

A Coin in Nine Hands Study Guide

A Coin in Nine Hands by Marguerite Yourcenar

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Plot Summary

A Coin in Nine Hands is a collection of stories about nine people who are connected by a ten lira coin that passes into various hands. In addition to the coin, each of the lives are connected by similar themes of death, loneliness and love. As this coin passes from one person to the next, detailed stories of the character holding the coin unfold. In addition to the stories revealed, there is a greater story affecting everyone to varying degrees. There is a strong sense of politics at play with the Italians under Fascist rule. The characters have differing views on their current dictator ranging from apathetic to supportive to outright rebellious. It is this rebellious aspect that brings significant action into play as an assassination attempt on the dictator stirs up many emotions.

The first main character in the story is Lina Chiari, a prostitute in Rome who is dying of breast cancer. Living in denial with her illness, she forces herself to face her own mortality as she reveals her disease. She is poor and lives a simple life, doing what she can to get by. Concerned with appearances, she either dresses up for her clients - or modestly for the doctor. Eager to go to her death revealing nothing to others, she buys a tube of lipstick to put her game face back on. Giulio Lovisi, an unhappily married cosmetic shop owner, also puts on an act of contrition as he goes to church to pray, though he prays for an end to his sad existence with his resentful wife and abandoned daughter and grandchild. He dreams of elaborate ways to escape his situation, though he knows it is fruitless.

Rosalia di Credo, who is dedicated to her family, is also fiercely dedicated to Gemara, the place of her wonderful childhood in Sicily. She sacrifices her own happiness to care for her ailing father, Ruggero, and wayward sister, Angiola. After a string of failed relationships, Angiola finally agrees to settle down in a normal life with Paolo Farina. Quickly bored with this predictable life, she takes off with another lover and leaves town. Once the marriage ends, Paolo refuses to continue mortgage payments on Gemara and lets it be sold at public auction. This is too much for Rosalia to bear, so she commits suicide.

Marcella, a former nurse who is now a political activist, reveals her plans to assassinate the dictator. Neither her friend, Massimo, nor her former husband, Alessandro, believes she will carry out the plans. Alessandro and Marcella admit they still love each other and acknowledge that it is only because of their political differences that they parted ways. It is Alessandro who breaks the news of Carlo Stevo's death, a fellow political rebel and friend. Determined to make an impact, Marcella embraces her destiny and fulfills her plan, although she is not successful. She is caught and beaten to death.

With the excitement in the area, Mother Dida an old lady who sells flowers, is required to spend the night sleeping outside. Although she has enough money to take a cab if she wishes, she does not want her family to know she has any money, so instead, she hoards her money. While she is preparing to end her night, she encounters the French painter, Clement Roux, who she mistakes as a beggar. He is in ailing condition because his heart is ready to give out. Clement encounters Massimo, who has come from the

plaza where the assassination attempt just took place. Massimo finds a taxi for the dying painter and goes home for the night.



Section 1, Pages 1-6

Section 1, Pages 1-6 Summary

A Coin in Nine Hands is a collection of stories about nine people who are connected by a ten lira coin that passes into various hands. In addition to the coin, each of the lives are connected by similar themes of death, loneliness and love. As this coin passes from one person to the next, detailed stories of the character holding the coin unfold. In addition to the stories revealed, there is a greater story affecting everyone to varying degrees. There is a strong sense of politics at play with the Italians under Fascist rule. The characters have differing views on their current dictator ranging from apathetic to supportive to outright rebellious. It is this rebellious aspect that brings significant action into play as an assassination attempt on the dictator stirs up many emotions.

Paolo Farina is suffering grief over the departure of his wife, Angiola. After six months of marriage, she leaves him for another man, which devastates Paolo. It turns out that Angiola marries Paolo because he is her rebound relationship. Paolo recognizes that he is the opposite of the type of man Angiola is normally attracted to. In his loneliness since his wife's departure, Paolo increasingly spends more time on business trips to Rome. It is in Rome that he feels he can live a little freer than in Tuscany. While in Rome, he meets a prostitute named Lina Chiari. Although he has little money, he arranges to see her on a weekly basis.

Section 1, Pages 1-6 Analysis

The stage is set for the first set of disappointments and unhappiness in each character's lives. Given the circumstances under which they came together, Paolo and Angiola's marriage is doomed from the start. Angiola is a restless woman, who is attracted to unreliable and usually unkind men. Paolo, previously a boring man living a mundane existence, makes a transition to becoming the type of man for which Angiola leaves him. For Paolo, though, his transformation is merely a gesture done out of hurt and grief over a lost love.



Section 2, Pages 7-16

Section 2, Pages 7-16 Summary

Giving in to the inevitable, Lina finally makes an appointment to see a doctor. Going over the financial problems in her mind, she chides herself for not taking a cab, though she tries to be economical. As she walks through the afternoon streets, she is mindful not to be conspicuous as a prostitute. Trying to not attract attention, she walks fast. As a hooker, she is used to walking at a much slower pace. She arrives at the doctor's office and waits her turn to see him.

For Lina, the worst part is acknowledging that something is wrong. So when the doctor finishes with his exam, she feels a sense of relief wash over her. He tells her that she needs an operation, which she will have the next week. Dr. Sarte operates on a particular day for the poor people that cannot pay. As Lina leaves, she feels distraught and grief-stricken, since she now knows she has breast cancer. The worst is happening to her and she plans on her death coming within the next few days.

Lina strolls past a poster announcing a speech by the dictator scheduled for that night and stops to read an ad by the movie theatre instead. She then realizes that she has left her lipstick at the doctor's office but chooses not to go back. Instead, she buys another one with a new ten lira piece that Paolo has given her. She decides that she also needs to buy proper nightgowns for the hospital, since she does not want to die in pink silk. From there, she goes to see Massimo, her friend, who only talks about his problems. She is sure that she can act as if all is well, so Massimo will not suspect that anything is wrong with her.

Section 2, Pages 7-16 Analysis

Lina knows she is very ill and is in denial about it. However, it is not the acknowledgement about the disease itself that she has trouble facing. It is the fact that she has gone to great lengths to hide her illness so that no one will ever find out. Lina admits that once she reveals her secret, the worst part is over. For Lina, suffering through the disease is not as bad as admitting she has it. In the end, she decides act as though nothing is wrong and live out her remaining days quietly.



Section 3, Pages 17-34

Section 3, Pages 17-34 Summary

Giulio Lovisi, a cosmetics shop owner on the Corso closes up and steps out into the early evening. Over the course of his thirty years in this location, he recalls the many things that change including women's hemlines and automobiles. On his way home, he stops at a church to pray. His wife, Giuseppa, makes his life miserable. As he prays, he reflects on his unhappy life. No matter how hard he tries, he cannot appease his wife. Giulio remembers how, during his days in the army, Giuseppa ran the shop. During his absence, a wealthy banker regularly came by and courted her. She throws it in his face that this happened and the good life that she could have had. Giuseppa is also a jealous woman by nature. In a rage, she forces Giulio to fire a young, English woman, who works part time in his shop. At the church, Giulio encounters Rosalia di Credo, who sells votive candles. They talk about his daughter and her plight with her deported husband and sick child. Giulio comments on how his son-in-law has gone on the offensive against the country's ruler, which is why he is sent away in exile. Giulio remarks to Rosalia that he told his famous son-in-law on several occasions that bad things would happen if he did not change. This, however, is untrue as Giulio only says this to appear to others as though he never approved of the match with his daughter. At the time of the marriage, Giulio did approve of his daughter's husband and even boasted to others that his daughter was marrying a famous writer.

Rosalia asks Giulio if he knows where Carlo is being held. Giulio tells her it is some island near Sicily. When she hears him say Sicily, it evokes strong memories for her. Giulio, however, does not notice how reverently she whispers the name. If he was able to truly hear her, he would have recognized that she, like he, is a person exiled from happiness. Instead, he goes on to talk about Vanna and how difficult the entire ordeal has been for her. Giulio tells Rosalia that Giuseppa has to get up every night to pray with Vanna in order to calm her down enough to sleep.

As he sits in the church, the English woman from his shop arrives, although he does not see her. She, however, sees him. Quickly looking away, she prefers that he does not see her. Her main reason for coming into the church is to hear some more music before she departs Italy. She reflects upon her time in Italy and frets over her money situation. As she sits for a while, she prays that the Lord allows her to have her secretary job once she gets back home to England.

Giulio lights five votives in honor and prayer for the Blessed Virgin. Although he lights the candles in order to pray for others, he also asks for help in his life. He continues thinking about his life, about his poor daughter and about Miss Jones. He wishes to free himself of his life's trappings but realizes that to do so, he would need to be rich, as well as a criminal. He knows that in reality he is not capable of any existence other than the one he has. Despite his reflections and feelings of futility, he sees hope in lighting the votives in church.



Section 3, Pages 17-34 Analysis

Giulio Lovisi is an example of the unhappiness and loneliness that many of the characters in the story experience. Every page in this section details the excruciating agony that Giulio feels toward his life. He prays in church for some release from the misery, but it does not come. His wife, Giuseppa, gives him grief about everything she can possibly think of, his daughter Vanna is abandoned by her husband, which upsets him, and finally, he despises his son-in-law for creating the situation that contributes to his already unhappy situation.



Section 4, Pages 35-58

Section 4, Pages 35-58 Summary

Rosalia di Credo is a beautiful, yet weary, woman. Her life in Gemara is a distinguishing characteristic about who she is. Gemara is not merely a house in Sicily; it has a life of its own. Rosalia is fiercely dedicated to her sister, Angiola, her father, Ruggero, and her home at Gemara. The centuries old house had once been a magnificent estate and is now shabby. Much of the home's deterioration has to do simply with its age. It has been in the di Credo family for six centuries. Over the course of time, parts of the building's edifice has crumbled, and much of the surrounding forestry has been removed.

Growing up, Rosalia's family does not have much money, although Ruggero speaks as though they did and of his daughters marrying princes. In her reflections of him, Rosalia pictures him with the disposition like any hired farmhand. This image of him is at odds, however, with how he really is. He has the disposition of a farmhand, though he has never worked his land. Instead, Ruggero is bent on discovering treasure. At first it is water he hunts for, and this eventually gives way to a search for real treasure. He becomes known in the neighborhood for his dowsing stick.

Ruggero is extremely protective of his two daughters, so much so that it borders on incest. They are not allowed to speak to any man - even the priest. When the girls reach the proper age, there is not enough money in the family to send them for the education befitting them. Their only education consists of what Ruggero teaches them of raucous music-hall songs and fragments of Greek verse.

As Rosalia and her sister, Angiola, get older, the town people converge on the house and claim that Ruggero is guilty of witchcraft. Over the years, strange happenings seem to surround Ruggero. If someone got in his way, their crops would die; accidents that occurred too suddenly to be natural were also blamed on him. During this one particular incident, Ruggero accidentally shoots a priest. Even as the priest believes he is dying, he exclaims to everyone to "bleed the devil," as the priest, too, believes Ruggero is evil. Unfortunately for the priest, the gathered crowd suddenly becomes afraid and they cease their protests.

Still, this marks the downfall of the di Credos' time at Gemara, as they are forced to leave Sicily shortly thereafter. The townspeople do not realize that they are destroying more than the house in which the di Credos live, but the invisible edifice which surrounds the family. After they arrive in Rome, their relatives pay for Angiola to receive schooling at a convent. For the three years that Angiola is gone, Rosalia finds solace in her absence. She continues to wait for Angiola to return and for the family's trip back to Gemara in Sicily. Once her schooling is complete, Angiola comes home. With her education and newfound grace, Rosalia secures Angiola a position as the companion for the Princess of Trapani. Angiola runs off with a month's advance pay without any word as to where she is going. Rosalia surmises that Angiola has not left



unaccompanied. Rosalia puts ads in the papers in an effort to find Angiola, but the search comes up empty. Rosalia later believes that Angiola's former lover from Palermo has come back for her.

Some time later Angiola returns, and Rosalia surmises that Angiola has suffered loss in her love life. Although Angiola never tells Rosalia what happened, Rosalia knows just from the look on her sister's face. Rosalia takes care of Angiola, who is nursing a broken heart. She believes that Angiola is truly contrite and goes out of her way to care for her, even at the expense of going without things Rosalia needs. It is during this time that Rosalia learns that Angiola is visited by a kind, though not handsome man—Paolo Farina. When he proposes, Angiola accepts. Rosalia helps them set their house up in Pietrasanta. She also entrusts her income to Paolo to handle. He then makes trips to Sicily for Rosalia, which takes him away from his new wife.

Although Rosalia dislikes Paolo in the beginning, she comes to pity him once she hears that Angiola has left him after only a few months of marriage. Angiola leaves him for the second tenor of an opera troupe, which had recently performed in a Florence theatre. In retaliation, Paolo stops paying the interest on the Gemara mortgage. When Rosalia sees Paolo in a cafe with another woman who is replacing her sister, Rosalia gets angry and creates a scene. She knows that Angiola may be happy wherever she went, but relies on her misfortunes in order to be happy. In her mind, Rosalia imagines that Angiola will come back once more broken hearted, and they can live and work together.

One day, Rosalia comes home to find a letter from Paolo stating that Gemara is going to be sold at a public auction. As she reads this, the life seems to go right out of her. She calls to a neighbor for glowing embers to warm her room. She pays the woman with the ten-lira coin that she received earlier in the church from Giulio Lovisi. Not paying any mind to what she is doing, her clothes quickly catch fire from the embers. Instead of putting the fire out, it consumes her, and she collapses on the bed. Her neighbors arrive too late to save her, and she dies.

Section 4, Pages 35-58 Analysis

Rosalia is so caught up in everyone else's life that she fails to take the time to do things for herself, such as get proper schooling, like Angiola does, and find a husband. The important things to her such as her father, sister, and Gemara take precedence over her own happiness. When all those things turn against her, she immediately recognizes that she has nothing to live for, so she commits suicide.



Section 5, Pages 59-101

Section 5, Pages 59-101 Summary

Vanna goes to visit Marcella Sarta for news of her husband, Carlo. Massimo answers the door and ushers her in because they cannot speak in the hallway without being overheard by the neighbors. Vanna is surprised that Massimo knows who she is. Marcella calms Vanna's fears by assuring her that Massimo knows everything about Carlo's situation because he is Carlo's closest friend. Vanna suggests that maybe Carlo will come home. Marcella immediately says he will never return. As Vanna has not heard any news in three months, she turns to Marcella in hopes that Marcella knows something. Marcella tells her that she does not have any more information than Vanna has.

The women argue over Carlo, his political involvement and subsequent exile. Vanna is jealous and believes that there may be more going on between Marcella and her husband. Massimo confirms that Carlo has sent no word on his situation, although Vanna knows that it is not good with his illness. She blames Marcella for his deportation. Marcella held secret meetings, which Carlo attended, in order to subvert the current Fascist regime. She also kept a room for Carlo where he could stay.

Massimo reveals to Vanna the newspaper he is holding. Vanna uses the opportunity to admit things that she cannot admit to her own family, such as resentment about her daughter's paralysis. Although she does not say it, she has had thoughts of killing the child by suffocating it and then killing herself. Massimo then points out the newspaper to Vanna. In it is information stating that Carlo has renounced his rebellion and has named names in order to cooperate. Marcella is enraged to learn of this news, while Vanna is encouraged; she now thinks her husband will return home. Massimo points out that the names Carlo gave were already compromised individuals, so he did not actually reveal any new information. When Marcella demands to know why Massimo has not told her sooner, he says it was because he felt sorry for Massimo.

Vanna, after reading the news, takes out her makeup and begins to make herself beautiful, thinking she will see her husband shortly. Massimo knows that she is deluded because he knows Carlo will not come home any time soon—at least not alive. At that moment the doorbell rings and Marcella needs both Massimo and Vanna to leave immediately. Marcella sends Massimo toward a back entrance so he can leave without being seen, and Vanna leaves as Marcella's guest enters. Marcella is surprised to see that her estranged husband, the doctor Alessandro Sarta, has come to visit. The two have been separated for four years as a result of their divergent political views. He is a member of the Fascist Party, while she is a political rebel. When he finds out that it is Vanna who just left, he calls Vanna a witch, although he treats Vanna's daughter as a patient. Marcella tells him that Vanna was only there for information.



Marcella implies that Alessandro got his big break with the Fascist Party because he operated on an important party member. This gets him the notoriety he now has. Marcella accuses Alessandro of only using the poor clients to further his career and experiment on. She goes on to yell at him for his lifestyle and the cars and women that he goes through. Although he tells her that it is a tribute to her that he quickly tires of these things, she does not believe him. He sees the ashtray on her table and asks if Massimo has been there. In response she asks him if he is having her watched, and he admits that he keeps an eye out for her. Alessandro lets her know that this is how she is able to remain free of Fascist entanglements with the law.

They talk of the early days of their marriage and the problems they encountered. Alessandro says that he hoped marrying Marcella would settle her down. She says that she agreed to the marriage so he could help her father. After they married, he did not do as he agreed, and she did not settle down enough. She is angry at him for joining the Fascist Party and not helping her father and her cause. Alessandro is highly impressed by their dictator.

He goes on to tell her of the day's news that Carlo is dead. Initially she is upset, then resigned. When Alessandro discovers that Marcella has a gun in her possession, which used to belong to him, she reveals to him that she plans on killing their leader as he gives a public speech. Despite their differences and quarrels, they find out that they still love each other. After Alessandro leaves, Marcella discovers Massimo hiding in another room. He knows of her assassination plot and follows distantly behind as she goes on her way into the night. She carries out her plan but misses her target.

Section 5, Pages 59-101 Analysis

Marcella's path to destruction is due in part to the guilt she feels over her parents. Although she falls in love and marries Alessandro, she becomes repulsed by the advantageous arrangement because she somehow sees it as betraying her parents' lives. By abandoning Alessandro and becoming a political rebel, she is moving - on schedule - toward her tragic reality. She does not feel she is good enough to enjoy the good life and the rewards of being married to an affluent doctor.



Section 6, Pages 102-118

Section 6, Pages 102-118 Summary

Angiola Farina sneaks out to watch her idol on the big screen. She has taken up with Sir Julius Stein, who is visiting Rome. After a day of walking through the streets and being a tourist, he is tired and dozing in an easy chair. Angiola takes the opportunity to dress up and go out. She takes a car and goes to see a movie. On the way, she thinks of all the places that Angiola Fides has been. She goes to the Mondo Theatre to watch her idol on the screen. She mimicks Angiola Fides in every physical respect such as her clothing, makeup and hairstyle. As she watches the movie, she makes comparisons between her life and the actress' life. She also makes comparisons between her father and sister and their impact on her life as it relates to Angiola Fides' on-screen character.

Not long after she arrives, Alessandro Sarte is ushered in. He has Marcella on his mind and is doubtful that she will come to the theatre. It is raining outside, and he is reluctant to go home. He wonders if Marcella will be successful in her quest. After he left her earlier, he had himself driven to the Balbo Palace. He is prepared to defend her, even though he does not approve of her actions. After waiting at their agreed upon meeting place at the Mondo Theatre, he realizes that she will not show. He thinks she has failed and will not want to flaunt this failure to him. He also begins to think that maybe she will show up at his home after failing. Alessandro realizes at this moment that the thing he loves most about her is the courage he believes she lacks. Regardless of what happens, he knows that because of their marriage, he will be called on to account for her whereabouts from the Fascist Party.

Alessandro becomes drawn to Angiola Farina, thinking she looks just like Angiola Fides. They proceed to have a romantic encounter while the movie is still playing. After their interlude ends, they both look for ways to rid themselves of each other. Neither has the intention to stay involved or pursue any further relationship. They act uncomfortable around each other, and Angiola goes so far as to blatantly lie to Alessandro. She pretends that she is a foreigner and only passing through Rome. He is aware that she is lying but pays her little mind. As she gets into her car to leave, Alessandro buys flowers from a nearby vendor and passes off the ten lira coin. This is also when he hears about the failed assassination attempt. He goes to the local police station where he sees Marcella's dead body.

Section 6, Pages 102-118 Analysis

As most characters in the story are seeking an escape from their current woes, Alessandro and Angiola briefly succeed during their movie theatre encounter. Alessandro comes in off the street from where he is anxiously waiting for Marcella, who does not come. Entering the darkness, he is able to make bold moves and temporarily leave his image at the door. Angiola, on the other hand, is living out her fantasy of being

her movie star idol. To her, the life of Angiola Fides is better and more glamorous than her own. She sees the encounter with Alessandro as merely an act, just as the movie starlet might also do.



Section 7, Pages 119-134

Section 7, Pages 119-134 Summary

Old Mother Dida sells flowers near the theatre. She reflects on her long life and the things that she has done. As a young woman, she was beautiful, and as an old woman she is described as looking like a tree trunk. Growing up she had so many brothers and sisters that she was unable to keep their names straight. After her mother dies, she takes over the household. The entire family worked in their vineyards. She marries her first husband, who is a gardener. Mother Dida has eight or nine children by him; she does not recall exactly how many. They, too, all come to work in the vineyard. Her first husband is killed by an express train.

Dida recalls the hard times as well. Her eldest son is killed in World War I. She hires another man to help with the heavy work at the vineyards and eventually becomes romantically involved with him. They have a child together, but she then wants to fire him. Her sons gang up on him and throw him out. Her stinginess becomes more pronounced, and she refuses things for her children. One by one, they start to leave, though a few remain behind. Her son, Ilario, recognizes that selling flowers is a great way to make money. Her remaining children help grow the flowers. Every morning now, her son, Ilario, drops her off, so she can spend her day selling the flowers. Father Cicca, a local priest, helped get her this spot almost thirty years ago. Her location is next to the Mondo Theatre, where foot traffic is good for her business. She goes home on the last bus each day.

Father Cicca comes by and jokes with her that she will go to hell for not donating flowers to his church. Still, she refuses to let any of her flowers go. It is raining out, which is bad for business. Her business suffers because of the political speeches taking place nearby. Now with the rain, she misses her last bus and contemplates her plan until morning. Although there is not much left to the nighttime, she decides that she can sleep in the courtyard of the Conti Palace where she knows the janitor.

The cafe owner tells her about the assassination attempt. Dida is hard of hearing, so she talks about the bad weather in response. The owner continues to talk about the excitement of the event. The owner goes on to say that the shot came close to the dictator and hit a nearby car window. In addition, the owner is more interested by the fact that the assassin is a woman. Wrapping up her story, the owner ends by telling Dida that the woman, of course, is dead. Before the owner leaves Dida, she indicates that there is a pool of the woman's blood at the entrance to the Santo Giovanni Martire.

After hearing the story from the cafe owner, Dida is afraid to be alone. Caught up in the action, the owner fails to realize that Dida is alone with no way home for the night. Dida thinks about the assassin and how it must have taken a great deal of courage to carry out her plan. Making sure that no one is watching her, she makes the sign of the cross



for her. The gesture costs nothing for her and might help one day if someone does the same for her.

As Dida tries to sleep for the remaining hours of the night, she is startled when she hears someone draw close to her. She sees it is a destitute individual clutching the walls as he walks on by. The man does not look dangerous to her. On the contrary, she sees something different about this person. Despite her stinginess, she offers a coin to a man she thinks is a street bum. It is the ten lira coin. At first she thinks he might not take it, but he does, without saying a word in return.

Section 7, Pages 119-134 Analysis

Death seems to surround Mother Dida, as it does for many other characters. She is widowed twice and works hard for the money for which she is convinced her children will murder her. This is one of her foremost thoughts, that she faces death on a daily basis. Ironically, although she will refuse her children and even a priest, she does feel some amount of guilt. This is evidenced at the end of the section as she hands the shiny ten lira piece to Clement, who she thinks is a beggar. She would not have done this if she had not felt some guilt over the money.



Section 8, Pages 135-155

Section 8, Pages 135-155 Summary

Clement Roux walks through the rainy night and stops for a moment. He is a seventy-year-old painter, who is suffering from a heart condition. As a way of diverting attention from his pain, he thinks about Rome and how the beauty has gone from it. He has vials of amyl nitrate, which helps calm his heart down long enough for a reprieve.

While waiting for his heart to calm down, he encounters Massimo. Massimo finds a spot for Clement to sit and asks if he has a problem with his heart. As Clement sits with Massimo, he becomes less afraid of dying. He is vaguely aware that there will be another attack probably not too far off in the future. He watches Massimo intently and notices that Massimo is shaking as Massimo tries to light a cigarette. Clement thinks that Massimo just pulled a bad job. He holds out his hand for a cigarette, and Massimo tells him that it is bad for his health.

Massimo is distraught over learning that Marcella has failed in her assassination attempt on the dictator. He tries to make sense out of both the deaths of Carlo and Marcella. To him, it feels like hundreds of years have passed between their deaths and the moment before him. Clement's presence makes Massimo feel better and takes his mind a little off of the evening's events. Clement talks about Rome and how he no longer finds it as beautiful as it used to be. Massimo mistakes Clement's nighttime walk for his attendance at the dictator's speech. Clement insists that his walk had nothing to do with going to hear the speech.

Massimo recognizes Clement as a famous painter, and they talk about his work. He is still upset over Marcella's death and uses Clement as a distraction from what is going on in his mind. He plays images of Marcella in his head, as well as what the authorities might say and do. He is afraid that the authorities will want to question him on his association with Marcella. He believes they will think him incompetent or an accomplice. At the very least, he expects to be deported back to home. With these thoughts going through his mind, he starts to cry and Clement sees it. Clement asks why Massimo is crying, and Massimo tells him that a woman was killed that night. He immediately regrets telling the old man, though the moment passes quickly.

Although Massimo is concerned about the old man's health, Clement insists on walking together for a little while. Clement asks about the woman and asks Massimo if he was there for the speech. Massimo adamantly denies he was there. He goes on to tell Clement that the dictator was unhurt and that Marcella only missed by a hair. While Clement calls it luck, he says that eventually his luck will run out.

Massimo speaks of Marcella's act and his involvement in riddles. Clement knows that he is lying about something but has no idea what. Massimo believes that Marcella must have died despising him. Clement asks him where he is from and wants to know what



his address is. Massimo only tells him that he has an address until the next morning. When Clement asks what Massimo does for a living, Massimo tells him that he deals in false passports.

Clement still fears that he will not be able to see too much more of Rome. He knows that he also might die that night. He wants to keep walking as he thinks this may put off death. He fantasizes about what the morning papers might say; that he was found dead and even mugged. He quickly gets the thought out of his mind. Clement believes that if something were to happen to him while they walk that Massimo will get help for him, and he will not be left to die alone. Massimo wants to get Clement into a cab, so Clement can get home safely, but Clement continues walking. He then begins to talk about the World War I. He remarks that he was too old by that point to be in the army.

Clement carries on about the tides of fame in regards to art and how styles go in and out of fashion. Massimo sees another taxi pass and contemplates whether or not he should flag it down for the painter. Clement knows that he is near the end of his life, and he is contemplating that death will occur in the near future. While listening to Clement's tale and successes, Massimo wonders where he will end up. Massimo wonders what type of job he will have, perhaps a hotel employee, a journalist, or an aging Narcissus.

Massimo likens art's timelessness to Carlo Stevo. He talks to Clement about Carlo, who is familiar with his work. He says that when people find out the next day that he is dead, they will talk about him more. Massimo goes on to talk about how quickly oblivion comes. He feels that similar to art that is out of fashion, Carlo's work will fade into the background. He talks about the letter Carlo wrote that gave names to clear his name. Massimo knows that this was done by a dying man, and people need to realize it. He knows that Carlo has gone all the way with his beliefs.

Massimo and Clement continue walking and approach a piazza with a fountain. Clement finds it beautiful and asks Massimo to help him get to the base so he can sit on it for a while. Clement points things out to Massimo that he says are beautiful in Rome and worth seeing before leaving. It is getting late, and Clement feels the cold set in. As Clement's ramblings begin to sound like Clement is drunk, Massimo is concerned about getting Clement back to his hotel.

Clement takes the ten lira coin out of his pocket and relates the story of how he came to get the coin. He says that a woman by the movie theatre had mistaken him for a bum and given it to him. He describes Mother Dida as a kind woman, who had mistaken him for a beggar. Then he talks about the old saying that people that toss a coin in the fountain are guaranteed to return to Rome. Massimo hails a cab to send Clement on his way. Before Clement gets into the cab, he throws the ten lira coin into a fountain and misses. Instead, the coin gets lodged in between the rocks.



Section 8, Pages 135-155 Analysis

Clement Roux feels death hanging over him, though not like any other character in the story. The other main characters long for death as an escape, but Clement longs to cheat death. He knows that his death is inevitable but he fights as hard as he can in order to prolong his visit in Rome and complete his unfinished work. This sets him apart as a character with some semblance of hope, however futile his efforts may be.



Section 9, Pages 156-167

Section 9, Pages 156-167 Summary

It is nighttime, and most people in Rome are in bed for the night. Paolo Farina is in a second-class cabin on a ship called the Sea of Sicily. It is dark, and his snoring mingles with the sounds of the ship. He replays in his slumbering mind the latest business he is conducting. Giulio Lovisi is going over his accounts while Giuseppa and Vanna are whispering to each other. The women are talking about Carlo's impending return home. They whisper to keep from waking the baby, though the baby is awake. The baby can sense the excitement in the house.

Alessandro is at the police station after being detained for questioning. He is tired but in control of his situation. He is explaining what he knows about his wife's whereabouts for the last several months, which to the police amounts to nothing. Don Ruggero sleeps in his asylum and Lina Chiari sleeps with her cancer. She dreams of Massimo, who does not dream of her. Clement Roux is asleep in his room at the Caesar Palace, finally resting after his long stroll that night. In a nearby room, Angiola Farina also slumbers.

Miss Jones misses her train because she did not want to leave the movie theatre early. She rents a squalid room by the train station. Dida sleeps in the courtyard. Her son begins to wonder where she is, since she did not show up at home. At two in the morning, Massimo eats a sandwich and drinks coffee at a bar by the train station. He sleeps for a while and wakes up suddenly to pack some items. He puts his suitcase back under his bed because he does not want to appear as though he is leaving in a hurry. He picks up a book by Carlo Stevo and returns to sleep.

News is being prepared for the following day to cover the assassination attempt on the dictator. Oreste, in an attempt to clear the fountains of coins for his use, comes across the ten lira coin lodged in the rock by Clement. He is disappointed because the ten lira coin is the largest one he extracts from the fountain. He wonders if there are fewer tourists in Rome or if they are merely poorer. For a moment he thinks about calling his gang back for a round of drinks but thinks twice about it and decides to go it alone.

Oreste decides to go to a cafe and buy some wine. He thinks about his wife, who is expecting their fourth child. His mind is on the future and health of this child. He drinks a few bottles of wine and gradually becomes more inebriated. The English Miss Jones is at the cafe as she prepares to leave Italy for home. Oreste contemplates getting acquainted with Miss Jones but thinks twice about it when he gets closer and sees that she is not as young as he originally thought. Drunk and in a content state, he falls over in his chair and passes out.



Section 9, Pages 156-167 Analysis

After the previous sections, this last section is the first to offer any sense of hope in the book. Oreste is the first character to drink to health and pray for the health and security for his unborn child. Most of the other characters reflect purely selfish reasons for their actions. There seems to be little of true love and devotion among them. However, Oreste's desire for his child is pure. Ironically, although his prayers are genuine, he is a thief as is evident when he makes his entrance to the story as he is attempting to steal coins from the fountain.



Characters

Paolo Farina

Paolo Farina is a kind and stable man, who marries Angiola after she is dumped by a previous lover. After only six months of marriage, she leaves him for a man in a local acting troupe. He knows in the back of his mind that she is never going to love him as his wife. He fools himself that she has the right background and uses it to convince others in his village, although they also know that the marriage is a sham from the beginning. No one is terribly surprised by the breakup. As a way of dealing with his grief, Paolo seeks the company of a prostitute in Rome. Although he goes to Rome frequently for business trips, he now goes more than he needs to. He sees Lina regularly, once a week.

While in Rome he also visits Rosalia di Credo, who is Angiola's sister. He visits Rosalia in order to get word about Angiola, but she never has any. As part of the marriage contract, Paolo agrees to make mortgage payments on Gemara, which is Rosalia and Angiola's home in Sicily. They are forced to move due to lack of funds. However, after Angiola leaves Paolo, he lets Rosalia know that he will cease making payments. After some time, he alerts her that Gemara will be sold at public auction.

Angiola Farina

Angiola is Paolo's wife. After she is dumped by her lover, Tripani, she goes into mourning, which is when she meets Paolo. He is kind to her, and she fleetingly thinks that maybe she should be repentant and go along with his proposal, so she accepts. Her sister, Rosalia, helps to set up her new home with Paolo. Since she never really loves Paolo, she leaves him after being married only six months. Although her upbringing seems to be proper, or so say the people in Tuscany, she does not carry on this way. While living in Rome, she takes on the persona of her favorite movie star, Angiola Fides. She imagines her life to be like Angiola's, which she envisions as perfect.

After her interlude with Alessandro in the movie theatre, her clothes and general appearance make her appear as a foreigner. When Alessandro asks where she is from, she answers that she is only passing through Rome. It is obvious that she is lying, and he is aware of it. She tells herself that she only allows him pleasure, since she is acting as her movie star heroine.

Lina Chiari

Lina is a prostitute who lives in Rome. She is poor and very sick. Paolo Farina is a regular customer when he makes his weekly business trips to the city. Lina is tired and in pain most of the time. She is well aware of the fact that she is very sick, though she has lived in denial about it for some time. Concerned that her clients will see her



growing illness on her body, she insists on wearing her slip almost all the time. She knows that if anyone sees her swollen breast, she will lose her clients and not be able to pay her rent at all, which is behind as it is.

She gets a recommendation from her friend Massimo to visit Dr. Sarte. To her, the worst part of the illness is admitting to someone else that there is a problem. Once her secret is out, she is seemingly fine about her illness and operation that the doctor tells her she must have. Although she is grieved at first, she is quickly at peace with knowing her death is imminent. Her secret is out with the doctor, but she insists that she will not tell anyone else. She is in love with Massimo, although he is not in love with her. She cannot tell Massimo her news as he usually goes to her with his problems. Also, she knows that she will not get from him the care, attention or love that she craves.

Professor Alessandro Sarte

Dr. Alessandro Sarte is the doctor that Lina visits about her breast cancer. He is a well-known doctor who treats poor patients. He is also married to Marcella Sarte, who attempts to assassinate the dictator. He is an active and well-respected member of the Fascist Party. Alessandro learns of Marcella's plan to shoot the dictator minutes before she heads out into the night to carry out her intentions. In the back of his mind, he knows that when it happens he will be called in for questioning, since they are married, although they have been separated for four years. Although he and Marcella parted due to political differences, they still love each other.

Alessandro vows to wait for Marcella at the Mondo Theatre after the appointed time that she says she will shoot the dictator. Deep down, he somehow does not believe that she will go through with it, though he may be in denial. When she fails to show, he goes in to the movie theatre, where an Angiola Fides movie is playing. He encounters Angiola Farina, and they share a romantic interlude. He does this only as a means of distracting himself from Marcella and seeking momentary company. After he leaves the theatre and sends Angiola off with fresh flowers, he discovers that Marcella has carried out her plans. He rushes to the local police station where her dead body remains.

Massimo Iacovleff

Massimo is twenty-two, handsome and not a native Italian. He is originally from Russia and works as a dealer in false passports. He is in love with Marcella, who carries out an assassination plot against the dictator. When she fails, he is devastated. He is Lina's closest companion. Close as they may be, however, Lina does not feel that she can confide in Massimo when she discovers she is ill. With Lina, Massimo tends to bemoan his life, his problems and his issues. He leans on her for support but offers her none in return. According to Lina, tender compassion is the one thing Massimo expects from women.



Giulio Lovisi

Giulio is the owner of a cosmetics shop. He has been in business for thirty years selling perfumes, creams, and toiletries. Giulio is almost sixty years old and has been married to his wife for as many years as he has been in business. His wife, Giuseppa, is a naturally miserable woman, who seems to grow more so as the years go on. She constantly plagues Giulio's existence with problems and insults. She is a jealous woman, who forces Giulio to fire the English Miss Jones from working in his cosmetics shop. He is unhappy with his life and fantasizes about ways to escape the dreariness, including looking forward to dying. One avenue he explores is becoming a criminal. He believes that if he has enough money and commits enough crime, he will be free of his miserable life, although he knows that it is not an existence that he would be able to maintain for long. His daughter, Vanna, is married to Carlo Stevo, a well-known writer who is exiled for his political involvements. Vanna, therefore, moves back in with her parents, who care for her and her sick daughter, who has infantile paralysis (polio).

Giuseppa Lovisi

Giuseppa is Giulio's wife. She is a large and aging woman, who is also very jealous by nature. She also has a sour disposition, which is demonstrated as she berates Giulio for everything that he does. She blames Giulio for her troubles and is insulting. During the time that Giulio served in the war, she met and was courted by another man. This is something that she throws in Giulio's face. Giuseppa also has a jealous streak, which she shows by making a scene in his shop and forces Giulio to fire a female clerk Giuseppa sees as a threat.

Carlo Stevo

Carlo is a famed writer, who marries Giulio's daughter, Vanna. He comes to meet the Lovisi's by becoming their tenant in Ostia. Vanna falls in love with him after the Lovisi's care for him when he contracts pneumonia. After he marries Vanna and they have a daughter, he is deported. Giulio claims that he dislikes Carlo from the beginning, though, in fact, he continually talks about Carlo's fame and his writing. Carlo stirs up political interest when he attacks the country's leader. Although he recovers from the pneumonia, he remains sickly in exile. His cohorts in political scheming, Massimo and Marcella, fervently disbelieve the reports that he has renounced his beliefs. They discover this shortly before they find out that he has died.

Rosalia di Credo

Rosalia di Credo is the woman selling votives in the church that Giulio goes to see at the end of his day. She is an old maid who takes care of her mother and worries about her younger sister. It is her father that she sees as the love of her childhood. Rosalia misses her sister and despises her brother-in-law for taking him away from her. Her



father is very protective of her and her sister. As she gets older, she sees her home at Gemara deteriorate further until her family is forced to leave Sicily for the mainland Italy.

Marcella Ardeati Sarta

Marcella is married to Dr. Alessandro Sarta. They met when she worked as Alessandro's nurse. It is their divergent political views that cause them to separate, although they apparently still love each other. She is a political activist and reveals that she is planning an assassination attempt against Italy's Fascist leader. Her beliefs are firm, though neither Massimo nor Alessandro take her seriously when she says she will shoot the dictator. On the surface, they go along with her, but they both believe she will back out of her plans at the last minute. She goes to the place where the dictator is giving a speech and fires off a round of bullets, which narrowly miss him. The authorities capture her, and she is beaten to death. Alessandro finds her dead body at the police station.

Mother Dida

Mother Dida is a flower vendor in Rome. She is old and chooses to spend her days selling flowers. Throughout her long life, she is widowed twice and gives birth to many children, some of whom are still living. Dida has a tough work ethic and expects her children to work just as hard. Many people see her as stingy, including a local priest who asks her to donate flowers to his church, but she refuses. It is her belief that if she holds on to the money that she has, she will have it in case of an emergency. It crosses her mind that perhaps others, including her children, will come kill her for her money. When she misses her bus the night of the assassination attempt, she chooses to sleep near her flower stand rather than pay for a cab home.

Clement Roux

Clement is the eighth person in the chain of nine to get his hands on the ten lira coin. He is a famous painter from France, who is visiting Rome before he dies. He suffers from a bad heart condition that is eating away at his remaining time. Massimo comes to his aid as Clement falters and obliges the old man by accompanying him for a late night walk through the streets of Rome. Clement comments on the changes in Rome since Clement's earlier days. He feels that all the beauty is gone from the legendary city. He feels death coming for him and tries to fight it as much as he can. If he can convince himself that his work is unfinished, then he will be allowed to live a little longer than his seventy years to accomplish more. Before Massimo whisks him off into a cab to go home, he tosses the ten lira coin into a fountain but misses.



Oreste Marinunzi

Oreste goes to the fountain where Clement throws the coin and retrieves it from the rock that it lands on. He is a fairly young man, who is expecting his fourth child with his wife. He is obviously poor, stealing coins from fountains is a common way of getting money for him. When he finds the ten lira coin, he goes to a cafe and quickly drinks it away. Oreste is the one character who is not obsessed by thoughts of death. Instead, as he drinks he dreams of a lifetime of health for his unborn child. The drunker he gets, the more comfortable he gets. In his stupor, he attempts to get acquainted with Miss Jones, who is in the bar but he is too drunk to do anything other than fall to the ground in a blissful sleep.



Objects/Places

Bocca d'Arno Beach

This is the summer camp that Lina attends as a child.

Tuscany

This is the Italian countryside where Paolo Farina lives and has his house built to share with Angiola.

A Ten-Lira Silver Piece

The ten lira coin, is the one object that connects every character throughout the story.

The Corso

This is a central plaza in town where there are shops.

Gemara

This is the place where Rosalia di Credo was brought up with her sister. Generations prior, it had been a lovely place, but Rosalia's father, Ruggero, let it go to waste. Paolo Lovisi agrees to help make mortgage payments on it when he marries Angiola, but when she leaves, he ceases the payments. He notifies Rosalia that the property will be sold at public auction.

Mondo Theatre

The Mondo Theatre is where Alessandro tells Marcella he will be waiting for her while she makes her assassination attempt. He goes here to wait and ultimately goes inside to watch an Angiola Fides movie, where he meets Angiola Farina and has a romantic encounter with her.

Angiola Fides

Angiola is a movie star that Angiola Farina is obsessed with and builds her life around.



Bagnani

Mother Dida's birthplace.

Rome

Rome is a city in Italy where much of the story's action takes place. Marcella makes her assassination attempt in a piazza in Rome. Mother Dida sells her flowers near the Mondo Theatre in Rome. Clement Roux roams through the city as he is dying.

Conti Palace

Mother Dida's son Ilario drops her off every morning on the marble steps of the Conti Palace, which is between the Mondo Theatre and the Cafy Imperio.

Cafy Imperio

Cafy Imperio is near where Mother Dida sells her flowers. One of the benefits of this location for her is that the owner of the cafy allows her to use the bathroom.

Via San Noccolo da Tolentino

This is the establishment where Massimo rents a furnished room.

Santo Giovanni Martire

This is the spot where Marcella is beaten and killed. A puddle of blood remains, which only later is covered up by sand.

Balbo Palace

Balbo Palace is where the dictator is scheduled to deliver his public speech. This is the event that Marcella is planning to use for her assassination attempt on the leader.

Triennial Exhibition of Modern Art

This is the art exhibit where Massimo sees Clement Roux's self portrait.



Caesar Palace

This is the hotel where the painter, Clement Roux, is staying while in Rome. He is trying to put off the inevitability of his death by wandering around Rome with Massimo instead of going back to his hotel.

Sea of Sicily

The Sea of Sicily is the name of the ship that Paolo Farina takes either on his way to or from Sicily and mainland Italy.

Social Concerns And Themes

As stated in the afterword to the revised edition of *A Coin in Nine Hands*, the novel was clearly political in design and considered by the author as one of the first French novels "to confront the hollow reality behind the bloated facade of Fascism." Undoubtedly, Yourcenar is attempting to investigate and expose the imperceptible evil she envisions as permeating the quality of life within pre-World War II Italy, simultaneously incorporating the delusion of idealism and the mastery of deception. Interestingly, the contemporary setting of *A Coin in Nine Hands*, Rome in 1933, is atypical of Yourcenar, and clearly the novel occupies a relatively distinct position within her body of work. Thematically, however, Yourcenar traverses a familiar literary landscape: the eternal mystery of human destiny, the restoration of self by means of illusion, and the psychological contrast of physical and spiritual death.

In the novel, the coin of the title seemingly by chance passes through the hands of the primary characters, serving as a linking device to tenuously connect the pattern and internal conflict of their lives. The coin itself is at once insignificant in monetary value yet of ultimate importance in relation to the sequence of events and artistic sensibility. Representing "the symbol of contact between human beings each lost in his own passions and in his intrinsic solitude," the coin essentially becomes a means of character identification as well as thematic definition.

Of utmost importance, the concept pervading the novel with structured precision is the ever-present proximity of death, and Yourcenar masterfully enables the reader to distinguish among the characters the systematic avoidance, fear, prolongation, or acceptance of the inevitable. Interestingly, as one pair of "hands" uses the coin to mask the symptom, another buys a moment of pleasure, while still another embraces the comfort of impending demise. At the center of the novel, however, is death by violence, and the aborted assassination attempt on Mussolini is crucial to advancing the moral sentiment of Yourcenar's political ideology.



Techniques/Literary Precedents

Arranged in chronological sequence while simultaneously allowing the reader access into the designated past of the primary and secondary characters, *A Coin in Nine Hands* is at once a disjointed chronicle as well as an intricate web of human interplay. Praised for its subtlety of language and structural inventiveness, the novel has conversely been criticized for being mechanically devised and artificial in purpose. Without question, however, Yourcenar is an effective storyteller, and her ability to maintain a pure narrative voice throughout the novel is highly admirable. Attesting to her creative abilities, Yourcenar succeeds in establishing mood and setting with an economy of descriptive exposition in much the same way as she develops characterization. In comparison to the majority of her fiction, however, *A Coin in Nine Hands* represents a unique departure for Yourcenar as an author.

Although her attempt to address a contemporary political situation is reminiscent of other fictional efforts designed either to identify or expose the presence of evil within the framework of modern society, Yourcenar clearly demonstrates an inherent strength to transform experience into artistic expression. Through the use of extensive imagery supplemented by classical reference and mythical allusion, the novel enables Yourcenar to merge past with present, dream with reality, and fiction with history.



Themes

Obsessions with Death

Almost every main character in *A Coin in Nine Hands* has an obsession with death. It is a link that each share - aside from the ten lira coin that passes from one person to the next. Lina is sick with breast cancer. She knows that she has an affliction that is deadly, and this is confirmed in a visit to Dr. Sarte. Once she knows for certain, she finds peace with knowing her life will end soon. She looks forward to planning it. Giulio Lovisi prays for death in order to escape from his unhappy marriage. He figures that if he can become a criminal and do unspeakable crimes, he will have to die to pay. Although he wants to do criminal acts as the escape, he also longs to die. Rosario de Credo's love lays in her home at Gemara in Sicily. Everything she does extends from her love of this place. When she learns that the property will be sold at public auction, she loses her will to live and commits suicide, where she finds peace.

Marcella Sarta is set on assassinating the dictator, regardless of whether or not she is successful. Either way, she knows that she will be killed as a result of her actions. Still, she goes through with it. Mother Dida is obsessed with her death as it relates to her financial situation. She is old and knows she will not live too much longer. In her mind, she plays out how her children will quarrel over the money she has. She also lives in some amount of fear as she thinks her children may try to kill her to get to the money. Finally, Clement is also obsessed with death. Although he does not long to die as some of the others do, he is reminded constantly of the little time he has left as a result of his worsening heart condition. He cannot get the thought of his impending death out of his mind.

Varying Degrees of Political Involvement

The story itself takes place in 1930's Rome when it is under a dictatorship. This is a fact that overshadows each character's life, although in different ways. Some are actively Fascist, some are strenuously rebellious, while others are apathetic. The current political environment however, dictates how many live their lives. For instance, Carlo Stevo is a political exile. His exile forces hardship on his wife, Vanna, and baby daughter. Vanna mourns him and is inconsolable. This, in turn, places additional strain on the already difficult relationship between Vanna's parents, Giuseppa and Giulio.

Lina Chiari is not politically inclined, although her doctor, Alessandro Sarte is. He is a staunch supporter of the Fascist Party except when it comes to his wife's political involvements. Their divergent views lead them to their separation. Since he still loves her, he continues to keep an eye out for her to make sure that she is safe. Despite their feelings for each other, Marcella is intent on following through on her plans to assassinate the dictator. Both Alessandro and Massimo know, once she has gone



through her actions, that they will both be detained for questioning. Alessandro will be watched, and Massimo is likely to be deported back to his home country.

Others, however, only experience the ripple effects of current politics and the bustle of the night's activities related to the assassination attempt. If it were not for Marcella's brave action, Angiola Farina would not have the romantic encounter with Alessandro. Likewise, Clement would not have had Massimo's aid when he needed it had there been no suspense in the streets. Mother Dida is affected only in that she is unable to catch the last bus home for the night because of the number of people that were out for the speech.

Unhappiness and Loneliness is a Common Thread

Many characters in the story share unhappy lives. Almost all of them are lonely. Lina is in need of a friend who she can confide in about her illness, and she laments that she does not have someone. The one person she really wants to tell is Massimo, with whom she is in love. He does not return her feelings. Massimo, in turn, is in love with Marcella, who does not love him back. They share a common political bond, but to her it is nothing more than that. Alessandro, who is still in love with Marcella, cannot be with her because their political views are too different. He misses her and tries to talk her out of her assassination plot because he knows that if she goes through with it, she will be killed.

Vanna Stevo is truly miserable, since her husband Carlo is deported. As a simple woman, she merely wants her husband back. She worries about him and grieves every day that he is gone. Giulio, Vanna's father, is also unhappy. His thirty-year marriage to Giuseppa is not a happy one. His wife is vulgar and insulting, and he dreams of ways to rid himself of her, even if it means death. Clement Roux is not someone looking to die to escape his misery but is unhappy because he knows that his death is imminent. Determined to hang on as long as possible, he stops short of begging Massimo for company because he does not want to be alone as he is afraid that he might die alone.



Style

Points of View

The story is related in third-person omniscient, and each main character's thoughts and feelings are clearly relayed. As this is a story in nine parts, there are nine different perspectives. Each character's life and circumstances are laid out individually. While there is some overlap with the characters, each chapter is from the perspective of the one holding the ten lira coin. The voice throughout is the same; as each character's story unfolds, it seems as though common themes run through each character's life. These are themes such as death, love and loneliness. Only the characters themselves differ, as do their pasts and futures.

The influence of politics in the lives of the characters is a constant theme throughout the work. This political undertone affects the lives of each character differently. Some are more directly involved with the current-day political situation, while others only from the periphery. The same can be said of the non-political events in their lives and how they each react to them. A character such as Angiola has a cool outlook on her life and her interactions. Though she takes lover after lover, she does not seem passionate about anyone. On the other hand, Marcella appears to be surrounded by passion and action. There are those that strive to be a part of Marcella's life, and she is intent on carrying out violent action.

Setting

The entire story takes place in 1930's Italy, which is ruled by a Fascist dictator. All of the characters, save Massimo and Clement, are Italian. Although some background elements include Tuscany and Sicily as a backdrop, most of the story unfolds in Rome. The overall setting is crucial to the story's plot, as it would not work if it took place anywhere else. Each character's tragic past is revealed in the beautiful surroundings of Rome. The sad stories seem incongruous set against the bountiful history and massive marble structures.

The Fascist dictatorship makes a powerful impact on Italy and those who live there. Although many of the characters share misery and loss in their lives, the political atmosphere impacts many of them. If it were not for the current politics, Vanna would be living happily with Carlo through his last days, and her daughter would have a father. Likewise, Marcella would not be compelled to attempt an assassination and lose her life in the process. In fact, if the dictator were not in power, she would probably still be happily married.



Language and Meaning

Because the entire story takes place in 1930's Italy, the characters' actions and words reflect the times they live in. The people are mostly simple and so is their language. While many of the characters share loneliness and unhappiness, they do not share similar stations in life. This is probably the largest difference in the various meanings of the story. Whether the character is a prostitute, such as Lina, or an accomplished doctor, such as Alessandro Sarte, the way they speak comes across as similar. However, it is their actions that differentiate them.

Additionally, where they live and where they spend their time also says a good deal about them. Alessandro, as a well known doctor and important Fascist Party member, spends time doing things that gain him the fame he seeks. Marcella and her friends meet at her home, which is hidden from any main thoroughfare and also possesses a secret entrance. This says a lot about the life she leads, which is secretive. The same can be said for Clement Roux, who is choosing to spend his remaining time outdoors in the beauty of Rome. It seems he does this with a sense of rebellion to shake off death. The various settings say much about the characters and the story's events.

Structure

The stories in *A Coin in Nine Hands* is divided into nine chapters. This is done to signify the nine major stories in the book. It is cleverly divided by the action of the passing of the ten lira coin. The coin is the one unifying thread bringing each character together, although the characters do not realize it. Stories unfold for as long as each person has the coin, although in some cases there is some prior history is related, such as when Mother Dida and Rosalia di Credo possess the coin.

The first character with the coin is Paolo Farina in the first section. He gives the coin to Lina Chiari in section two. She then gives it to Giulio Lovisi at the cosmetics shop when she buys lipstick, then in section three, he uses the coin to buy votives in the church so hands it off to Rosalia di Credo. In section four, Rosalia gives the coin to Marcella in exchange for embers. Marcella gives the coin to Alessandro as payment for the gun in section five. Alessandro then uses the coin to pay for flowers for Angiola at the movie theatre in section six. Mother Dida, in section seven, gives the coin to Clement, who she mistakes as a bum. In section eight, Clement tosses the coin into a fountain and misses. Finally, in section nine, Oreste finds the coin and uses it to buy wine.



Quotes

"The little money Paolo Farina gave Lina each week was used to create for him a welcome illusion; that is to say, perhaps the only thing in the world that does not deceive." (Section 1, Pages 1-6, page 6)

"Like the inhabitants of besieged medieval cities who, surprised by death, went back to bed, trying to fall asleep again by telling themselves that the threatening flames were only a nightmare, Lina had used the drugs that put oblivion between us and terror; these benefactors too often called upon had grown weary of helping her." (Section 2, Pages 7-16, page 8)

"Unlike the official calamities discussed every night at the dinner table, the departure of his touching English girl affected him alone; it was his very own little romantic sorrow." (Section 3, Pages 17-34, page 21).

"Had he been clairvoyant, Giulio Lovisi would have agreed that praying was futile. And yet the thin tapers burning under the unmoving gaze of the Madonna were not useless: they were there to maintain the fiction or a hope." (Section 3, Pages 17-34, page 34)

"For three years, in each new affliction, Rosalia found consolation in her sister's absence; Don Ruggero spoke of selling his dowsing secrets for fabulous sums to get back on his feet again and to return to Sicily: Rosalia's life was spent waiting for either her sister's reappearance or the departure for home." (Section 4, Pages 35-58, page 48)

"She did not tell herself that her sister, wherever she was, might be happy; Angiola's misfortunes were the only thing that gave her hope. Rosalia expected to find her again, betrayed, maybe sick, but, in any case, downhearted; she would not even inform the grotesque husband who had been responsible for her loss." (Section 4, Pages 35-58, page 52)

"I know you'll do nothing to interfere with my plans," she [Marcella] went on. "Admit it, destruction fascinates you. You're too curious about the human soul, as you say, not to want to know if I'll go all the way or not." (Section 5, Pages 59-101, page 83)

"She had sacrificed everything to this ubiquitous ghost whom the camera granted a factitious immortality, not immune, however, from death." (Section 6, Pages 102-118, page 105)

"Since Marcella will never know, Alessandro deems it pointless to admit he admires her, and he would probably not understand himself if he admitted that right now he envies her." (Section 6, Pages 102-118, page 117)

"Yet death had passed by there; it didn't take *him*, but it took the woman; perhaps it was still roaming around, looking for someone else." (Section 7, Pages 119-134, page 131)



"Groping in her apron, she pulls out a ten-lira coin a customer in love had carelessly tossed her at the entrance to the movie theatre, and presents it with great show to the needy man. "Here, old man, this is for you."" (Section 7, Pages 119-134, page 133)

"Neither the time-immemorial prejudice that attributes a soul only to members of the human species nor the crass vanity that turns modern man into the upstart of nature had ever persuaded Clement that an animal is less worthy of God's solicitude than man." (Section 8, Pages 135-155, page 136)

""I [Massimo] know this can't really interest you," he went on in a shaky voice, "but still, it's a little like your memories. No one understands... And oblivion comes so quickly."" (Section 8, Pages 135-155, page 148)

"People did not recognize his true worth; because one day, when he had too much to drink, he happened to mention that it would be nice to cut his mother-in-law's throat, they treated him now as an assassin, him, Oreste Marinunzi, who wouldn't hurt a fly." (Section 9, Pages 156-167, page 165)



Topics for Discussion

If the story's setting did not take place in Fascist Italy, would it have been possible for Marcella to be happy? Or would she still have violent inclinations? Explain your answer.

Paolo Farina makes a transition to becoming more like the type of man for whom Angiola leaves him. Do you think this is a lasting transition or is this an attempt to win his wife back? Are there any actions that suggest he changes for selfless or selfish reasons?

How much does the current political situation in the country play a part in the lives of each character? What might their lives be like if they were not under Fascist rule? Explain.

Many of the characters in the story are unhappy with their lives. It is a characteristic that seems to connect them, along with the coin. Do you think it is possible for any of them to easily change their situation in order to improve it? Explain your answer?

If Marcella had been successful in her assassination attempt how do you think it would have affected other characters and events? Name at least three characters that would be affected by this alternate outcome and explain how you think a successful outcome would have affected each one.

Death is an ongoing theme throughout each of the character's stories. Why do you think death is so much on everybody's minds?

Which character do you think has the most hopeful outlook? Name three reasons why.



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