of the story. He is, in the boys' early youth, Cosimo's partner in adventure and meting out of justice. When the two of them are so horrified by their sister's cooking small animals and their parents' subsequent



insistence that the family share her lavishly executed animals at family meals, they conspire together a means of setting her next victims free. Biagio understands his brother's feeling of abandonment when he enters the trees, and his heart is divided between his family and loyalty to his brother and best friend. As they grow, Biagio is both an admirer and a confidante to Cosimo, and for that reason is able to faithfully recount the story of Cosimo's life both as he observes it and as it is recounted to him in the time he spends listening to Cosimo's stories.

Biagio lives a predictable and conformist life for all the revolutionary ideals he admires in his brother. Still a noble, he does manage to keep his lifestyle somewhat his own while still conducting the business of the family, only separated from his brother and childhood home by his wife's disapproval of Cosimo's influence on their children. In the end, Biagio completely sympathizes with Cosimo's vision of what life could be like if it were lived in harmonious cooperation with nature instead of by subduing and isolating oneself from it. The trees in particular are a feature of Europe he misses acutely as he reflects on how Europe changes over his lifetime.

Violante Ondariva

Known as Viola to Cosimo, and as Sinforosa to the fruit thieves, Violante Ondariva is next door neighbor to the Piovasco family, growing up the apparent only child of wealthy, land-owning parents and doted on by a flurrying cloud of aunts. She first encounters Cosimo while playing alone as a little girl in her family's elaborate and exotic garden, and is taken away to boarding school before their friendship progresses very far at all. Before Cosimo, Viola spends time commanding, protecting, and flirting with a particular pair of fruit thieves Cosimo later befriends. Playing men off of one another is a pattern Viola continues to enjoy into young adulthood when she and Cosimo are reunited. In some moments, their love affair is pure abandonment to each other and the magical world they retreat to in the trees. At other times, her taste for imposing misery and jealousy in her lovers, making them pine and ache for her, proves an unbearable torture for Cosimo, and their affair abruptly ends with a promise from Viola that he will never see her again.

Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondo

Cosimo's father, Arminio Piovasco di Rondo, is a man unable to wrap his mind around the changes that come about as a result of the Wars of Succession, and hopes always to see his land-owning status as Duke of Ombrosa restored and passed along to Cosimo, whom he doggedly trains for a nobleman's life. He is a bore to his sons due to his singularity of purpose, and because nothing they are or which interests them is as important to him as his own out-of-date set of hopeless priorities. A bit of reconciliation comes into his relationship with Cosimo when, after Cosimo's organization of the people in the village to protect the trees against fire, he visits and gives him his sword. It is an acknowledgement that Cosimo is behaving nobly, even if in a less illustrious realm than Arminio would have liked.



Baroness Corradina di Rondo, the Generalessa

Cosimo's mother is nicknamed the Generalessa for her love of all things to do with battles and implements of war, grown in her from years spent with her father the General on the battle field in the Wars of Succession. She embroiders in her private quarters pillows featuring the trajectories of cannons and the strategies armies used on the battlefields. Biagio expresses some sadness at her never having divested her knowledge to her sons, so that as boys they could use the flag signals and such. They never even discover her knowledge of these soldier's tricks until she employs them to communicate with Cosimo in the trees. She is the parent who shows the most ready acceptance of Cosimo's lifestyle, likening him to soldiers on sentry duty, and continues to include him in her inner circle of comforters in the last days of her life.

Battista Piovasco

Younger sister to the boys, Battista spends much of her childhood dressed as a nun and confined to the family home following an incident in which she makes an attempt on the virtue of a visiting family's son. To occupy her time, she tortures, kills and maliciously cooks and serves all manner of creatures, presenting arrangements of them, such as a lobster gripping the tongue of a pig, lying in the pig's open mouth as a tongue itself, and snails decapitated and their heads propped at the end of pieces of wire mesh in order to produce the appearance of swans. She prides herself on being the most shocking member of the family and is observably put out when Cosimo takes to the trees, surpassing her on the oddity scale. She marries and has a family, but retains her love for torturing small animals. She builds a reproduction of a French guillotine and decapitates rodents for small audiences.

The Cavalier Avvocato Enea Silvio Carrega

The Cavalier is illegitimate half-brother to the Baron Arminio, raised alongside Arminio by their father. He spends years in a Mohammedan country learning hydraulics and connecting himself in some unknown way with a woman named Zaira. Biagio never knows whether she is daughter or lover, only that Cosimo reports his calling her name when he knows he is preparing to meet his doom at the hands of the pirates. The Cavalier spends time as a slave, a prisoner and a bookkeeper in his life, and instead of making him worldly or colorful, these experiences turned him timid and withdrawn. He is talented in hydraulics and beekeeping, and Cosimo learns from him everything he can. He also, however, seems to deal in the shady affairs of pirates, and so meets his end when Cosimo exposes the pirates to the locals, and they take the Cavalier to be the traitor.



Abbe Fauchelefleur

The Abbe is teacher to the boys, and an otherwise retreating and small-minded man of the cloth. He shows little sign of having any real opinions of his own, but is willing to be commanded, by the Catholic Church, the Baron Arminio, and eventually Cosimo, when he comes into the trees to drill Cosimo in his Latin. He becomes a student to Cosimo in those sessions, and listens to the ideas of the great thinkers of the late 17th century with tremendous interest. It leads to a crisis of convictions, and he is eventually exposed as being a reader of works forbidden by the Church and is arrested and hauled away.

Ursula

Cosimo's first long love affair of his early adulthood is with the young Spanish girl who lives in the trees with the other exiles in Olivabassa. She is more agile of both body and mind than the other inhabitants of the trees, and so explores the trees and ideas of new thinkers with Cosimo. They are very happy together until their separation when the exile of the Spaniards ends. She tries to stay with Cosimo, but is pulled out of the trees and into a carriage by her sisters as they prepare to return to Spain.

El Conde

Another character from the season spent in Olivabassa is the only real thinker among the adult men, El Conde. He possesses some notoriety as an example to the others of what they are trying to accomplish, having been a prisoner himself. He holds sway over the opinions of the other exiles to the point that when he says they need to stop petitioning the prince for their release, they listen and stop their efforts at once. He also shares a great interest in the writings of the thinkers Cosimo loves, and that is the thing that pits the Father Don Sulpicio against him.

Father Don Sulpicio

Father Don Sulpicio shares Abbe Fachelefleur's characteristic of taking convictions and opinions directly from the edicts of the Catholic Church. When it becomes evident to him that the thoughts Cosimo is discussing with the others, come from writers strictly denounced by the Church, he shakes off the complacency that has characterized him and attacks El Conde in the night. Cosimo fends him off, and bests him again in his final appearance in the book when he is a part of a secret chapter of Freemasons trying to become armed and free the country of revolutionaries.

Gian de Brughi

Gian de Brughi is a notorious thief. His fame is such that other thieves have been claiming his name to instill fear in their victims and get them to hand over their



valuables. When he is finally being arrested, Cosimo snatches him into the trees and away from his captors, throws them off the trail and befriends the wilted old brigand. The two discover a shared passion for reading, and Cosimo supplies him with books until he is finally caught in a burglary arranged by two of his own protégés (the burglary goes bad due to his loss of skill). As he awaits execution, Cosimo reads him more stories of daring men, and lets him go to his death with an air of triumph when he tells him that one of his favorite heroes is also executed by hanging.



Objects/Places

Trees

Cosimo makes a home and a family out of the place and the dynamic rhythmic life the trees provide. They cover the whole village and countryside, making it possible to travel from one country to the next without touching the ground. It was this density that makes a life above the ground and outside the current political system possible for Cosimo. It also provides the seclusion necessary for him to conduct his love affairs, spend hours in study of books, and in the writing of the letters and treatises in which he records his vision for his country.

Viola's swing

The swing is what first provides Cosimo and Viola the opportunity to play without it being necessary for Cosimo to come down, or Viola to come up. It is a place suspended between their worlds where they can come together easily.

The Piovasco Estate

It is from the windows of the estate that Cosimo's family watch him conducting his life in the trees. Cosimo continues to look in on them, as well, on special occasions like Battista's engagement party.

Generalessa's Implements of War and Spying

The Generalessa spends long hours tracking her son's location with her telescope and marking it on a map. She also signals to Cosimo with the signals she learned from soldiers as a child, and he waves back with his cap.

Cosimo's Leaving-Home Clothes

The thing that sets Cosimo immediately apart from the other boys who spend time in the trees is that Cosimo leaves home still dressed in his tricorne and waders, his rapier at his side. His very formal appearance is also what makes him such an intriguing oddity to Viola when she first sees him.



The Ondarivas' Garden

Cosimo is first attracted to the garden in which he encounters Viola because it is so filled with plants and trees from far off places, making it exotic in appearance, fragrance and opulence by comparison to everything around it.

Olivabassa

The Spanish exiles Cosimo hears about in town live in the trees of a village called Olivabassa. It is there that Cosimo meets and has his puppy-love affair with Ursula, teaches El Conde about the thinkers he has been reading and has his first duel in the trees with Don Sulpicio.

Books

A Jewish bookseller is Cosimo's supplier of reading material, and a deal they make together makes it possible for Cosimo to supply lighter novels to Gian de Brughi.

Cosimo's Weapons

Cosimo only ever uses his guns for hunting animals and defending the village against the invasion of wolves. Like the gentleman he is, the only times he duels, he used his rapier.

Furniture

During his love affair with Viola, the two of them pull beds and curtains up into the trees to make themselves a place to which they can retreat. In the years of his intense study, Cosimo installs a large bookcase to house all of the books that are most important to him. Then, at the end of his life, Biagio and the people of Ombrosa send up a bed so Cosimo can stretch himself out and be comfortable in his old age.

The edge of the trees

There is only one time in the book when there is a place Cosimo wants to reach that he cannot. It is when he follows Ottimo Massimo to the large expanse of grass across which the dog continues to run, and he can only watch and wonder. It is from that spot that he learns of the Marchessa who lives on the estate and begins to wonder if it can be Viola, his childhood friend.



Baron Arminio's Sword

The old Baron holds out as long as he can, waiting for his eldest to come to his senses and return to life on the ground. When he hears about the fire patrol Cosimo has organized and sees that he is making a good name for himself in the trees, he comes out to see him and gives him his sword as a token of his approval and pride.



Themes

Living in Pursuit of One's Ideals

Cosimo sees as a very young boy that the priorities that shape the actions of his parents are not what he wants to shape his own life. His father chases ideals which no longer exist, and his mother escapes from her world by commemorating battles long-since over. His initial leaving is prompted by one rather insignificant protest, but his staying becomes a way of demonstrating to himself and the world that there are different ways of doing things that might even be better than the one imposed on groups of people by other groups of people. The resolve to guide his own destiny, and the character of a good and selfless member of the community is all Cosimo started out with, and the ideas that shape his political ideals and vision come later as a result of his study.

Even his one consumingly passionate love affair with Viola cannot make him compromise what he understands to be the goal and purpose of human existence: to live happily and in harmony with the people in one's life. He pursues that goal when he teaches the people to cooperate to prevent the fires, when he defends El Conde against the censure of Don Sulpicio, even when he sends the girls he brings into the trees away happier and feeling more beautiful than when they entered them. His ideal to bring out the best in people and help them to apply it to the common good motivates the overwhelming majority of his actions. It is sadness that this ideal is not realized in the fate of the country that so characterizes Biagio's close of the story. They remain, nonetheless, the most memorable footprint left on the minds of the people who remember him, and makes Cosimo's life a satisfying one.

The Value of the Unexpected

Cosimo does not set out to be shocking, only to be the master of his own destiny, but the nature of his chosen path does make him rather a conspicuous character among the people of Ombrosa and greater Italy. This is exactly what makes it possible for him to exercise the kind of influence he does. People pay particular attention to him because he is such a singular character. Things that start out as strange to their perception became quite normal because he normalizes them. Another aspect of the value of the unexpected is perhaps best demonstrated whenever it is necessary for Cosimo to operate covertly.

The first instance of this is with the pirates. None of them expect to have to look up to find the informant, and so he manages things very effectively from his location, and escapes their murderous swords. The second instance is when the nobles come to take their tithe from the grape harvest. Cosimo moves easily from one property to the next and covertly spreads word to everyone about his plan. Not only does everyone act in perfect concert, but when the enforcers of the law try to convict anyone as the



mastermind behind the protest, no one can be found. The people truthfully claim innocence.

Early in the story, there is also the befuddled chagrin of Battista at no longer being the most shocking member of the family, Cosimo's ability to tell stories in the town square, to conduct secret love affairs and to help Gian de Brughi. All of these became possibilities entirely because he exists in a completely unexpected way, and people caught off their guard are much easier to influence.

Love

There are a number of love relationships recorded in this story. There is the love of brothers, the love of family, the love of self, romantic love and love of country, and each story has a lesson about its type of love. Concerning love between brothers, Biagio learns that loving his brother does not necessarily mean he has to be his constant shadow or companion, but that they can go on to live their own very different lives and still help and confide in each other.

The Piovasco family has learn to love Cosimo just as he is, instead of how they expect him to be. They all come to accept and celebrate him in their own ways, save for Battista who remains ever self-involved.

Self-love is also what, in its proper measure allows Cosimo to pursue his life on his own terms and, in its exaggerated measure, what prompts Viola to insist that Cosimo should have to suffer for her as her other ridiculous suitors suffer.

Cosimo's view of romantic love is best codified in the conversation he has with Viola, recorded in chapter twenty-two, when he says that two members ought to be pursuing the happiness and good of the opposite member instead of wishing for their misery. This is perhaps the best thesis on love to be found in the whole work: love should be a selfless thing mutually shared between two people seeking the good and happiness of the other person.

Finally, love of country is what spurs Cosimo on to spread the thoughts on civilized, harmonious society to the men he encounters. It is also what makes the destruction of the trees with which Cosimo lives in such harmony such a tragedy to Biagio. Their country was largely defined by the trees native to it, and is washed clean of them to make room for the trees of other countries. When the good of their country is not being pursued in a way that preserves what he and Cosimo love about it, Biagio finds much heartache.



Style

Point of View

The story is written from the perspective of Biagio, Cosimo's younger brother. It is in large part, however, Biagio's re-telling of the stories Cosimo recounts to him. Only when the boys are very young, and when they are very old is Cosimo continuously close enough to Ombrosa to allow Biagio to observe him directly. The rest of the time, as with the story of the Spaniards, the pirates, the beekeeping, Gian de Brughi, Viola, the fruit thieves—nearly every one of Cosimo's great adventures—Biagio is faithfully recording the details of stories Cosimo tells him. The other observances of Cosimo's life come from Biagio's observation of the people of the town, and Cosimo's influence over all of them. Nearly every one of his adventures changes something about how the people of the town relate to one another, such as when he motivates their formation of the fire squad and the vintners' strike, or when he gives them something to talk about, such as his string of affairs, his long affair with Viola, or his period of madness. Some of his stories Biagio does not completely believe, such as the night of the wolf invasion and Cosimo's hanging sheep and rifles from the trees. However, whenever this is the case, Biagio points it out and warns the reader that some of the details of the story he is about to tell have changed with each of Cosimo's tellings.

Setting

Cosimo's story takes place in late eighteenth century Italy following the Wars of Succession and preceding Napoleon's rule of the country. The town of Ombrosa is the boys' hometown. It is a provincial town of farmers and tradesmen, and society is still very much divided between the wealthy and the working-class. The Piovasco family lost a most of its lands in the Wars of Succession and tries to hide its poverty by stepping out of societal obligations like entertaining and going to parties. The status of Cosimo in the minds of the people of Ombrosa is, then, as a member of the upper class, and that is much of what allows them to shrug off his behavior as the eccentricities of the wealthy. The town, as well as the countryside that surrounds it, is covered with ancient large and sturdy trees. It is this feature of the geography that allows Cosimo his mobility, allowing him to move unseen from place to place whenever he chooses. The time period of Cosimo's life sees the Napoleonic wars touch Italy, and the Austrian soldiers moving through, as well as the coronation of Napoleon as their country's new ruler. Academically, the setting is rich with new ideas and feeds Cosimo's passion for dreaming what his country can become.

Language and Meaning

Italo Calvino originally wrote the story in Italian and Archibald Colquhoun translated it in 1959 into English. The syntax is informal and conversational, and mixed with moments



of French, Spanish and Russian as Cosimo encounters people from those places. Those languages are left without translation but are easy to loosely understand based on their context, as each instance of them is very short.

The sentence structure is simple and playful, as if the book was written to be understood by children as young as twelve, but enjoyed by people of every age. There are moments in conversation when the style is either very formal or very crude and informal, depending on the speaker. The narration is minimal, letting the action drive the pace of the chapters, and giving stylistic freedom to each character to make their impressions on the reader based on their own actions and words.

There is, consistent throughout the book, a note of amused admiration in Biagio's tone, and it makes it easy for the reader to fall in love with Cosimo for the same reasons as his longest-running admirer.

Structure

The story is written chronologically over the course of Cosimo's entire life, beginning when he is a young boy. For that reason, it narrates a good deal of action and quick-moving stories in the beginning, and as Cosimo gets older, the stories also get a little longer and more complex.

Each chapter stands alone as its own episode in the life of Cosimo, and therefore they vary in length depending on the complexity and length of the story they are telling. Containing 30 chapters, the reader is able to spend a good amount of time observing each phase of Cosimo's development.

The novel moves quickly—there is never more description than is necessary, letting the action of each story drive the pace. There are a series of subplots with characters who move into and out of the story as Cosimo interacts with them. When a character moves out of Cosimo's life, he is also left behind in the story.



Quotes

"These accumulating family resentments I myself only noticed later; I was eight, everything seemed a game, the battle between us boys and grownups was the same as in all families, and I did not realize that my brother's stubbornness hid something much deeper," Chapter 1, p. 5.

"The turbulence of the times makes some people feel the need to bestir themselves, but in the opposite direction, backwards rather than forwards; so, with things boiling up all around him, our father had set his heart on regaining the lapsed title of Duke of Ombrossa," Chapter 1, p. 5.

"The rest of the day our mother spent in her apartments, doing lace and embroidery and petit point; for in truth it was only in these traditional womanly occupations that the Generalessa could vent her warrior's urge," Chapter 1, p. 6.

"But that restless creature, our sister Battista, used to spend the nights wandering around the house in search of mice, holding a candelabra, with a musket under her arm," Chapter 1, p. 11.

"But if you touch the earth just once with your foot, you lose your whole kingdom and become the humblest slave. D'you understand? Even if a branch breaks under you and you fall, it's the end of you!" Chapter 2, p. 21.

"There were the brown boughs of cherry, the tender quince, peach, almond or young pear, the big plumb, and sorb apples and carobs too, with an occasional mulberry or knobby walnut. Where the orchards ended, the olive groves began—silvery gray, a cloud tufted out halfway up the hillsides," Chapter 4, p. 29.

"The strange thing was that our mother never deluded herself that Cosimo, now he had sent her a greeting, was thinking of ending his escape and retuning among us. Our father, on the other hand, lived perpetually in this hope and at the slightest news about Cosimo would repeat: 'Ah yes? You've seen him? He's coming back?'" Chapter 5, p. 40.

"He would remember the mysterious aspirated syllables, and try to mimic them, as he tried to mimic the twitter of the birds which woke him in the morning," Chapter 9, p. 65.

"Or the nut... sometimes seeing my brother lose himself in the endless spread of an old nut tree, like some palace of many floors and innumerable rooms, I found a longing coming over me to imitate him and go and live up there too; such is the strength and certainty that this tree had in being a tree, its determination to be hard and heavy expressed even in its leaves," Chapter 10, p. 69.

"While down below our world lay flattened, and our bodies looked quite disproportionate and we certainly understood nothing of what he knew up there—he who spent his nights listening to the sap running through its cells; the circles marking the years inside the



trunks; the patches of mold growing ever larger helped by the north wind; the birds sleeping and quivering in their nests, then resettling their heads in the softest down of their wings; and the caterpillar walking, and the chrysalis opening," Chapter 10, p. 70.

"'I'm sorry to tell you, Gian,' answered Cosimo, 'that Jonathan ends hanged by the neck.' 'Thank you. Like me! Good-bye!' and he himself kicked away the ladder and was strangled," Chapter 12, p. 98.

"Later Cosimo came to realize that when a problem in common no longer exists, associations are not as good as they were before, and it is better then to be a man alone and not a leader," Chapter 14, p. 107.

"The people treated him with great respect, called him 'Lord Baron,' and he came to take on certain attitudes of an older man, as young men sometimes do, and would sit there telling stories to groups of Ombrosians, clustered around the foot of the tree," Chapter 16, p. 121.

"So began their love, the boy happy and amazed, she happy and not surprised at all (nothing happens by chance to girls)," Chapter 17, pp. 131-2.

"And there, with ingenious youthful fervor, he would explain the ideas of philosophers and the wrongdoings of sovereigns, and how states should be governed by justice and reason," Chapter 18, p. 133.

"They knew each other. He knew her and so himself, for in truth he had never known himself. And she knew him and so herself, for although she had always known herself she had never been able to recognize it until now," Chapter 21, p. 159.

"'Why d'you make me suffer?' 'Because I love you.' Now it was his turn to get angry. 'No, no, you don't love me! People in love want happiness, not pain!' 'People in love want only love, even at the cost of pain,'" Chapter 22, p. 164.

"Squinting into the half-darkness, I saw that the soft vegetation below was composed chiefly of hairy busbies and flowing mustaches and beards. It was a squadron of French hussars. Having been soaked with damp during the winter campaign, toward spring all their hats were sprouting with mildew and moss," Chapter 27, p. 199.

"The dying Cosimo, at the second when the anchor rope passed near him, gave one of those leaps he so often used to do in his youth, gripped the rope, with his feet on the anchor and his body in a hunch, and so we saw him fly away, taken by the wind, scarce breaking the course of the balloon, and vanish out to sea..." Chapter 30, p. 216.



Topics for Discussion

Which do you think was the more powerful motivation never to set foot on the ground: the promise Cosimo made to Viola during their game, or the secret promise he made to himself? Which do you think came first?

What point or points do you think Cosimo was trying to make to the people around him by living his life as he did? What might he have wanted to prove to himself?

Was it hubris, naivete or boredom that made Viola insist that Cosimo suffer and compete for her instead of ever giving herself to him entirely? What, if anything, do you think would have changed in Cosimo's world of priorities and possibilities if she had stayed?

Discuss the incompatibilities Cosimo saw early between himself and his family. How did they resolve, if at all, as they got older and more used to Cosimo's lifestyle?

Discuss the possible historic parallels or archetypes each member of Cosimo's family could be used to represent. What present-day parallels might be drawn between his family members and groups or ideals shaping the modern political and international landscape?

Can you identify any mistakes Cosimo might have made, or are there choices he made that you wish he had not? Discuss what might have changed had he made the decision you would have liked to have seen.

Do you think that the type of society Cosimo envisioned was possible at the time? Is it possible today? Are justice, reason, and harmony with the earth universal enough goals that people can agree to seek them and put aside their opposing agendas? What is necessary to unite people behind a cause and what made Cosimo successful at it?

Discuss Cosimo's string of short dalliances with the local girls. Why do you think the village expressed no dismay or judgment? Being in every other point a virtuous young man, do you think his promiscuity in that time was inconsistent with the rest of his character? Do you think the reader was intended to interpret that time as a demonstration of any particular virtue in Cosimo?