

History Study Guide

History by Elsa Morante

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Plot Summary

History: A Novel, is a moving saga that follows the life of a half-Jewish Italian school teacher and her young son, who is the result of rape by a German soldier. Ida Mancuso, a widow born in 1904, is a single parent to her son, Nino. She is raped by a young German soldier in 1941 and conceives a child. Her new son, Giuseppe, named after her father, becomes the focus of Ida's will to survive. Giuseppe, who calls himself "Useppe," has seizure problems similar to Ida's childhood illness, which, unlike hers, develop into a more serious medical condition as he grows. His older brother, Nino, is an activist and anarchist, much like his maternal grandfather. Nino lives a brash and dangerous life, and only shows up at home randomly. He is the most important person in little Useppe's life. Ida and Useppe survive periods of devastating poverty and hunger, as well as the abiding horror that her partially Jewish heritage will be discovered and she could become a victim of the Nazi forces.

Ida, whose forced illegitimate pregnancy is a source of shame, returns to her work as a teacher when Useppe is a baby. Useppe is forced to stay in their locked apartment alone with very little stimulation or guidance, although she does check on him. Their lives are simple and sparse. However, when their apartment building is bombed, Ida and Useppe are forced to live in refugee housing in abject poverty. With the closing of the schools, Ida is forced to occupy her days combing the streets in search of food for Useppe and herself, as the large group of refugees wait for news of the Germans' retreat from Italy. It is here that Ida and Nino meet Carlo Vivaldi, who turns out to be a Jew named Davide Segre. Davide's story becomes an important piece of the story's plot.

Ida is emotionally connected by her heritage to the Jews in her neighborhood. She and young Useppe witness a train packed full of human beings who are about to be transported to Auschwitz. Someone tosses a note from the train car, which Ida carries with her from that day forward. The realities of what is really becoming of Italian Jews begins to settle in when the ghetto is virtually empty of people.

Useppe has a number of problems, not the least of which is his unreliable brother whom he adores, and who shows up only occasionally. He also suffers from epileptic seizures, made worse by malnutrition during the bad times. Nino's dog, Bella, becomes Useppe's best friend and stays with him until the end of his life. Nino, who goes from rebel fighter to black market dealer, is killed in an accident. Davide Segre dies from a drug overdose. Useppe dies from the effects of untreated seizures. Ida Mancuso, who finds the meaning of life only through her son, Useppe, loses her sanity when he dies, and is taken to an asylum where she dies nine years later. The dog, Bella, is shot by police when she refuses to allow them access to Ida and Useppe.

The story is punctuated by summaries of the global news as it relates to the horrendous events of World War II and after. Some summaries span a period of several years. Therefore, this is not just a novel, but also a documentation of world history that provides the reader with an idea of what one small family might have endured over the

period of 1904 through 1947. A followup of world history that spans from Ida's death until 1955 reminds the reader that, as history rolls on, war is ever-present.



Preface History and Chapter 1

Preface History and Chapter 1 Summary

The author notes the discoveries concerning the structure of matter and the beginning of the atomic century from 1900 through 1905, and sets the stage for the beginning of World war 1 in 1914, which ends in 1918 with ten million dead.

A short preface mentions a German soldier walking in the San Lorenzo district in Rome in 1941, with the first name of Gunther. A rather immature, large bodied young German soldier, raised in Bavaria but legally from Dachau, he is destined to be shipped to mysterious Africa. He is excited but, as a child, is also afraid. He is free temporarily, walking the streets of Rome. Anticipating opportunities for heroism in Africa, he is also missing his mother, his home and an older prostitute to whom he recently gave his virginity. He roams the uninteresting streets looking for a brothel, but comes upon Remo's, a wine and food establishment, where he is treated with distrust. Belligerently, he drinks too much wine and does not eat. Strongly missing his mother and forgetting his uniformed appearance, he confronts the first woman he sees, who is horrified.

Preface History and Chapter 1 Analysis

The author distills down an all-encompassing summary of the state of the world, to the single mindset of a very young German soldier who still lives at home with his mother in his heart, and who is at once dazzled and saddened by his new freedom and responsibility. It is clear that he has already been indoctrinated by the German military, as he tries to intimidate the Italian shopkeeper and customers. The developments at Dachau are only hinted at during this segment of the story, but this new soldier has the gist of the thinking developing within the German military.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Thirty-seven-year-old Ida Mancuso is an elementary teacher who is somewhat afraid of the world. She is of average intelligence and grew up with no siblings, raised by her father Giuseppe Ramundo and Nora Almagiá in Cosenza, Italy. The story goes back into Ida's history.

Nora Almagiá Ramundo (changed to Almagiá to hide her Jewish descent), a schoolteacher, is Jewish but has changed the accent mark on her name to protect herself. She is given to manic outbursts and believes Jews are destined to be persecuted. Nora and Guiseppe raise Ida, or "Iduzza" as a Catholic. Guiseppe is an active alcoholic, an outspoken anarchist who loves his wife and daughter.

The narrator tries to imagine the town of Cosenza in that time, its agrarian culture and cruel caste system. Ida, as a child, experiences mild seizures, another secret held by her small family. Guiseppe worries that his sperm that conceived Ida was poisoned by alcohol. Ida's seizures bring an end to visits with her paternal grandparents, where her grandmother baked bread dolls for her. A doctor pronounces Ida healthy and gives her a sedating syrup which alleviates the seizures, and they finally disappeared in young adulthood.

Guiseppe's bad leg keeps him out of the war, but his controversial beliefs are a constant threat. Post-war epidemics, land-grabbing and poverty grips the country, including Guiseppe's family in the southern region of Reggio, to whom all of Guiseppe's earnings were sent. Ida receives her teaching certificate and marries a salesman, Alfio Mancuso, who survived a disastrous flood in his boyhood. The newly married couple travel to their new home in Rome and Ida naively allows her marriage to be consummated. Ida competes for a teaching job in Rome. There are signs of the beginning of revolution in Rome. Ida's father is put on a pension and removed from his teaching job and now makes toys for his grandson, Ninnuzzu. Guiseppe is deeply disappointed when Facism takes over and his dreams of revolution are dashed. Nora has become violent and irrational. Guiseppe dies from cirrhosis, and Ida's husband dies from cancer.

Ida obediently teaches her students the words of Mussolini. The author notes the resemblance between Hitler and Mussolini, pointing out their fundamental weaknesses as failures and serfs with a vindictive sense of inferiority, caused them to be dreamers. Terrified of the intensifying campaign against Jews and the pressure to report to the census, Nora becomes more ill and lives in isolated terror. Unwilling to endanger anyone else, Nora flees across the border and heads for the sea, where she is found dead, her wealth concealed in her stocking. Her death is deemed accidental. The narrator describes an old photo of the young Nora.



Chapter 2 Analysis

In this long chapter, the lives of Ida's parents is summarized and encapsulated for the reader to hold, as one continues to learn about the lives of Ida and her children. Ida's father, although a chronic alcoholic, loves his family and is impassioned about his politics. He stays true to his beliefs until his death. Nora, however, becomes more and more frightened and deranged, and the threat of her Jewish heritage being revealed consumes her. The genetic combination of these two characters will show up in Ida's small family as the story progresses. Ida, as a young woman, has many secrets to keep: her father's controversial beliefs, his alcoholism, her mother's strangely unpredictable behaviors, her own seizures and the daily sedative, and the fact that she is half Jewish. These secrets contribute to her withdrawn and childlike personality.

The narrator tells the story as if she has researched and unraveled the detailed story of the lives of this family.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

The articles of the Italian Racial Law are cited, with respect to how Jews are to report their status in the Census. In 1938, Jews are excluded from all types of business and employment and plans for genocide have been made, giving Germans free rein to destroy them in every way. Baptized a Catholic, Ida reports her deceased mother's Jewish status to Roman authorities. Like many others, Ninuzzu, at fourteen, is pleased about the newly formed pact between Hitler and Mussolini. Ida lives as an Aryan but mingles with Jews in the ghetto. She worries that her secret might someday affect Nino. There is a sense of confidence among the Jews that they are protected by Mussolini, their Rabbis, and the Pope. A friend, Vilma, brings startling news of impending atrocities against all Jews. Ida calculates that Nino will qualify as Aryan.

da's fearful response to the drunken German soldier offends him. He follows her up six floors and helps her open her door. Nino is not home, but his presence is reflected all over the messy house. The German envies Nino's youth and freedom. He shows Ida a photo of his family in Dachau. She has a seizure as he rapes her, and as usual, when the seizure is over, Ida has a sense of peace and pleasure. The soldier sleeps, a drunken child. When he awakes, he fixes a light socket for Ida, gives her his knife as a souvenir, and takes one red flower to keep forever. He is headed for Africa three days later when his air convoy is attacked, resulting in his death.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

Ida feels like an outsider among Aryans, as though she is cheating in some way. She seems somewhat obsessed with her secret heritage, and primarily worried about how it might affect her son. Nino is politically driven at a very young age.

The rape scene in this story is very strange. Although it is brutal and violent, and causes Ida to have a seizure, she feels such pleasure coming out of the seizure that the experience is not as horrible as it might have been. The narrator reminds us that this is just a boy. As he sobers up he feels remorseful and is lonely, begging with his facial expression for her "charity." The reader is left with a confused feeling of compassion for this unfortunate boy, as well as hatred for the drunken Nazi soldier in whose body he is living.



1941 - 1 and 2

1941 - 1 and 2 Summary

The recitation of the history of 1941 reveals Italy's invasion of Greece, Italian colonies in Africa being attacked by Britain, German intervention in Greece and North Africa, the devastation of Yugoslavia for not agreeing to ally with the Germans, Greece's surrender to Italo-Germans, the alliance of Japan and the Soviet Union. Haile Selassie is restored to his throne in Ethiopia in the spring of 1941. Germany attacks Russia with Italy's cooperation. In July, Japan occupies Indochina, the Yugoslavian resistance against fascism begins and Germany advances across Russia. By fall, all Jews are required by Germany to wear a yellow star. Gandhi urges passive resistance. Nazis occupy Poland, sequestering Jews. Hitler has killed three million Russians, ignoring prior war conventions. Hitler and Himmler plan the final extermination of all Jews. A counter-attack is launched by Leningrad, holding back the Germans; British takes over East Africa. Hitler's million troops are to capture and suppress "anyone who represents a danger for 'German security.'" The Japanese attack America at Pearl Harbor and war between the US and Japan extends into world conflict.

Ida recovers physically from the attack of the German soldier, but nervously anticipates a repeat of the attack and is nervous when Nino is not home. Eventually she returns to her daily routine but discovers she is pregnant, another thing to hide. Ida pretends she has colitis, and has graphic dreams that illustrate her deepest fears, hopes and memories.

Nino becomes increasingly restless, and wants money for staying out late to see movies. She finally gives him his own key to the house, which is a symbol of freedom to him.

Fuel and food are becoming more scarce, but Ida is comforted by the child within her. Her friends in the ghetto are disappearing, but Vilma continues to tell stories of people being hanged from the trees and gassed in their homes. Nino wants to ignore the alarms and sirens, feeling sure that Rome is safe; Ida eventually sleeps through them, as well. Ida does not tell Nino about her pregnancy, knowing he will not accept a lie.

The baby, delivered by Ezekiel the midwife while Nino is away at Nazi camp, is a tiny boy. Ida names him Guiseppe, after her father. When Nino returns, she says the baby was found in the street, but Nino knows she gave birth to him, and very much wants to keep him. Nino pushes and bullies his mother for cigarette money, and Ida responds to him with vehemence, much like her own mother's. She refers to Guiseppe as Nino's brother.

He brings home a dog he has named Blitz, for whom he has bought a leather collar. Ida has given in to his demand for a dog because of her guilt over the baby. When Nino



fantasizes about going to other countries, it is clear he does not plan to take his aging mother.

Baby Guiseppe presents his first smile at a very young age to his Nino and his friends. Blitz becomes Nino's constant companion. Although his mother forbids it, Nino brings his friends to see Guiseppe, of whom he is very proud. Ida continues to work, trying to get home to nurse him, but he learns to take his own bottle. Blitz is loyal to both Nino and Guiseppe now, spending time with one or the other. The baby spends a lot of time alone at home, but shares his status of "bastard" with Blitz, who waits outside the door to see him.

1941 - 1 and 2 Analysis

World history in 1941, broken down by months, is chilling and disturbing to read. The world is in a terrible state of upheaval and violence, with so many dissenting philosophies and powers trying to take control. The confusion and struggle of Ida Mancuso is only a microcosm of the events in the world and, although she is unaware of much of the tribulation, it is reflected in her own life.

Ida is plagued by fears of so many things that it is a relief when Nino appears to be happy over his new brother. Not only is the world changing, but Ida's household is changing, as Nino embraces his political life and his life on the streets as a minor hoodlum. He is disrespectful to her but she is unable to stand up to him because he is brazen and belligerent, even though he is only sixteen. She is not an assertive person and, again, is taken advantage of by a male, now by her own son.

Ida is not physically well. Her limbs are shrunken and she has not eaten regularly or properly, partially due to poverty. Her eating patterns and the similarity to her mother's behavior foreshadow illness for her in the future.

This small apartment is the picture of poverty, with a baby left alone all day, a dog who cannot get inside to comfort him, a young boy who skips school and runs wild all day and a mother who is struggling just to provide food. However, there is an unbreakable bond forming among Nino, Guiseppe and Blitz, which excludes Ida.



1942

1942 Summary

Historical events are cited, including the Wannsee Conference for racial planning. The Japanese master Indochina and a large part of China, threatening British holdings in India. Chiang Kai-shek is made commander of Allied troops in China; the Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia are inadequately supplied for winter; the US plans for war industry. Italo-Germans reoccupy Bengazi in North Africa. In spring, the death chamber at Belsen begins; Hitler receives official confirmation of absolute power; the British Air Force begins its offensive of bombing civilian areas, with reprisal by Germans. The US defeats the Japanese; Italo-German forces regain lost territory. In summer, four-engine bombers are being tested. Italy again sends ill-equipped troops to Russia; Germans take Stalingrad. The British arrest Gandhi; riots take place in India. The Allies are wiped out at Dieppe. In fall, Germans occupy ruins of Stalingrad and British resume offensive in North Africa. In winter, a Soviet offensive attacks Germans trapped in Stalingrad; the British reoccupy Bengazi. In Europe, civilians and cities are destroyed by carpet bombings, aided by US bombs. People are starving in Greece but try to organize resistance against the Axis. Sixteen hundred tons of bombs hit Genoa, Naples, Turin and cities of Italy. In Chicago, the first nuclear reactor goes into operation.

A cheerful baby, Giuseppe is isolated in the apartment. He takes pleasure in the small details in the apartment, since he does not see the outdoors. His greatest pleasure is seeing his brother, who visits infrequently. Nino finally takes Giuseppe out into the world where he is able to fully observe nature. Nino tries to help Giuseppe overcome his speech problems. Ida pretends not to know about their excursions. Food is becoming sparse, and the family's health is challenged. Ida's dreams become vivid and disturbing.

Nino can sing, while Ida is tone deaf. Ida takes Nino out now, to a park, and he learned to walk. Nino has become a Fascist vagabond who roams in the night, his rage building and his behavior becoming more militant. Ida, now steadily sedated, only makes an occasional trip into the ghetto to sell some trinket, and her only source of news is Nino, who seems to know about the developing weapons and secrets of war. Nino now uses Gunther's knife to shave, but eventually loses it.

1942 Analysis

It is astonishing to think of a baby being left alone all day in a closed apartment, but, in addition to her job, Ida's shame and fear of being noticed with him overrides any desire to take him out. Giuseppe, now called this because it is how he says it, is so good natured and smart that he is delighted by the most mundane details in the apartment. It is not clear what Giuseppe perceives when he looks at the calf at the train station, but there is an implication that he may be tuned in to others in a supernatural way.



Nino shows a certain disrespect for his mother, and is an angry young man, but he loves his little brother and seems to enjoy showing him the world. Nino's immaturity contributes to his swagger with respect to the war. Since war is what is happening in his world, he has taken a position and uses his new machismo to promote it. He wants to fight.

The author continues to interject third person notations, such as "Actually, I believe, she did dream" It is as if the author is only partially omniscient and wants to remind the reader that this is a story that is being told, not one that is being lived at the moment.



1943 - History and I

1943 - History and I Summary

The Italians are defeated in Russia, set up and left to die by Nazi-Fascist leaders. Leningrad is liberated at the cost of 630,000 lives. Germans surrender in Stalingrad. Italian colonies in North-Africa are placed under Allied administration; Yugoslav resistance to the Axis forces spreads to Greece and Albania. More than four million women are working in the US; all German males and females are drafted for defense labor. Workers strike in Italy, with active Communist party; Nazis burn Warsaw to the ground; in Africa the Axis surrenders to allies; Japanese naval defeated by US; Stalin dissolves Comintern.

Sicily is occupied by Allied forces; Fascists in Rome dismiss the Duce, who is isolated in the Abruzzi; he is replaced by King-appointed Badoglio, who proclaims the end of Fascism and sides with Nazis, ordering suppression of Italian uprisings. The King, Allies and Germans are holding secret negotiations; dictatorship ends in Italy as Nazis gather at its borders.

Allied armistice with Italy; the King, government and high command flee to south abandoning the army and Italy. Mussolini is freed by Hitler and the Nazi-Fascist Republic of Salo is formed in Northern Italy. Italian army units are massacred or deported to Germany, with some refugees escaping. Italy is under Germany military occupation; resistance groups form. Badoglio government in the south declares Italy's war against Germany, while Salo republic calls for formation of Nazi/Fascist army. Nazis proceed with "final solution to Jewish problem." Nazi-Fascists kill Italians, while partisans organize uprisings supported by Communist party. Russia send air raids on Berlin. Churchill, Stalin and Roosevelt meet in Teheran.

Nino is growing and now stealing food, which Ida will not eat. He is bored and constrained by winter, and is skipping school, fighting and resisting his education. He is addicted to tobacco. He finally leaves school for good, which devastates Ida, who rejects him in a note. Nino spends nights away from home and turns up with new clothes. He promises Usepe a bicycle ride, but the bike does not materialize. He teaches Usepe the word, "whore," and even in his rage, cannot help but laugh at him with love. Nino has been scratched and emotionally wounded by a woman, but eventually goes out again. He brings home a girl, who is fascinating to Usepe.

1943 - History and I Analysis

The gist of the history during this time is that when trouble is suppressed in one place, it pops up in another. When one force dominates, smaller forces begin to form to resist. The historical facts are real, but in this context seem to imply that there can be no peace for long, anywhere, and even when there is a lull, people are laboring to produce war



materials and machines, or plotting to take over — a constant struggle for power continues to rumble under the surface.

Nino has become hardened and angry, having grown up in an uncertain world that, outside his immediate neighborhood, is full of violence. He somehow thinks that being involved in violence is more fun and exciting than being bored, and he creates his own dramas as a result. His adoring little brother innocently learns from him and takes Nino's mood changes in stride.



1943 - 2 and 3

1943 - 2 and 3 Summary

Italian cities are being bombed, while Rome is spared, thus far. Ida is now responding to the alarms, running to the basement with Useppe, her corset containing her life savings safely strapped on. Nino eventually begins to go to the basement with his family and Blitz, who loves the outings. The raids provide some social interaction for Nino. People still feel Rome is protected by the Pope.

Nino, who welcomes the war, would be glad to be compensated for the loss of the poor building where they live. They learn from passersby that Naples is totally destroyed. Nino manages to get accepted into a battalion fighting for the Duce, and he leaves, hoping Useppe will care for Blitz.

Blitz is inconsolable without Nino, waiting and whining, and is finally allowed to sleep with Useppe. He is frequently left alone in the apartment while Ida and Useppe shop. While walking with bags of groceries, an air raid surprises Ida, who covers Useppe and tells him it is nothing. Their building is destroyed, along with other household belongings, and Blitz is gone. While resting in the basement tavern, a stranger tells Useppe that Blitz is now a white dove, which is comforting to him. Ida thinks of all her neighbors who may now be missing.

Walking the streets carrying Useppe, Ida is disoriented and confused, still harboring a deep fear of being identified as Jewish. As they walk toward a dormitory for people whose homes have been bombed, Ida meets a marble cutter, also named Guiseppe, who pushes the sleeping Useppe in his wheelbarrow, Ida hanging on to one handle.

1943 - 2 and 3 Analysis

Nino is a fearless boy whose imagination is fed by what he sees as the romantic aspects of war. His anger makes him a natural for things like the black market, prostitutes, and anything that is potentially violent and risky. He is a tender person, who loves his dog and brother, too, a complex character who might have been something better if his circumstances had been more fortunate.

The author personifies the animals in the story, giving them a voice to help express their imagined states of mind. Blitz tells Useppe, "You're all I have left in the world now!" and the caged birds exchange minimal chirps of solace to one another.

The devastation around them, as perceived through Ida's foggy brain, is hazy. However, Moran provides the reader with great detail with regard to the small details of the bombed out Pietralata, including the buildings, statues, and desperation.



Little Useppe takes most things in stride because everything in the world is new to him. He is a war baby in every way, from his conception to the state he is in now, alone with his mother in the streets of Rome with no home and great poverty. Ida has kept herself sedated throughout most of this time, but is now faced with having lost everything she had, making her kitchen seem like a lovely fantasy.



1943 - 4 and 5

1943 - 4 and 5 Summary

The Allies leave northern Italy to the Fascists, Germany and small bands of militia after Mussolini is arrested. Rome is now under Nazi occupation.

Ida and Useppe live in a shelter with other refugees. The marble cutter, Guiseppe Secondo, registered as having died in the rubble, also lives there with his two canaries and his cat, Rossella. In the same room lives a very large half-Neapolitan family named by Cuchiarelli Guiseppe, "The Thousand". A young girl named Carulina is pregnant, but did not notice by whom. Carulina describes what may be a dirigible, out of which Janet Gaynor emerges, handing out pastries. She brings some to her grandmother. The childlike Carulina gives birth to twins, who are supplementally nursed by a relative. She is obsessed with show business, and keeps an old gramophone going in the room.

Caruli makes clothes for the precocious Useppe, who is barely two. He loves everyone, including the pets and the baby twins. A pretend marriage takes place among Useppe and the two baby twins, whom he loves equally. Useppe is agile and active, climbing and doing acrobatics.

Guiseppe Secondo owns a wool blanket and hides money in his hat, jacket and shoes. In her malnourished state, Ida dreams of the past, and hunts for food in the daytime. In the common room, she stays withdrawn in her corner, feeling inferior to everyone. Useppe wakes up and observes the mass of snoring, sleeping people; he cuddles up with the old grandmother, Sora Mercedes, and goes to sleep.

An ill, delirious young soldier, identified as Carlo Vivaldi from Bologna, appears at the dormitory, and the pregnant cat, Rosella, takes a liking to him. In a fevered state, he tries to calculate something connected with shirts and tablecloths. Carlo, who appears to have been beaten or tortured, is better the next morning. Secondo helps him get more comfortable and they set up a curtain for him, behind which he reads and rests.

The Thousand want to go home to Naples where the allies are in control, and there are differing opinions as to how long it will take for the Allies to free Rome from Reich control. A large amount of meat is obtained by the Thousand, which helps Useppe and Carlo begin to feel better. Having healed, Carlo now appears to be an Arab rather than Italian, his face reflecting some kind of corruption. He practices writing his name, Carlo Vivaldi. All young men in Rome are now in danger of being taken prisoner to serve in the German military. The group has learned to signal the others if the building is approached by anyone in uniform, the men making ready to escape.



1943 - 4 and 5 Analysis

With hopes that they will be free of Nazi control soon after the Allied takeover of Naples, the refugees wait patiently in squalor, without proper food and in close quarters. Their daily living overlaps one another and one can only imagine the horrific smells and claustrophobic conditions. Useppe's dream of being on a rocking boat is due to his close proximity to two people having sex. As usual, little Useppe thinks everything is wonderful.

The story about Janet Gaynor appearing from a balloon is odd. It's difficult to tell whether this is something that actually took place or whether Caruli imagined or heard about it, and made it real in her mind. The story occasionally takes a surreal turn, and this is one example.

Carlo Vivaldi seems sinister, and his Arabic appearance implies that he is an impostor of some kind. His curled lip and the need to memorize his name may indicate that he is a spy. It is also possible that he has been tortured and has escaped a cruel fate. He is a secretive character.



1943 - 6 and 7

1943 - 6 and 7 Summary

Nino appears with a follower named Quattropunte, named for his skill with four-sided nails. Grief stricken over losing Blitz, he assumes his posture as rebel soldier and demands food, making sure everyone knows he and his friend have killed Germans. Ida briefly wonders if Nino has killed Useppe's father, not knowing he died three years ago. Nino tells the sympathetic Secondo that he has switched sides, and now dreams of revolutionizing the world. Nino is now Ace of Hearts.

Nino confronts Carlo, who claims to be an anarchist. They all agree that they are anti-Fascist. Carlo admits he was not a soldier, but a political prisoner who escaped from a sealed train heading east, arrested for distributing political propaganda. He spent three days in a bunker in Northern Italy, listening to executions, and describes how the mind tries to stay busy in such isolation. All are expecting the liberators to arrive soon.

When Secondo suggests that Carlo join the armed struggle, Carlo says violence is against his ideals; he believes only in negation of power. Nino feels communism will equalize all. Nino and Quatro rise early. Nino tells Ida he suspects Carlo is not who he says. Guiseppe Secondo offers his services and money to the cause. Nino tells him to talk to Remo, who will give him instructions. Nino promises Useppe he will take him to the partisans' camp while Ida is out.

Secondo joins the guerrilla fighters, bequeaths his property to Ida and changes his name to Moscow. He is thrilled with his new role, proclaiming great victories on the part of Nino and friends. The group learns that all Roman Jews have been rounded up and taken to the ovens. Ida expects the Gestapo to arrive for her. She buys Useppe some boots in Tiburtino and encounters an old Jewish acquaintance who begs to join her family members who wait in teeming, overstuffed cattle cars. Useppe is horrified by the sight. Someone tosses a piece of paper to her from the cattle car. When she returns to the shelter, exhausted, she has a light seizure.

Allied troops are expected to enter Rome on the anniversary of Fascism, October 28. Groups of snipers await the Germans and crowds battle them in Forte Tiburtino, taking food, medicine and weapons. Gunfire takes place in the fields around the shelter, and Germans arrive searching the building for snipers. A poster claims Germans have imprisoned Communist snipers from the area and have carried out death sentences against them. Eleven bodies are found in the ditch near Pietralata.

1943 - 6 and 7 Analysis

Nino appears again and Ida, again, is made nervous by his presence. He does not seem to show her any affection at all, but as usual, asks her for money and food as if she owes him. She trusts his ability to survive for some reason, but they are not close,



even though she longs for his presence. Useppe still idolizes Nino. Nino's new promise to him is a more serious proposition than just an escape to the park or a ride on a bicycle.

Carlo no longer seems a sinister person, but more an unfortunate person who has been frightened beyond reason. If he truly does not believe in violence, his character is not as threatening as it once seemed, however, it is not clear yet whether he is truthful about his beliefs.

Morante likes to juxtapose the fantastical or divine with the horrifying and banal. For instance, there is quite a bit of text about the cat, whose gentle nature only surfaces when she is with Carlo. Carlo himself, who seems sinister and frightening in his "lair," shares that he is against violence of any kind. Even Ida's seizures are blissful after she has experienced a grotesque and deeply disturbing sight. Use of words such as paradisaical, ecstatic, rapturous and fantastical incorporate a strange sense of disorientation from the brutal realities of war.

Secondo's zeal over getting involved in the fighting foreshadows a terrible fate. When shooting breaks out near the shelter, although the refugees think it is the Allies meeting up with German forces, it is actually snipers firing on German soldiers. At every turn, the reader expects to learn that Nino and, perhaps, Secondo, have been killed.



1943 - 8 and 9

1943 - 8 and 9 Summary

A monk arrives and leaves a message for Carlo Vivaldi; the lodgers speculate on who Carlo really is. When he learns of it, Carlo walks the streets for hours and, perhaps, beats his fists on the walls in the night. Secondo brings optimistic news, and says Nino and Quatro are fine and successful. Carlo decides to go with Guiseppe Secondo. When Rosella kills Secondo's two canaries, Ida tells Useppe they have flown away.

Nino arrives to take Useppe in Remo's truck. They stop to visit Nino's girlfriend, Maria, whom Nino intends to marry when the war ends. They walk to a mud hut where Moscow and two others discuss the night's triumphs. Useppe learns about mules and sees the ocean for the first time. Nino spots German soldiers through his binoculars and worried for the overdue Quatro, leaves Useppe behind. Useppe wanders about and hears finches whom he thinks are the canaries, singing, "It's a joke a joke all a joke!" Nino returns with his friends intact, bringing weapons, food and other supplies stolen from the German soldiers Quatro and Carlo Vivaldi (now Pyotr) have killed. Carlo, the non-violent anarchist, is Jewish, his family deported. He brutalizes the German soldiers. Maria takes Useppe on the back of the mule back to Remo at the tavern.

Pietrialata is a muddy swamp and Carulina's twins are ill. Waiting for the liberators, the room's atmosphere is foul and full of irritable drama. Mice and roaches have invaded the room. In the midst of arguing and confusion, many of the disheveled Thousand leave for other shelters, managing to procure vehicles and taking their belongings. Later in Naples, Nino learns that Carulina is a prostitute; the twins are not seen, but the family is still alive, a fact that he never shares with Ida, who never asks.

Ida and Useppe are the only two left in the shelter, and little Useppe spends hours alone, thinking. He has occasional visitors, including German soldiers and Eppetondo (Moscow), who shares gruesome stories of the guerrillas' efforts and conveys Nino's love to Useppe. He says Pyotr is useless as a fighter, now drinking heavily. Eppetondo leaves his wool mattress for Useppe, who is showing signs of wasting from malnutrition.

1943 - 8 and 9 Analysis

Carlo's Jewish heritage is now the cause of great pain and the loss of his family has completely changed his non-violent political stance. While the partisan fighters engage in the most brutal and gruesome of acts, little Useppe fantasizes with the birds and wildlife, his innocence intact. Again, words such as "rapture" and "gilded veil" and "sumptuous autumn splendors" and "festive" punctuate the horrors of what is happening around Useppe. His dangerous trip on the mule with Maria is simply a happy adventure for Useppe. Maria seems beautiful to him, the mule warm and the trip pleasant. He has

seen the ocean, spent time with his brother, communed with nature, and all is well. Again, Morante offers the light and dark.

The author reminds the reader she is just telling a story. "I have heard all private cars were forbidden to circulate at that time..."

It is interesting that this little child, who loves stories of any kind, is told by Moscow all the grueling details of the partisans' fighting. It seems that Useppe and Ida may be starving now, since she is gone looking for food and he is "rather pale and wasted."



1943-10, 1944 January - December, and 1944-1

1943-10, 1944 January - December, and 1944-1 Summary

A new double ordinance allows for all Jewish assets to be confiscated and divided among victims of air raids, and requires those of mixed breed to be under surveillance, which includes Ida. Ida is questioned, but the matter is not pursued by the Germans, although she is deeply afraid for Useppe's safety, given reports of German brutality. New people arrive at the shelter, including a group of bomb victims from Genzano, their patriarch dead of a heart attack and their family treasure walled up in the bombed ruins. A woman who is tormented by her son's ghost pays attention to Useppe, but he is otherwise ignored.

Jan: Fascists in Italian cities under German occupation are torturing and killing. The Duce's son-in-law is executed; Allied forces are blocked in Cassino. Feb-April: Remaining Jews are rounded up; 355 Italian civilians are slaughtered in response to a partisan attack that killed 32 SS patrols. The Soviet Red Army reaches southern Czech border. June-July: Allies land in Normandy and begin to reclaim France; Allies enter Rome and are joined by various resistance forces. Russian forces proceed toward Reich where an assassination attempt against Hitler fails and five thousand people are executed.

Aug-Oct: Allies enter Paris and face enemy at Florence's Gothic Line; Warsaw is destroyed for rising up against Nazis with 300,000 Poles killed. Nov-Dec: Britain commands demobilization of Italian resistance forces, anticipating Allied victory, but partisan forces continue to engage Germans. Allies are blocked at Gothic Line..

1944-1: The Allies do not yet dominate Italy as anticipated. Remo tells Ida that Nino and Pyotr are fine but no longer in the area. The deaths at the hands of Nazis of Moscow (Secondo), Quatro and Tarzan are gruesomely detailed. Moscow died at sixty, the same age as Mussolini. Nineteen-year-old Quatro, whose real name was Oreste Aloisi, died of a bullet he did not even feel. Maria, who betrays her comrades, is raped. After she leads them to the stone house hideout of Ace and his friends, she and her mother are both brutally killed.

1943-10, 1944 January - December, and 1944-1 Analysis

The atmosphere in Rome remains tense as Jews are taken, poverty continues and everyone anticipates salvation from the Allies. Ida and Useppe do not have a familial

relationship with the new boarders and Useppe does not receive the affection and attention he was once accustomed to. The year in history is one of bloody destruction, and it is not only Jews who are being slaughtered. As expected, the deaths of Nino's compatriots is gruesome but, amazingly, Nino still lives. The author has built a deep, unremitting tension in the story, as the Germans clamp down on the Jews. Ida lives in constant fear of being recognized as half-Jewish, and the total and utter chaos in the world contributes to the sense of suspended animation in her life. It seems impossible that Nino would still be alive at this point in the story, and part of the tension that is building is connected with that probability.



1944 - 2

1944 - 2 Summary

Ida finds herself missing the Thousand, since she mistrusts her new roommates. She finds the money left to her by Eppetondo in his mattress, and she and Useppe move to a rented room, out of Pietralata to Testaccio, near the school where she had taught. The school is being used by the military, but Ida is able to teach classes. The area is filled with German soldiers and she is perpetually anxious. She still holds the little note thrown to her from the train, and is afraid of seeing Signora DiSegni, to whom she confessed her Jewishness. But the Signora did get on the train with her family to Auschwitz where almost all of them were immediately sent to their deaths, including Signora DiSegni and her family, as well as the midwife who named her child after Ida. Only fifteen of those who somehow missed the train came back to the ghetto alive.

Filomena Marrocco, her father, her daughter-in-law and her husband live in the apartment where Ida and Useppe now rent the room of a son who has gone to war. The young man's belongings remain in the room, and they are left untouched. Sounds in the house include Filomena's sewing machine and the incessant hacking and exclaiming of the very ill older man whose desire is only for wine. Useppe enjoys a pet rabbit who is finally traded for canned food. A young female apprentice (piccanina) helps with the sewing and a visitor named Consolata comes by. Ida keeps Remo informed of where she is in case Nino should come to Rome. Another visitor, Santina, is a prostitute who reads cards for Filomena and Annita, giving hints about her Giovannino's whereabouts and well-being. The women have received two censored letters from Giovanni containing money and news of the soldier's difficult life, but he is now missing in action. Anitta asks Ida to re-read his letter to her. Consolata criticizes Filomena and Anitta for thinking Giovanni will come back, but she too, assumes her brother will return from the Russian front.

The Marrocco's use coarse, sexually tainted language that is shameful to Ida. Ida is gone during the days again, and Useppe is paid little attention. Useppe feels sorry for the old man and offers him wine, which is restricted and measured out by his daughter.

1944 - 2 Analysis

Although things appear to be improving for Ida, things are not good in the world. The seamstress's apprentice has a concave chest from hunger, and the women live in a constant struggle to maintain hope that they will see their missing soldiers. Although the general atmosphere of Ida's life has lightened a bit, there is a constant reminder even here of grief, upheaval and loss. Useppe is on his own again during the day, an unnatural state for a small child. His good nature shows through when he tries to help the old man by offering him wine.



1944 - 3

1944 - 3 Summary

Rome becomes a mess of bodies, beggars and filth while Reich Commands eat and drink lavishly, and orchestrate more massacres. Cruel German forces have overtaken buildings and turned them into torture chambers, employing their occupants as help. Young men are being rounded up and deported as forced labor. Young men are being required to report for Reich labor, and so much needless death is taking place that there is a certain hush among the people. New and increasingly "niggling" orders, rules and requirements are posted about the city every day, and hunger dominates the population to the point where Ida's paycheck is not enough to buy olive oil. Useppe is again losing weight and Ida is again leaving every day to find food for him, living on grass and water herself. Ida is shrunken with malnutrition but possesses an "unnamed instinct for preservation," mostly for the sake of Useppe. Ida is no longer afraid and has become indifferent to threats surrounding her, thinking only of her son. She scrounges from acquaintances and occasionally gets soup from the Vatican, having lost any sense of honor or shame, and has even accepted German handouts given as part of their propaganda machine. Most stores are closed down; Ida learns to steal food, and even Remo's supplies are becoming scarce. At one point a group of Roman women hold up a truck loaded with flour, and Ida manages to bring a bag of it home. Ida is becoming disoriented in her daily routine of searching for food, as well as weak and confused.

Ida searches the abandoned ghetto neighborhood for someone with the name of Efrati, which was written on the note she retrieved at the train. In the silence she hears voices of its past occupants living their everyday lives, and realizes they are all dead. Ida finds a butcher and trades some of her flour for meat for Useppe. That night she dreams, in black and white, of searching for a small shoe.

Filomena makes her eat some pasta, which causes her to be violently ill. She still tries to teach Useppe some manners about asking for food. The German soldiers are making a last effort and have forbidden crossing of the bridges of the Tibor river, where Ida's usual destinations are. Tomasso has seen trucks loaded with German soldiers leaving the area. The Allies enter Rome, much to Useppe's delight, but Ida continues to sleep and dream.

1944 - 3 Analysis

Ida is now a woman who may have reached her limit in terms of starvation and exertion. There seems to be an ebb and flow of hope in Rome that the Germans will be defeated, but during it all, Ida continues to struggle for survival and psychological relief. She is overtaken by the reality that all of the neighbors in the ghetto are dead, and has forced herself to enter their homes and face the fact that they are gone. Combined with the

daily horrors of war, starvation, a total relinquishment of any formerly held moral principles and a depleted spirit, Ida seems to be sinking and perhaps, giving up.



1944 - 4 and 1945 History

1944 - 4 and 1945 History Summary

Ida learns that Nino has been in Rome but he has not contacted her except for a postcard from Capri saying he will see her soon. Rome has been liberated by the allies. Annita has found that much of the village areas are decimated. The old grandfather in the house passes away. Ida resumes collecting her salary, and gets a job teaching Italian lessons to a South African military unit in exchange for food. Carlo (Pyotr), who shows up looking for Nino, announces that his name is Davide Segre. He is still strange, brooding and arrogant, and tells the Marrocco women their men will never return. Santina, who is also a prostitute, takes Davide to her room before she reads cards for the Marroccos.

The newly Americanized Nino arrives at the house two days later, well-dressed, in good humor and thriving in the admiration of those around him. He misses Useppe, who is out with Annita. Nino informs Ida that he knows she is a Jew, and that Davide Segre is Jewish also.

Davide now visits Santina frequently, and talks of his respected friend, Nino. Nino is running contraband goods, again needing to be incognito and working in resistance to established powers.

1945: The war continues with Nazi occupation of European countries and slaughter of its citizens. The Allied powers agree on the future disposition of the world. Hitler orders massive destruction; Soviets gain and Allies are advancing. Hitler makes a last-ditch defense; Roosevelt dies and Truman is president of the US. Germans begin to capitulate in Italy; Mussolini is executed publicly. Hitler kills himself and his mistress; Germany surrenders. Italy's Parri government is formed from resistance parties; Koch is executed. The US makes the first atomic bomb; Japan persists with war, but US threatens them with destruction, and drops the bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The war ends with fifty million dead, thirty-five million wounded, and three million missing. The victors divide the world except for Asia; Ho Chi Minh announces the free Republic of Vietnam. American banks protest the Parri government's left wing policies. French colonists try to reconquer Viet Nam. Civil war erupts in China between Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek. The Parri government in Italy is replaced with Prime Minister DeGasperi, who purges the Fascists.

1944 - 4 and 1945 History Analysis

Nino is not a terribly loyal son when it comes to his mother and brother. He is vain and self-centered, although passionate about his politics. He cannot stop breaking the law because his resistance to any kind of power is so ingrained in him, and is reflected in his lifelong indifference to Ida.

David Segre is a lost soul whose self loathing is so great that he idolizes Nino and drinks heavily. One might assume that his need for Santina is related to the loss of his mother. The Marrocco family, who still tries to hold out hope for their military men, seem to remain cheerful and somewhat steady in their denial. Most of the characters are portrayed now as pitiful, broken people, perhaps with the exception of Nino.



1945 - 1 and 2

1945 - 1 and 2 Summary

Nino returns briefly, and gives Ueseppe money. The family's servant remains in awe of him, but is also intimidated by him and his reputation.

The Germans finally surrender; Hitler commits suicide. The Blitzkrieg in Italy is over with millions dead, including Italy's former leaders. The war rages on elsewhere, but in Europe, trials and settling of accounts is taking place.

Ueseppe sees magazine photos of the tortured bodies of those who are hanged for their beliefs, but is otherwise unable to recognize one-dimensional objects and loves newspapers because they can be made into hats. He comes across hideous photos of bodies in Nazi prison camps, secrets that are now being revealed since the war has ended. He develops an aversion to newspapers.

After the bombings, Japan surrenders unconditionally and the second world war ends. Churchill, Truman and Stalin meet to define the peace and new boundaries, and the Iron Curtain begins to form.

Of the thousand Jews who left the Tiburtina neighborhood in Rome, fifteen return, totally traumatized and undernourished, tattooed and devastated. People try to ignore them because they are so disturbing, their plight inconceivable. Ida does not go back to the ghetto.

Consolata's brother, Clemente, a former carpenter, returns from Russia with a mutilated hand and maimed foot. He does not know what became of Giovannini. Although he tries to convince himself he is still strong and capable, Clemente is ill and easily tired. The horrors of being a prisoner in Siberia in his memory are so ugly that he is somewhat disgusted by those who were not there.

Clemente's companion, Giovanini, waits by the side of the road in the snow to be picked up, too weak to get up. Many pass by him; delirious with fever, he tries to drag himself west, his feet frozen, starving and dying of thirst. He comes upon a dead soldier, but does not know he is dead. He imagines rather unpleasant scenes with his mother, and Annita, and ultimately experiences himself as a pure little boy huddled in his mattress as he dies.

1945 - 1 and 2 Analysis

The author attempts to establish how images of brutality and violence are lodged into Ueseppe's young mind and then become just a part of who he is. Although the images are mortifying, he tucks them away into his memory and incorporates them, as did many thousands of innocent people during that time. Morante also uses Ueseppe's interest in



the pictures to describe the atrocities. The irony of three world leaders getting together to decide how things will go from now on is astonishing, given the suffering endured by the millions and the lives lost for a cause that is now irrelevant. But, as Morante points out, life goes on regardless.

The return of Consolata's brother from Russia is a surprise, however, Clemente will never be the same in any respect. His external damage cannot compare to the internal, and he can no longer relate to people who can only imagine what he's been through. He is symbolic of all returning, wounded veterans.

Morante's omnipotent position as a storyteller allows her to go back in memory to Giovannini's death and tell his story from within his own brain, relating his own perspective of the death experience. This is no pleasant death and before Giovanini rests, he experiences imaginary scenes that cause him guilt and pain. This is one person's idea of what a painful, violent death might look like from the inside out.



1946 History, 1946 1 and 2

1946 History, 1946 1 and 2 Summary

Revolution stirs in India and Greece. Postwar boundaries displace thousands of people in Europe. Italy still struggles with reactionaries who are still suffering from effects of the war. Stalin executes huge numbers of people and establishes a hideous dictatorship veiled by the Iron Curtain. Italy elects new leaders; terrorism continues in Palestine; there is civil war in Greece against British power. The Mev synchrocyclotron is installed in Berkeley, CA. Workers and police clash in Rome; the trial in Nuremberg ends with twelve death sentences. In North Vietnam, the French shell Haiphong and Ho Chi Minh calls the Vietnamese to war against France.

A relative of the Marroccos returns from Russia very ill, but he also knows little about Giovannini, whose return is imagined, fantasized and fervently hoped for by the women. Ida feels she must leave in case Giovannini returns, and will return to the Testaccio quarter in her own private lodging. Useppe is weak, pale and restless, and wakes up with nightmares since he saw the ugly newspaper photos. The doctor says Useppe is tiny for his age, but there is nothing wrong. She comments on his beautiful eyes and prescribes a sedative for sleep. Useppe seems to communicate with a small baby in the waiting room. Useppe's new tonic helps his sleep.

Nino returns on a motorcycle, of which he is very proud. He has removed the muffler, and takes Useppe on a noisy ride all over Rome. Nino perceives that there is something wrong with Useppe. Nino returns again, this time with Remo, with whom he argues about politics. Remo is still a loyal Communist, but Nino is not. Nino no longer believes in leaders like Stalin, nor does he trust causes, except his own. He only wants to enjoy life in the postwar era, and wants to become rich, an bandit anarchist in his heart.

Ida's new living quarters are tiny but she likes it, and furnishes it with the hope Nino will return. Her old schools will reopen, which is a comfort to her. On their motorcycle outings, Nino occasionally has a girlfriend with him who begs him not to drive so fast. They have sex under a tree while Useppe plays. He is used to being around this after living with the Thousand, and has no interest in it except that Nino tells him his manhood may make useppolinos some day. Useppe sees beauty in girls and women and when he kisses Patrizia's elbow, she asks Nino to give him to her. Nino says his own father was a Sheik, while Useppe's was a Chinese mandarin. Useppe laughs, knowing mandarins are a fruit. Other than this comment, Nino has never inquired or commented about Useppe's origins.



1946 History, 1946 1 and 2 Analysis

The Marrocco family represents the thousands of war-torn families who waited, sometimes for years, for their loved ones to return from war, desperately clinging to any source of news or hope.

Useppe is showing signs of the psychological effects on a child who has lived through a number of hellish situations. The doctor seems intrigued by Useppe and, as a reader, it is still impossible to tell what it is that makes him special, and whether he is impaired by his situation or is in some way brilliant or extra sensitive.

Remo is consistently self-centered, although he is loyal to his small brother. He, too, has seen and done too much to go back to his political fervor. He now only wants fun and wealth, and trusts no one but himself. He is a legend in his own mind, and wants to continue to do spectacular, stunning things in his life instead of risking his life for a leader or a cause.



1946 - 3 and 4

1946 - 3 and 4 Summary

Except for a distant uncle, Davide Segre is alone in Mantua at his family's home, all of whom have been killed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Davide has been alienated from his family for a long time due to their wealthy bourgeois lifestyle, with which he is at odds. Having spent some time distributing propaganda, for which he was caught by Germans, he now is inactive politically. There is no information about a girl he cared for. He and Nino occasionally write letters. Davide has told Nino he wants to write a book some day, although he says he wants to be a physical laborer. It is not clear how Davide got documents that hid his Jewish heritage. He took a job as an unskilled factory worker to experience the working class, performing drudgery at a milling machine, imagining himself a revolutionary. At eighteen, Davide imagines he is destined for eventual happiness, but he suffers from social awkwardness and health problems from the bad working conditions. He emerges from the job after nineteen days with his moral and political ideal intact and strengthened. Davide has Nino's great respect for his thinking and philosophizing. Davide decides to return to Rome for good.

Santina is brutally murdered by her pimp, Nello D'Angeli, who surrenders willingly. After an orphaned, institutionalized childhood, Angeli later finds his mother and has a short-lived working relationship with her before he physically abuses her and leaves. Having been a thief and abuser of animals, he finds Santina, to whom he is also abusive. However, Santina is kind to him and gives him presents, in addition to the money she earns as a prostitute. Santina is the only person who does not fit Nello's idea that everyone is his enemy. Hers is the only sense of home he has ever had. He has learned to hate freedom.

Davide returns to Rome and sees Useppe, but Nino has gone on a plane. Davide learns of Santina's death and, since her apartment is empty, rents it for himself. He is not afraid of ghosts, since they do not answer even when called. He writes a letter to Nino.

1946 - 3 and 4 Analysis

We learn much more about Davide Segre, earlier known as Carlo Vivaldi. He was a mysterious character when he first appeared at the shelter and it was not clear what problems he had experienced. We now know that he grew up a rather spoiled, privileged Jewish child and rejected his family for their bourgeois ways. His attempt to become a member of the working class was a failure, and his earlier ideals eventually led him to partisan activities with Nino.

Davide has remained a friend to Ida and Useppe, as well as Nino, but since his family was wiped out, his emotions are blunted. He does not seem to feel a thing over the loss of Santina, whom he used for comfort. He is an intelligent and perhaps, gifted, young

man who has been dulled by the horrors of war and the loss of his family. As a Jew who was spared a cruel death under Hitler's regime of terror, Davide is numb and terrorized, and is now without a family.



1946 - 5 and 6

1946 - 5 and 6 Summary

On one of Nino's frequent visits he brings a new dog named Bella, whom he has acquired from an incarcerated friend. A two-year old "shepherdess," she has had two litters of pups, and has become Nino's sidekick. Bella has a large vocabulary for a dog and remembers her former master's name, Antonio. Useppe and Bella bond quickly and when Nino argues with his landlord, he moves into Ida's home with Bella, which pleases Ida. Ida imagines having her little family together again, and suggests Nino might go back to school for a diploma. But Nino feels he is part of a new beginning, and now that his generation knows how to use guns, leaders will never control them again. His talk of guns frightens Ida. Nino leaves again, and promises Useppe he will return with a jeep.

Ida takes Useppe to her first grade classes with her, but when he proves unready, she puts him in kindergarten, which causes him to become alternately withdrawn, sad, wild, happy and generally oddly behaved. After he escapes several times, Ida now leaves him home alone with the door locked, the building's concierge or her granddaughter, Lena-Lena, charged with checking on him. She buys him a gramophone and records. He is lonely and has had a severe seizure, as well as the return of night terrors. His doctor tells him to hide his first lost tooth for the Sora Pasquetta. When Useppe gets a new record, he begins to spin in circles. One morning, Useppe has a strange flash of memory and utters the name "Carulina," the girl who lived in the shelter home when he was small. He then throws his new record on the floor and cries, trying to fix it, then becomes angry again, his moods swinging violently back and forth.

Useppe, who is still very small, avoids other children. He does not want a dog because he is afraid to lose it, like Blitz and Bella. Ida realizes that he is remembering his entire babyhood. She assures him Bella is safe with Nino, and buys him a new, special coat.

1946 - 5 and 6 Analysis

Nino is the same wild, impulsive young man, but he does have a very soft spot for dogs and his little brother. He is doing well financially, although it is worrisome to Ida that his career involves the black market and guns somehow. But Ida is happy for any time spent with Nino, as is Useppe. She fantasizes a normal education and career for Nino, but he is not a regular boy and has seen too much to return to a system he has grown to distrust.

6. Useppe is showing definite signs of mental illness, in addition to his epileptic problems. He is a sweet little boy, but cannot deal with the classroom or the presence of other children, his moods being too unpredictable and variable. It is hinted that Useppe's illness is a product of what he has seen of war, although this may just be Ida's

suspicion. She knows there is something dark and fearful in him, and knows he has seen pictures he shouldn't have.



1946 - 7

1946 - 7 Summary

Useppe continues to have troubled nights in spite of his medicines. One night he wonders if Nino has gone to America without him. The Marrocco family still waits for the return of Giovannino. Nino's whereabouts remains a mystery, although Annita has met with David Segre, who says Nino is fine. Ida can no longer face going to San Lorenzo where she might ask Remo about Nino. Useppe's behavior has become abnormal in Ida's eyes. Useppe finally has a grand mal seizure. Although he is unaware, he knows something happened and wants his mother not to tell Nino.

A police officer arrives and tells Ida that Nino has been in a serious car accident. She manages to get to the hospital and views his corpse. In a daze, Ida walks the streets and finally comes home, falling into a deep sleep. Messages of condolence arrive and guests arrive to comfort Ida, but no one tells Useppe of his brother's death. Nino was apparently involved in the transport of illegal guns, and after the accident, he died at the door of the hospital. The one survivor gave authorities the names and addresses of the other two and inquired about the dog before he passed. The accident was the result of a police chase wherein gunshots were exchanged between the two vehicles.

Afraid for Useppe and of her own unbridled emotions, Ida never cries over Nino and does not attend his funeral. She has been convinced for years that he was invincible, and she wanders the streets looking for a trace of his life, leaving Useppe alone at home. Everything is connected to Nino in her mind as she grieves. She moves through the town imagining him, his childhood, his present state, his state at the morgue, and imagines he is angry with her for giving him birth. Intermittently, she becomes angry with him for being a gangster and criminal. She imagines him alive again, begging her for help, and asks God to give him rest.

A disheveled Bella scratches at the door, a relief to Useppe, since Ida has become old and strange, Ida's teaching has gone downhill, even though her students try to show her respect for having lost her son. Ida has never become a true adult and still views authority as a child. In the classroom, although she holds some authority, her students tend to protect her from the same fears they share with her. Ida has bizarre dreams of searching for Nino; due to lack of sleep and confused behavior, her students begin to misbehave, but she cannot control or discipline them. In her wanderings, Ida comes across Vilma, the woman who had warned the Jews of what was coming in October of 1943. She cannot speak and has aged, and tries to communicate something to Ida.

Although the government has changed, for people like Ida nothing is much different, and the same people behind the scenes continue to run things. Ida votes for the first time. Remo makes visits to her and discusses politics, promising that they will see a New World. On December 31, 1946, Rome celebrated the year's end.



1946 - 7 Analysis

The effects of losing her son have rendered Ida all but insane. She cannot sleep, she wanders aimlessly, awake and in dreams entertaining wild imaginings of Nino. Poor Useppe, whose sensitivity helps him learn most of what he knows, never brings up Nino's name again, although one can assume that he intuitively knew when Nino was in danger. The appearance of Bella lightens the mood of the story only slightly, since it seems that Useppe is really alone at this point, with Ida having gone so far downhill in every way. Remo stays optimistic, but Ida and Useppe seem doomed at this point in the story.

It is interesting that Useppe stammers the name Carulina, a character from his earlier childhood with which he associates music and dancing. The narrator again reminds us that this is a story being told, since there are moments when she can't remember or believe what has happened, such as the death of Nino.



1947 History, and 1947 - 1

1947 History, and 1947 - 1 Summary

January - June: Trade union leaders are assassinated in Sicily; a pact is made between the Fascist regime and the Vatican; Britain asks the US to intervene in Greece's civil war and Truman warns against the Red Menace; The US and USSR attend to the smaller countries within their blocs, the US providing aid, the USSR taking their natural resources. The armaments race continues, the secret of atomic power formerly monopolized by the US. War persists in Greece; Ho Chi Minh rejects armistice terms offered by the French for Viet Nam; a massacre takes place at a Sicily demonstration of peasants; a new non-Communist government forms in Italy, headed by DeGasperi.

July - September: Gandhi obtains independence for India, which is divided into India and Pakistan, Hindu and Muslim, with refugees struggling to get to their proper places resulting in a million dead. Colonialism gives way to neo-colonialism, wherein resources are purchased rather than taken from the colonies; October - December. Cominform is founded. Peace talks over Germany are broken off; intense espionage continues to find atomic secret. The US produces the first missiles similar to Germany's WWII missiles.

Ida and Useppe now have a telephone. Ida inquires whether her own seizures may have been inherited by Useppe, but the doctor wants to do an EEG, to which Ida is opposed. Useppe's eyes are unusual and look as though he has seen much more than most. Useppe now stays with Bella exclusively, who no longer leads a luxurious life of baths, grooming and fancy food. Useppe has taken on Bella's odor, and the two spend time outside when the weather is nice. Bella protects Useppe and brings him home at supper time. The two occasionally hear someone calling a "Nino," of which there are many in the neighborhood.

Useppe has another grand mal seizure, which Ida witnesses from the beginning. Confined to the apartment the next day, Useppe draws with colored pencils and destroys his drawings later. Ida finds him crying in the hall, and Useppe asks her, "Wy?"

1947 History, and 1947 - 1 Analysis

The world seems to be setting down, but not necessarily in a good way. There are still factions fighting, and the new competition for the atomic bomb seems ominous. Communism has now become the dire enemy of the western part of the world, and even religious factions are slaughtering one another in India and Pakistan.

For now, Useppe and Ida and Bella are doing a bit better in their standard of living; however, they are suffering more than ever emotionally, physically and mentally. Useppe's convulsions are frightening and, due to her deep-seated fears of electricity, Ida will not have him tested any further. Little Useppe is growing more ill and, at least with Bella, he has some piece of his beloved brother with him. We do not know why

Useppe cries and asks his mother "wy?" but she has looked at him at one point in this chapter and feels he "knows," so perhaps he is grieving the loss of Nino, as well.



1947 - 2, 3 and 4

1947 - 2, 3 and 4 Summary

Ida decides to have Useppe undergo the recommended EEG. Ida is afraid of the large doctor, who sends Useppe out to look at a hamster. Useppe wants to take him out of the cage and free him, but the doctor stops him. Useppe responds by kicking him. The EEG does not offer any specific diagnosis. The doctor asks Ida if Useppe is receiving proper nourishment, and prescribes medicine for the symptoms. Ida's fear of doctors is cemented and she decides that Bella and Useppe can freely be out together, since she wants Useppe to be like other little boys.

Bella keeps Useppe from getting lost in the Testaccio district, where he occasionally becomes afraid or confused. The two discover a place where the river is unbounded and Bella has memories of the sea. The two find a peaceful clearing in the woods closed off by a circle of trees that form a tent. Useppe hears a birdsong he remembers from being at Eppetondo's, waiting for Nino. The bird seems to be singing something like, "It's a joke, a joke all a joke!" Useppe hears the silence speaking in voices, colors, lights and shadows and all the sounds of the world, including his brother asking him for a little kiss. All of this makes him laugh out loud.

Bella and Useppe encounter Davide Segre in the street, but he quickly leaves them to go home where he can feed his addiction. Davide, on one of his sojourns, met up with a friend from the revolution who is a medical student. The friend gives Davide morphine to calm him. He becomes addicted to opiates and sleeping pills. Bella leads Useppe to David's dirty house where they find him resting on his bed. David recalls the joy in both Useppe and his brother, Nino, and tells Useppe that happiness is not of this world, that he is too pretty for this world. They decide they will always be friends. Useppe says he makes poems in his mind and says them to Bella; he agrees to recite one for Davide. Davide tells him he speaks of God, and that all natures testifies to the existence of God. Davide recites his own poems for Useppe, who asks him if he believes in paradise. Davide does not want there to be a God. When Useppe and Bella return to Davide's and he is unable to see them for the second time, Useppe invites him to dinner at his house. However, Davide does not show up. Useppe and Bella head out to their tree tent.

1947 - 2, 3 and 4 Analysis

Useppe's EEG amazingly does not show anything significant. It is not clear whether his condition might be caused by his malnourished childhood. Ida is more comfortable now letting Useppe out on his own with Bella, the loyal dog. This is one of the lighter chapters of the story, since Useppe is finally free to have new experiences on his own with the safety of Bella's company. The family is doing better financially, evidenced by Useppe's nice clothing for his doctor visit, as well as regular meals, medicine and a taxi

ride. Useppe seems to understand the language of animals and, in his sensitivity, is not at all like other little boys as Ida would hope.

4. David Segre, the one friend left from Nino's time, is in a state of terrible depression and addiction. The presence of Useppe and Bella gives him the opportunity to recite his poetry and talk, although he is in an inebriated state. Davide's beliefs have led him to somehow believe in poverty, and reject all of the values he was taught as a child, including the idea of God. He recognizes God through nature. Davide, too, is a very sensitive soul. Now that the war has ended, it seems that things are lighter, however, the humans themselves who have been through it show signs of deep damage.



1947 - 5

1947 - 5 Summary

The tree tent's only inhabitants have been the dreamy Useppe and Bella; however, they now find that someone has been there, evidenced by food and personal treasures. They meet, what appears to be a twelve-year-old dwarf who reminds Useppe of the guinea pig he saw. The creature warns them that the cops are after him, and smokes a cigarette. Useppe sings the birds' song to him. Scimo shows him a newspaper article with his name in it and admits he has escaped from a reformatory. Scimo forgives Bella for eating his lupines, and tells Useppe about pirates across the river and says he will be back tomorrow.

A woman named Patrizia, who was a lover of Nino's, encounters Useppe and tells him her baby is Useppe's niece. Crying over the loss of Nino, she boards a bus and leaves with her baby, Ninuccia.

Scimo is at the hut and he tells them of his vast mixture of intertwined relatives. Scimo shows Useppe his medal which was an advertising piece that he treasures, among other small items. Scimo's benefactors all seem to be "faggots," a term which Useppe does not understand. After swimming, Scimo and Useppe compare genitals. Scimo explains his scars and beats his head on the ground, then prepares to go to the movies, telling Useppe he is too little to go.

Thinking he sees pirates, Useppe feels a seizure coming on and falls into the water, where Bella keeps him afloat and gets him to shore. The seizure is averted and the two of them fall to sleep. Useppe dreams of snow falling and of being in the water, with the circle of hills blissful, the trees vivid and healthy, the panorama resembling a garden in the sky. Although very sleepy, Useppe agrees with Bella to go home, but he slept until past lunch time the next day. Remembering to meet Scimo, Bella and Useppe find him gone, not knowing that he has been recaptured and is in a cell being punished. Assuming they have just missed Scimo, Useppe and Bella sit, Useppe still feeling very tired.

Bella tells Useppe all about her beautiful puppies and tells him how beautiful he, Nino and his mother are, as well as extolling the beauty of Scimo and Davide.

Dog and boy go into town where there is festive activity. Useppe buys two ice cream cones for himself and Bella, and decides to visit Davide Segre. Useppe wants to go home to get the wine they had bought for the dinner Davide did not attend, but instead hears Davide's voice coming from a tavern nearby.



1947 - 5 Analysis

In a different setting, these stories would be those of childhood bliss, of finding secret spots and meeting strange people and having the freedom to play and imagine. However, in Useppe's case, there is an underlying darkness and foreboding, since his only companion is a dog, and his illness is so unpredictable. There is some sense of a new maturity for Useppe, as he now gets money for ice cream and is allowed to go farther with Bella than ever before. Apparently being in the streets at all hours is not unusual in this culture.

It is hard to say whether Useppe understands that his niece is Nino's daughter, or whether one can know if Ida ever learns of the child.

Scimo is an odd character that almost seems to pop out of Useppe's imagination. He is dwarf, or "pygmy" like, with tufts of hair on his tiny ears, perhaps a result of inbreeding, based on the descriptions of his family. The author is very slowly setting the stage for Useppe's demise, as she has already warned us.

The author tells us now that Useppe and Bella are conversing clearly and understanding one another, which makes one question Useppe's state of mind.

It is worth noting that the streets of Rome are now safe enough for a little boy to roam without a guardian, in contrast to the beginning of the story when there was nothing but danger in the city.



1947 - 6

1947 - 6 Summary

Davide welcomes Useppe and Bella into the tavern, then ignores them. They see Filomena's brother, Black Hand, now destitute and estranged from his sister. Davide is not looked on with regard by the card-playing patrons. Useppe notices a swelling on Davide's arm, as Davide rambles aloud, not involved in the game and not making much sense. Davide is high on drugs and cannot mix the wine Useppe brought, but only wants to speak about something he urgently needs to communicate. The others want to forget about the war, but he needs to lecture, as though in a classroom, on Fascism and Nazism, history, exploitation and revolution. While other patrons listen to a game on the radio, Davide goes on about Power and, realizing no one is listening, pipes up and says he is a Jew. This also gets little response, so he picks up his thread about human life, the nature of the universe, his atheism and belief in anarchy. Useppe tries to remind Davide that he and Bella are there, but is ignored. Davide describes anarchy like a utopia, repeating his hatred of the bourgeoisie power. Working himself into a frenzy, Davide experiences something like Turret's syndrome, randomly babbling obscenities. All of the former aspects of Davide Segre make their presence known. He admits he was born into a bourgeoisie family, which he realized at a young age was scum, particularly his own arrogant father. He rails at his young sister's naivete, then admits that they are all in "the pile." His speech vacillates among his memories, passion and superego. Only Useppe listens. He admits he was a murderer, and decides that the Christ was the ultimate anarchist who represents total consciousness. There is no need for a revolution because there is a Christ in each of us who most often goes unrecognized. Davide contemplates that we all have in us the SS and the bourgeoisie and he recalls the man he murdered whose face became childlike. Davide goes to the restroom and comes out re-medicated and revived. He finally leaves, with Useppe and Bella behind him. Davide tells Useppe he is too pretty for this world, and goes home to sleep. In his misery, Davide tries to tell Useppe two different very distorted fairy tales, and the boy and Bella leave him, making plans for the next day to see Scimo.

1947 - 6 Analysis

This fifty-two-page chapter is devoted primarily to the ramblings of David Segre, who is, at this point in the story, mentally ill with grief, guilt, anger and fatigue, in addition to being addicted to narcotics. He is mostly ignored by his tolerant friends, and much of what he is saying is valid; however, it is so much more valid in his own ears and mind that it is something of a nuisance and goes on far too long to have any impact. He speaks from all of the aspects which have been him - a revolutionary, a Jew, a child, an anarchist, a brother, a son, etc. He is physically depleted and malnourished, as well, making his brain seem foggier than it really is. Useppe's presence at the tavern allows the reader to be an audience to Davide in order to grasp the full extent of his condition, even though Useppe does not understand the situation.

It is interesting that throughout Davide's dissertation, the men continue to play cards together and listen to competitive sports, all of them fairly relaxed and comfortable as compared to Davide, who is agitated and irrational. Earlier in the story David, then Carlo Vivaldi, appeared as a pacifist and anarchist, who did not believe in violence. Clearly, his participation in gruesome violence has affected him to the core. When he killed a young soldier, Davide realized that at the time of death we become totally innocent again, as babies.

Bella is now a true character in the novel, since she and Useppe hold full conversations, understanding one another's language.



1947 - 7

1947 - 7 Summary

Davide wrestles in a feverish sleep with tormented dreams and images that call into question the truths about his core beliefs, the choices he has made, his experiences and the nature of reality. His dreams seem to cover every aspect of his life and thoughts, including those of future technology and ancient philosophies. Memories of Nino and of the young German soldier Davide killed pop up through symbolism in his nightmares. He is physically ill with withdrawal, struggling desperately for the willpower to end his addictions. He relives the memory of his mother's gift of a necktie, which is symbolic, in his mind, of all that is bourgeoisie.

Useppe and Bella find that Scimo really is missing. In the afternoon, with the bottle of wine in hand, they go to Davide's as planned, but the ravaged Davide shouts obscenely for them to leave, and Useppe runs home, extremely upset over the rejection. He is unable to tell Ida what has happened. Useppe has another seizure and sleeps for two days. In the meantime, Davide, finally giving in, has injected himself with drugs and, perhaps accidentally, has overdosed and died.

Ida never realizes that the wine flask is missing and does not know that Useppe's emotional state is connected with Davide. She blames herself for Useppe's relapse, as she has not been consistent with his medicines. The doctor feels that neither Ida nor Useppe have long to live, as she has seen the "goodbye" in Useppe's eyes. They plan to admit him to the hospital the following Monday, and on a now-reduced dose of medicine, Useppe seems more affectionate, as they plan a real vacation in the woods. During Ida's afternoon nap, Useppe and Bella go to the river to see Scimo. Useppe again hears the birds singing "it's a joke," and watches as a group of dreaded adolescent "pirates" arrives. Bella and Useppe both go on the attack, bringing on a seizure in Useppe. The frightened kids think they have killed him, and they run. Useppe goes into his usual post-seizure deep sleep, and Ida wakes up in a panic when she realizes he is not there. On her way to the river, Bella meets her and guides her to Useppe. Using Bella as a vehicle, the three manage to get home. Ida is obligated to go to school the next day but during a meeting is overcome with fear. She cannot reach Useppe by phone and runs home. She finds little Useppe dead and falls into her own state, her brain letting go.

Bella, who relentlessly tries to protect Ida and Useppe, is put to sleep by authorities and Ida is forced to let Useppe be taken away. In a state of deaf, mute insanity, she enters an asylum that day, from which she never leaves until her death nine years later.



1947 - 7 Analysis

The author takes great liberties with the assumption that animals and people communicate and that animals are of a higher intelligence. She also makes reference for the first time to Useppe as "simple," although she has inferred it in many different ways up until now. With Scimo, the strange little dwarf, Davide, the suffering addict and the band of ruffians, the war seems to have swallowed everything in Ida's world into a black hole of ugly negativity and horror. Of course, this does not include Useppe, whose deteriorating state makes him seem more and more angelic, and Bella, whose loyalty and intelligence results in a very important character for this part of Useppe's life.



Characters

Ida (Ramundo) Mancuso

Ida can be considered the main character in this story because the chain of events that unfolds is primarily associated with her and her two sons. Ida is a school teacher whose father was Jewish. She is shy and frightened and lives in a state of tension over the possibility of being discovered as being half-Jewish. Ida is not an authoritative parent, and when her rebellious son, Nino, begins to wander the streets and smoke cigarettes at fifteen years of age, she protests, but to no avail. He manipulates her for money and she allows him free access to the house, including housing and caring for his two dogs, which she cannot afford. She is frustrated by his use of bad language and his involvement in dangerous dealings, but is powerless over him. For the rest of his life, Ida wonders and worries about Nino, but defers to him constantly, believing him to be somehow invincible.

With respect to Useppe, Ida's primary concern is over his safety and survival. She is forced to lock her little child in their apartment during the day, where he spends many lonely hours, not particularly thriving. Useppe becomes Ida's reason for living.

Ida initially carries deep shame and guilt over the conception of her youngest son, Guiseppe (Useppe), who is the result of rape by a German soldier. She becomes old before her time. Her body suffers from malnourishment, her focus being on Useppe's survival and well-being. As a child, she has a light case of epilepsy, which has shown up starkly in Useppe. She was a somewhat gifted child, but now a middle-aged widow in the middle of a world war, she withdraws and closes herself off to anything but the most cursory interactions with others. When their building is bombed out, Ida lives with a group of people in shelter housing, and later takes up residence with others to get back on her feet. She has a deep empathy for her Jewish neighbors, who have all but disappeared due to Hitler's roundups; however, her personal goal is to avoid having her own heritage revealed to the Nazis.

Although she is a broken and traumatized woman, Ida stays remarkably able to provide for Useppe, gleaning food from the streets during the day, and gratefully returning to work at the school when she is able. Her mental illness eventually outweighs her physical deficiencies, and she outlives Useppe by nine years, albeit in a state of catatonia.

Giuseppe Felice Angiolino (Useppe)

Little Giuseppe has named himself Useppe because of his childish speech. He is a tiny, sickly child who never does catch up to average in size and health. He is a child of rape and war, and comes into the world under disadvantaged circumstances. His mother, who is his protector and keeper, takes second place in his life to his beloved older



brother, Nino, who only shows up occasionally for play and bonding with Useppe. The author implies that Useppe longs silently for his brother for most of his life.

As a baby, Useppe is precocious, happy and loves people. Living in an emergency shelter, he is exposed to life in its rawest form. He happily joins others at their meals and, in his innocence, is charming and lovely. His eyes reflect a deeper plane of existence, the meaning of which can only be guessed at. Useppe has a severe case of epilepsy, which becomes exacerbated due to periods of hunger and malnourishment. Special, and too small for his age, Useppe seems gifted with a vibrating sensitivity that allows him to communicate with and understand animals. Useppe lives in a world of his own and, like his brother, begins wandering the streets of Rome at an extremely young age, accompanied by Nino's dog, Bella.

Useppe's condition, both mental and physical, can be attributed to his inherited epilepsy, his malnourishment, his shock over seeing horrifying images of persecuted Jews, his loss of Nino and Blitz and being isolated as a baby, left to fend for himself. There is not one specific cause for his failure to thrive, but many causes, all of them attributable to the horrors of war.

The few people in his life who mean a lot to him, disappear. His mother is already somewhat distant, trapped by her own anxiety, ill health and inability to sleep. His brother is totally unreliable and finally, does not return at all. His friend Davide falls into an insane drug stupor and rejects Useppe entirely before his death. His dwarf friend, Scimo, who is an escaped orphan, also is captured and disappears from Useppe's life. His best friend, literally, is the dog Bella.

Toward the end of his short life, Useppe hears a birdsong, the words of which he interprets as "It's a joke." Little Useppe is a tragic and lovable character who is war victim who has never been captured, shot or tortured. His life is entirely compromised from his conception to his death.

Ninnarieddu (Nino) Mancuso

Ida's eldest child, Nino, is her son by Alfio Mancuso. Nino is rebellious and disrespectful toward his mother, but is still lovable. He loves his new baby brother and promises him the world, fully intending to deliver but not quite coming through for Useppe as he promises. Nino is a rebel, even if he needs to change his stance. In the beginning of the story, he rails in support of the fascists. However, as time goes on, he joins a militant faction fighting against the Nazis. Finally, Nino realizes that the real enemy is anyone who is in a position of power over the people. Having become so entangled in underground activities, when his causes dry up, he decides to become rich and go to America and continues his black market, underground activities. However, Nino's wild lifestyle catches up with him and he is eventually killed in an accident.

Nino is a daredevil who wants to live his life fully awake and involved. Although he is a thug, he is flashy, handsome and full of bravado. The young woman he is most attracted



to is part of the partisan effort, and is also a tough character. There is an implication that he has inherited his restless political subversiveness from his maternal grandfather, Giuseppe. However, he is influenced, as well, by Davide Segre, whose views of anarchy makes the most sense to him.

One learns at the end of the story that one of Nino's girlfriends has borne his child. However, this information is passed on to little Useppe and never reaches Ida, the child's grandmother.

Davide Segre (Carlo Vivaldi)

Davide Segre appears first in the story when he comes to the shelter where Ida and Useppe are living after their building is destroyed. He presents himself as a Catholic Italian, Carlo Vivaldi, but is, in actuality, an escaped Anarchist Jew. While doing some propaganda work, Davide is caught by the Germans and arrives at Pietralata under the assumed name of Carlo Vivaldi.

Davide does not believe in violence, but he eventually joins Nino in partisan fighting after he learns that his entire family has been destroyed at Auschwitz. In direct violation of his own values, Davide murders a young German, an act which will haunt the rest of his days. Davide remains a friend of Ida's family, and Useppe loves him. Davide's only romantic relationship is with an old prostitute, Santina, to whom he returns only for the comfort of the familiarity of her bed and the fact that she always lives in the same place.

When Davide returns to Rome, devastated over his personal losses (which include his friend, Nino), and his own self-hatred, he finds Santina's apartment empty due to her death, and immediately moves in. He becomes increasingly addicted to hard drugs and even severs his relationship with little Useppe, who wants to help him but does not understand his condition. Davide finally dies from overdosing on drugs, his suffering and early death making him another victim of a hideous war.

Bella

Bella comes into the Mancusos' lives after the war has receded and when Nino has come to see himself as a rich man. Bella is a large, intelligent white dog who has been raised on the finest of foods, exceeding the quality of food that Ida and Useppe consume. Bella seems to know that Nino has left the earth, and Useppe becomes her charge and her responsibility. She guides him, takes cues from him and, if the reader is to believe the story, communicates with Useppe. Bella roams the streets with Useppe and goes with him to the place by the Tiber river where the dwarf orphan, "Scimo," is hiding out. Bella senses danger, like any dog, and is extremely protective of Useppe, jumping into danger herself when he is threatened by a gang of adolescent kids. She goes to see Davide Segre with Useppe, and waits with Useppe while Davide drinks and insanely philosophizes in a tavern. She represents a sense of security for Useppe, who, at five years old, has total freedom to wander with her. When Useppe falls into a severe grand mal seizure, Bella runs toward home to alert Ida, then leads Ida to him.



Bella's end is tragic, as well. When Useppe dies, Ida is unable to function and remains in the house holding Useppe's lifeless body. Bella becomes violent in her efforts to protect the two from the police, and she is shot so that the authorities can get to Ida and Useppe. Bella is imbued with human traits in her interactions with Useppe, reflecting the author's wish that the reader knows Useppe as a highly sensitive child.

Remo

When Ida is raped in the very beginning of the story, she is living near Remo's inn/tavern in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. When Ida's building is destroyed by bombs, she moves to a community shelter but reluctantly turns to Remo, more than once, for food for her son. Remo is a political activist involved in Italy's resistance movement, with the same interests as Nino; however, he is a devout Communist and Marxist. Throughout the war, Remo is Ida's source of information regarding the whereabouts and activities of her elusive son. Remo's tavern serves as a headquarters for partisan activity, and Remo is a key figure in the organization of the subversive activities in which Nino and his friends are involved.

Epetondo (Cuchiarelli) Giuseppe Secondo

A marble cutter who dwells in the refugee building where Ida and Useppe go for shelter, Ida sees him as slightly "mad." Many in Italy are named Giuseppe — this Giuseppe likes Ida and Useppe, and is very good to them. The three meet on the trail to Petrialata, where Giuseppe lets the tired baby Useppe ride in his wheelbarrow. Later, he leaves money sewn into his wool mattress for Ida. He names the large, mixed family who resides in the shelter "The Thousand," and is the owner of the aloof cat, Rosella (who later makes friends with Carlo Vivaldi).

Gunther

A complex character who disappears after the first chapter, Gunther is a young German soldier who is wandering Rome, waiting to be shipped out to Africa. He is barely mature enough to be out on his own, much less a soldier in Hitler's army. However, he has adopted the swagger expected of him, and he senses that people in Rome are not much impressed with him. In a drunken state, fearing for his own future, he encounters the meek Ida Mancuso and forces her into her apartment, where he brutally rapes her. However, there is some very strange notion at the end of this horrifying episode that they perhaps, for a moment, felt some kind of love for one another. He is killed shortly after he leaves, but Ida is never aware of it. She is pregnant from the rape and bears her youngest child, who she names Giuseppe, and who comes to be known in the story as "Useppe."



Giuseppe and Nora (Almiglia) Ramundo

Ida's parents, the Ramundos, baptize their daughter Iduzza (Ida) as a Catholic. Nora has some mental difficulties, and Giuseppe is a radical anarchist in his thinking. Nora was raised as a Jew, however, she denies it vehemently to everyone but her family. Instead of spelling her maiden name as it originally was, Almagia, with an accent on the "a," she changes the spelling to have the accent on the "i" in order to be seen as Italian. Giuseppe is an alcoholic who raged on about politics, her mother a closet Jew who put the lifelong fear of persecution into Ida. Although eight years younger than Nora, Giuseppe died first, and Nora eventually was found drowned.

Carulina, Rosa and Celeste, and The Thousand

A large family who comes to live in the refugee shelter in Pietralata is named "The Thousand" by Giuseppe Secondo. Carulina is a fifteen-year-old member of The Thousand family. She was impregnated at fourteen, but does not know who the father is. Carulina gives birth to twin girls, Rosa and Celeste and, although she is not healthy herself, tries to be a good mother to them in spite of the fact that she is still a child, herself. She washes their clothing and actually tries to take care of everyone, including little Useppe. Carulina is fascinated by movies and celebrities, and claims to have seen Janet Gaynor emerge from an egg bomb, hand out treats, and return to the flying vessel from which she had emerged. Useppe is particularly fond of Carulina and remembers her name one time later in the story when he is older. Carulina's twins eventually die from malnutrition, and she turns to prostitution. The family leaves the shelter

Scimo

Scimo is an orphaned dwarf child who has learned his way around the streets of Rome. Useppe and Bella find his hiding place near the river, where he has stashed small items that he treasures. He is impressive to Useppe because he is older and because he goes to the movies, but he has actually escaped from an institution and is trying not to be found. He becomes a friend to Useppe and Bella, and they are disappointed when they find that he has gone. The reader knows that he has been found and re-institutionalized, but the little boy and his dog are unaware of what has happened to him.

Blitz

Blitz is the first dog that Nino brings to Ida's home. He is Nino's companion and is loved by Useppe, as well. Blitz perishes in an air raid that destroys the building where the Mancuso's have been living.



Vilma and Signora Sinino

A cat lover who lives in the Ghetto, Vilma tells of horrific news she is hearing about the Nazis and their treatment of Jews in Poland. Signora Sonnino sells clothing and listens to the Fuhrer's voice on the radio, and has some understanding of what is coming. Both women are more aware than the average citizen in Rome's neighborhoods about what Hitler is actually planning and doing to the Jews of Europe.

Benito Mussolini

The Fascist dictator in Italy until 1943, the "Duce," as he named himself, sided with the Axis powers in World War II, and was eventually killed by Italian Partisan forces in 1945. His power was on a level with the King of Italy, and he was admired by Nino Mancuso. However, siding with Hitler against the Allied forces was his downfall, and he was ousted from power.

Adolph Hitler

This German Fascist dictator's sweep through Europe, extinguishing the Jewish population and spreading terror, his military establishment came under fire in Italy from partisan forces, such as the guerrilla fighters Nino Mancuso was involved with. His forces were finally forced by Russia to leave Italy. When Hitler was taken out of power, he and his mistress committed suicide.

Annita, Consolata and Filomena Marrocco

The Marroccos take Ida and Useppe into their home for a time. The women are waiting, in vain, for their fiance and son, Giovannino, to return from Russia. He has been fighting in the war and has been missing in action for quite a long time. Filomena is a dressmaker. Consolata's brother, Clemente, does return from the war but is missing a hand and is bitter at being disabled.

Ezekiel Di Capua

A Neapolitan woman, Ezekiel Di Capua is the midwife in the San Giovanni district who helps Ida give birth to Useppe. She allows Ida to stay for a few days and cares for her at no charge.

Patrizia

Patrizia is one of Nino's many lovers, who Useppe knows from outings with the two of them. After Nino's death, Patrizia approaches Useppe to show him his new niece, and



bemoans the fact that Nino has left her in this way. Useppe still has not been told of Nino's death.

Santina

Davide Segre's lover, Santina, is an unattractive, older prostitute who takes him in and is good to him. It is not clear why Davide is attracted to Santina unless she reminds him of his mother. He begins to rely on her company and perhaps, even loves her. When she is murdered, Davide takes over her apartment and lives there until his death.

Nello D'angeli

Nello D'angeli is Santina's pimp who brutally murdered her in a fit of insanity. Nello has never been loved or had a real home, and he expresses his deep pain through violence.



Objects/Places

Rome

Elsa Morante's story takes place in Italy, primarily in Rome and its outskirts, covering a span of time from when German Nazi forces were only discussed and speculated upon, to their total occupation of the city, removal of Jews, and eventual retreat. The impoverished Italian people look from one leader to the next for relief and protection, but find that the working class is oppressed under every brand of facism and communism that comes into power. An ancient and beautiful city, this story tells of the devastation of Rome by bombs dropped both by Axis and Allied forces.

San Lorenzo

San Lorenzo is a working-class district in Rome where Ida Mancuso lives with her two sons, Nino and Useppe. After many air raid alarms and evenings spent in the air raid shelter in the building's basement, their building is finally bombed and destroyed, leaving Ida and Useppe without a home.

Pietralata

A settlement in the country on the outskirts of Rome, Pietralata is where Ida and Useppe go, along with Cuchiarelli Giuseppe, to live in a refugee shelter when their apartment building is bombed out. In this location the Facist regime built a housing development for the poor and disenfranchised, consisting of cheap, small, identical hovel-like dwellings. The refugees wait in the shelter for the Germans to retreat from Rome so they can return.

Ghetto

The Ghetto is the Jewish Italian neighborhood where Ida Mancuso does some of her food shopping, and where some of her friends live. This is where she goes to privately give birth to Useppe, and this is where she and Useppe see a train, loaded to capacity, with human beings who are being taken to Auschwitz,. The district becomes virtually empty of people, and is a source of fear for the half-Jewish Ida.

Air Raids

When the sirens go off, Ida and Nino and little Useppe go down to the air raid shelters until the danger has passed. The people of San Lorenzo tend to ignore the sirens because they think they are protected by the Pope.



Via Bodoni

Check in the 500 - s 554

Via Bodoni is where Ida and Useppe lived in their own house after the German occupation of Rome was over. Ida has to return to her work at the school, and Useppe is left in the home with the dog Bella, and is looked in on by the concierge's niece, Lena-Lena.

Mantua

At the home of his deceased family, Davide Segre decides to stay for a while in Mantua in their abandoned home. Davide hates the way he was raised by his bourgeois family, and decides while in Mantua to find out what it is really like to be a laborer.

Axis and Allies

"Germany, Italy, and Japan. The axis also included minor powers such as Finland, Slovenia, Hungary, Manchkuo, Romania, Thailand, Persia." Allied forces were "...primarily Great Britain, France, Soviet Union, USA, China, Canada, Poland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, the Netherlands, Czechslovakia, Belgium, Denmark and Norway also joined the allies. The Soviet Union was initially part of the Axis Powers but switched sides so did Finland and Romania. By 1945, almost the whole world were at war with the Axis." (www.answers.com)

Genocide

The Germans are instructed by Hitler to conduct all-out genocide against the Jews after "Kristallnacht," a night of violence in 1938. This effort eventually extended to all the Jews in Europe and ended in the deaths of at least six million Jews.

Dauchau

The home and birthplace of the German soldier named Gunther who raped Ida Mancuso and fathered Useppe. Dachau later became known for "biological experiments" conducted against Jews.

Anarchy

A political belief held by Ida's father, as well as Davide Segre and Ida's son, Nino, anarchy opposes any person or structure that holds power over the weaker or less fortunate. Thus, whomsoever is in power at the moment is the opposition, whether it be communism, facism or capitalism.



Guerilla War Fields

Nino took Useppe to a secret hideout hut where he and his band of partisan comrades, "the Liberty Group," were staying. It is a long donkey ride to this area from Pietralata, and the location is out in the hills of Italy where, from their small cabin they are able to spot German soldiers and maneuver ways to kill them.

Facism

A political belief system that relies on oppression and authoritarianism, and which gives no credence to individualism. Facists believe war and violence the key to keeping their society intact, and that an aristocratic dictatorship system and strong militarism are the best ways to maintain control. Hitler was a facist, and Italy, which once sided with Hitler, changed sides half way through World War II.

Aryans

Aryans are non-Jewish people who are of Caucasian descent. Hitler considered Aryans the "master" race.

Testaccio District

The Testaccio district of Rome is where Ida and Useppe rented a room from the Marroccos at via Mastro Giorgio, after spending time in the emergency shelter in Pietralata.

Blackouts

During the war, local and regional regulations frequently required citizens to turn out or block out any lights that might show at night, since enemy bombers were likely to spot the cities if lights were on.

Mongomeri

A mongomeri is a duffle coat, "made fashionable by General Montgomery, who wore it in battle"(516) Ida Mancuso bought an Italian imitation of one of these coats for little Useppe.



Grand Mal Seizure

A Grand Mal seizure is a full-body and mind seizure. In Useppe's case, the seizures are a result of epilepsy. The seizure generally causes temporary unconsciousness, jaw clenching and paroxysms.

Tiber River

The river that runs through Rome, the Tiber provides a peaceful setting for Useppe and Bella, who explore the banks and meet their friend, Scimo. Useppe has one of his last seizures on the banks of the river.

Four Point Nails

Quattropunte, one of Nino's militant friends, fashions nails with four points, which they use to stop or disable German military vehicles.



Themes

Less Obvious Horrors of War

Morante's story is a revelation of many layers of suffering that result from war. She reminds her readers that what takes place in small villages that are under siege or occupied by enemy forces is inhumane, and results in forms of unimaginable suffering. It is this suffering that one is most unaware of, since information on troops lost and casualties is presented objectively and without detail.

Among many others, Morante's main characters are Ida, Nino, Useppe and Davide. These are typical Italian citizens who have done nothing wrong to anyone. Ida is a school teacher, her son a rebellious teenager, and Davide, an undercover Jewish pacifist who does not believe in his family's aristocratic ways, but sympathizes with the common worker. Ida and Useppe, who are passive victims of the war, both suffer from malnutrition, hunger, terror, exacerbated medical problems, homelessness, loneliness, depression, early aging and death. Nino, who will not sit back passively, skips his education and becomes involved in murdering soldiers and trading on the black market at a very young age. He eventually meets an untimely death smuggling guns, always with the hope and dream of freedom and comfort.

Ida lives in fear of being revealed as being half Jewish, and lives her life in a state of anxiety for her self and the safety of her sons. She lives in a state of social awkwardness, feeling inferior to those around her because of her heritage. She watches as friends in the Ghetto are taken by train to concentration camps. She endures rape and pregnancy at the mercy of an enemy soldier. Her life work is interrupted by the war.

Useppe, of course, is a baby who is born of a brutal rape. He could be brilliant, but is under the constant blight of epilepsy, the symptoms of which increase due to his malnourished state. He is left alone by necessity as a little child because his mother cannot afford to put him under someone's care and she needs to work. He is witness to filth and the rawness of life in the shelter home, as well as the disappointment of not being able to see his brother, who is busy with his underground dealings. Nino, who bravely and brashly tries to buck the system, is killed in a car chase involving stolen weapons.

Davide Segre, Morante's only fully Jewish main character, suffers the loss of his entire family. In attempting to stay true to his spiritual convictions, he has rejected them, but did not expect to lose them. He is forced to commit murder, which haunts him forever. He eventually becomes an alcohol and drug addict and kills himself with an overdose.

These are stories that don't make the headlines, and ones that do not appear in history books. Even the suffering cat, pet birds and dogs in the story are affected by the war. There is no thing or being in Morante's story that survives the war unscathed.



Oppression of the Working Class

There is a running theme in the story about the hope of the Italian people for the working class. They think Communism might be their salvation, and some believe that Fascism could make a difference. However, the working class continues to pay the price for whatever system is in place, an irony that Morante makes a point of repeating.

David Segre, who is raised in an aristocratic family, is devoted to the idea of uplifting the working class in Italy. He experiences working as a laborer for a short time and is unable to continue under the harsh conditions, but his convictions are even stronger after he leaves the job.

Nino, whose sympathies change from Fascist to Communist to Capitalist, simply wants a better life for the common people, like his small family. Nino eventually identifies himself as an anarchist because it becomes clear to him that regardless of the political philosophy, the people in power will always be the oppressors.

Ida's father and Remo are convinced that Communism will bring about a greater sense of equality, unaware that the form of Communism being practiced in Russia at that time was brutal and violent.

In the "history" segments of the book, Morante points out that, after each war, the three powers sat down and decided how the world would be divided up, who would control what regions. There has never been a true democracy wherein the common people were able to determine their own fate.

Familial Relationships

In *History: A Novel*, Elsa Morante makes many references to the power and importance of family. Family provides another thread for Morante's theme of the less recognized agonies of war.

Ida Mancuso's childhood, although not perfect, is Morante's way to structure a picture of a childhood that might be considered "normal" in a time when war was not raging in Italy. Ida has a mother and father who share some dynamics that are common to many families. However, the intensity of family dynamics comes more sharply into focus during Ida's adulthood, and continues throughout the story.

In her passage about Nino's beautiful white dog — "she looked at each of her puppies, she thought it was surely the most beautiful one in the world" — Morante captures the essence of motherhood. Ida Mancuso's manic determination to keep her son fed and protected is an incredibly stark example of maternalism. Her concern for her son, Nino, and her tolerance of his disrespect and his need for freedom is also an illustration of the depth of her love for him. The fact that Ida is forced to work and leave Useppe home alone as a baby is one of the first indications that life is difficult for this little family, especially during this time in history.



When Ida and Useppe stay in the refugee shelter, the extended family named The Thousand, sticks together, even in large numbers. Useppe finds comfort in their family life and routines, and craves their company.

Davide Segre, who has rejected his family, is devastated to lose them and returns to his familial home to mourn and work out his problems. The entire families on the train to an extermination camp, and the separation of some of their family members is one of the most horrifying and moving segments of the story.

Carulina, whose twins die from malnutrition, is forced to turn to prostitution for a living. Even Rosella, the cat whose name means "Russia," is forced to abandon her only kitten in search of food and survival.

The escaped orphan Scimo has lived without family. He lives on the fringe of society and is not particularly mentally balanced. Finally, the reason Ida is able to maintain her sanity is that she has her son to care for. When Useppe, her only remaining family member, dies, Ida's will to live is extinguished.

Altered Values

One of the more subtle of Morante's themes in this story is the power of conflict to reverse a human being's basic values and principles. Although Nino Mancuso is raised by Ida, whose morals are strong, the mere excitement and romance of war draws him away from his education into a world of militant and illegal behaviors, which eventually result in his death. Nino is a tender-hearted boy who loves his brother and his dogs and, in his own way, loves his mother, as well. He is not a mean person, but he has the bug to rebel and fight. The reader can only wonder what might have become of Nino had he lived in a time of peace.

David Segre's situation illustrates this theme in the most poignant way. David is sympathetic with the working class and, although he claims to be an atheist, is also an anarchist who objects to abusive and oppressive power. He is an intelligent, deep thinker and has decided that violence has no place in his life. However, after his family is wiped out by the Germans, Davide joins Nino in the resistance forces, and actually kills a young German soldier. In his personal pain and rage, he realizes the soldier is just a kid, and he carries the pain of his actions throughout his short life.

Of course, the most deviant character in this story is Adolph Hitler. Hitler represents everything that is loveless and oppressive, his insanity resulting the deaths of six million Jews. It seems that in the beginning of his reign, Hitler was not speaking so much of killing Jews as he was intent on rounding them up and accounting for them. However, as his power grew and his army grew stronger, he began to desire the complete annihilation of the race. It is hard to imagine Hitler with any good values or traits; however, he, too, was a damaged child whose philosophies became warped through violence and power.

Style

Point of View

Elsa Morante's story is told from a supremely omnipotent viewpoint, as narrator of a story who knows the characters and events fairly intimately, but who is also relying on research. She reminds the reader several times throughout the story that she is not sure of her facts, but that this is either what she has heard or read. However, she fluctuates, also seeming to be inside the heads of her characters with a deep understanding of their feelings and viewpoints. She primarily writes in the past tense, although at times reveals her scenes in the present tense through narration and dialogue, even speaking for her characters. Morante reports her story in a rather detached, journalistic fashion, even when the scenes are heart-wrenching. In the chronicled history sections, Morante writes in a detached manner as if reporting the facts for a school textbook.

Morante wanted her story to be a warning and an accusation against Fascism. Although there is tenderness in many instances, her writing is powerful and forceful and, often, does not give the reader a break from the graphic violence of war, such as in the description of Giovannino's death.

Morante clearly lived through the period of which she writes, as noted in the Introduction. There is nothing good about the events that take place, but only a sense of relief when the German occupation of Rome ends, when Ida and Useppe get a home of their own, when Nino returns and when Useppe wanders with Bella. None of these events are without a sense of impending doom, and Morante does not let her readers forget for a moment that she despises war, Fascism and the damage that has been done to humanity.

Setting

History: A Novel is set in Rome, which is divided into many regions. In the beginning of the story, Ida and her son Nino live in an apartment building in the San Lorenzo district. This is a working, lower middle-class area where small living spaces are rented in large buildings. At this time, Italy was allied with the Axis powers, which is why Gunther expected a warmer greeting. Italy later changed allegiance and sided with the Allies. People walk to and from work and there is an occasional motorcycle, like Nino's, but it is generally just a neighborhood of residents with few businesses, except for Remo's Tavern.

When Ida's building is destroyed by bombs in San Lorenzo, she and her little son, Useppe, move to a shelter that is being used by refugees who have fled the bombings in the cities. Pietralata, where the shelter is located on the outskirts, is a slum-like district. The one-room dormitory becomes home to Ida and Useppe for a period of time, since it is a safe spot where they can cook and sleep. They live with many other people



who are primarily refugees from Naples. There are mice and lice, limited light, and too many humans in one room, making the conditions oppressive and unpleasant.

When the Germans withdraw from Rome, Ida and Useppe move to the Testaccio district and rent a room from a family who is waiting for their men to return from war. Their small room in this house seems to be clean and decent. The house is warm, the family pleasant, and this is a huge step up from the shelter. Later, they get their own place in another district called Via Bodoni. This is another small apartment upstairs, but is a real home for them and is near the school where Ida teaches.

Useppe and Bella roam the streets of Via Bodoni and make their way to the banks of the Tiber River, where they play and dream. This is where they meet Scimo and experience a band of adolescents who frighten Useppe into a seizure.

Language and Meaning

This is a translation from Italian, but the story is remarkably well told in English. There are differences in the Italian language that come through, and most of them are explained by the author at the end of the book. Although there is an enormous amount of detail and the story sometimes rambles off into a sub-story, the author's style is almost journalistic. Her wanderings are well-timed and add perfectly to the point she tries to make. An example is the sub-story of Nello D'angeli who brutally murders the character, Santina. Morante interjects his story to make the point that Nello has never been loved or had a real home, and he expresses his deep pain through violence. Nello might be compared to Hitler. Morante's sub-plots are carefully constructed and their meaning becomes clear, sometimes after the fact.

The characters in the story are only as important as the historical setting in which they are placed. Therefore, they are developed only to a certain extent by Morante. Her tone is so objective that, although the reader grows to love little Useppe, it is clear from the beginning that he is destined to die young. Her "reporter" style keeps the reader from cringing with sentimentality over the horrible fates met by her characters. Morante does not intend simply to tell a touching story about an Italian family, but wants to shock and inspire outrage at the effects of war on such everyday people.

Morante uses her story to express her personal opinions about many topics, such as politics and religion. For instance, in Davide Segre's ramblings at the tavern, he delivers a long dissertation about the meaning of "christ" and what the true story of Jesus actually meant. He suggests that a momentary awareness on the part of all people that there is Christ in all of us would be enough of a revolution to change everything. The speech is long and complex, and reflects not only a very well-thought out opinion, but also the ramblings of a mad man who knows much more than the average worker drinking at the bar.

Structure

This is a book of 737 pages, divided into nine chapters. It includes a foreward written by Lily Tuck, which describes the author and her work. Between chapters, a chronicle of history is laid out, the first starting in 1900 and covering the events through the winter of 1940. The histories touch on all major events that have taken place in the world, separated by year. The story actually begins in 1941 with the rape of Ida Mancuso by a young German soldier named Gunther who is killing time in Rome while he waits to be sent to Africa.

After this first segment, the chapters are individually named with the years, 1941 through 1947. Historical chronicles at the end cover 1948 through 1967. With these lists of historical events, Morante shows the reader the patterns and constant participation in war around the globe.

The plot of the novel involves an Italian school teacher and her children; however, the plot is woven by the events of World War II and the story's emphasis is equally placed on the plot as well as the historical events.

The story occasionally flashes back into the childhood of different characters, but moves in a linear fashion through the years of the war. Morante uses dialogue, narration and historical fact to round out the novel, making it a fascinating journey through history, as well as the lives of common people who are each affected in different ways by the war. The characters are endearing and their lives are touching, but Morante does not sugar coat their situations, nor does she try to spare the reader any of the graphic details of the lowest parts of their lives. She manages to horrify the reader without including a Jewish survivor and without any detail about concentration camps, except for what is heard on the streets of Rome.

Reading this book is a formidable undertaking, but is worth the time it takes and makes a lasting impression.



Quotes

1906-1913

Nothing very new, in the great world. Like all the centuries and the millenia that have preceded it on earth, the new century also observes the well-known, immobile principle of historical dynamics: power to some, servitude to the others. And on this rule are based, in agreement, both the internal order of society (at present dominated by the 'Powerful,' known as the capitalists) and the international order (known as imperialism) dominated by certain Nations also known as 'Powers,' which have virtually divided the entire surface of the globe into their respective properties, or Empires. Among them, the latest arrival is Italy, which aspires to the rank of Great Power, and to reach it has already taken armed possession of some foreign countries — weaker than she — forming a little colonial property, but not yet an Empire."

p. 3

"In the street's putrid sirocco, which swelled his heart at every breath, he was seized by an impossible longing to be at home, curled in his too-short bed, between the cold and swampy odor of the countryside and the smell of the cabbage his mother was boiling in the kitchen."

p. 18

"Anarchy, nowadays, means attack, war on all authority, on all power, on all government. In the society of the future, anarchy will be defense, the obstacle opposed to the reestablishment of any authority, any power, any government. CAFIERO!"

p. 25

"Mussolini and Hitler, in their way, were two dreamers, but here is where the difference lies. The dream-vision of the Italian Duce (corresponding to his physical desire for life) was a histrionic festival, where among banners and triumphs he, a scheming vassal, would play the part of certain beatified ancient vassals (Caesars, Augustuses, and so on...) before a living crowd humbled to the rank of puppets. Whereas, the other (tainted by a monotonous, vicious necrophilia and horrid terrors) was the half-conscious minion of a still formless dream. In it, every living creature (including himself) was the object of torment, to be degraded even to putrefaction. And at the end — in the Grand Finale — all the peoples of the earth (including the Germans) would rot in unseemly piles of corpses."

p. 47

"Perhaps the Fascist Mussolini didn't realize at the time of the Ethiopian venture, supported by Hitler the Nazi (and then followed immediately by another common venture in Spain), that he had irrevocably yoked his own carnival chariot to the other's funeral hearse."

p. 47



"Meanwhile, the Mussolini-Hitler bond became tighter and tighter until, in the following spring of 1939, the two formed a military alliance with their Pact of Steel."

p. 59

"Not only the strange news from the Signora and the Nun, but also the more or less semi-official news from the prison grapevine continued, there in the Ghetto, to encounter a kind of stubborn passivity. For that matter, nobody, in the Ghetto or elsewhere, had as yet learned the true meaning of certain official terms, such as evacuation, internment, extraordinary pacification action, final solution, and so on. The world's technological-bureaucratic organization was still in a primitive phase; that is, it had not yet contaminated, irremediably, the people's consciousness. Most people, in a sense still lived in prehistory."

p. 100

"Every so often, at night, the air-raid alarm sirens would resound through the city; but the people of San Lorenzo paid little attention to them, convinced that Rome would never be hit, thanks to the protection of the Pope, who in fact was nicknamed 'the Capital's ack-ack.'"

p. 101

"January-February

'Wannsee Conference' for racial planning (decimation of the inferior races through forced labor and inanition, separation of the sexes, special treatment, etc.).

p. 125

"Like all lovers, Useppe had absolutely no sense of the inconveniences of that life. While summer lasted, the inhabitants of the dormitory were joined by mosquitoes, fleas and bedbugs. And Useppe scratched himself above and below, performing true natural gymnastic feats, like cats and dogs, and grumbling only as a slight comment: 'lies, lies' that is to say flies, since he called all insects flies."

p. 206

"The thorns of anxiety could barely scratch her thoughts, promptly blunted by her mysterious faith in Nino's hoodlum invulnerability."

p. 233

"My ideals REJECT violence. All evil is derived from violence!"

'Then what kind of anarchist does that make you?'

'True anarchism cannot admit violence. The anarchist ideal is the negation of power. And power and violence are the same thing...'

p. 249

"Now, it was known beyond any doubt that of his whole family, deported in 1943, no one had survived. His maternal grandmother, very old and already ill, had died during the journey. His grandfather and his parents had been exterminated in the gas chamber on the very night of their arrival at the lager of Auschwitz-Birkenau. And his sister, seventeen at the time, had died in the same lager a few months later (apparently in



March of 1944)."
p. 458

"And so, Davide Segre's experience as a worker, which according to his plan was to last, in the minimum hypothesis, five or six months (and in the maximum hypothesis, his whole lifetime!), was miserably concluded in the space of nineteen days nineteen! Luckily, his IDEAL had not emerged from it destroyed; but rather, on the contrary, enlightened and strengthened (he had already counted on this)."
p. 473

"The familiar little room, which still retained Santina's poor smell, received him on that day as a familiar, almost affectionate nest. It was cool, shady. And Davide wasn't afraid of ghosts. He had learned, in fact, on his own, that the dead don't answer, even if you call them. All means are futile, even praying them to show themselves if only in feigned and hollow guise, even as a hallucination's effect."
p. 486

"'I'll see you soon,' his brother guaranteed, stopping for a moment on the step and holding the eager dog by the collar. 'And this next time,' he promised, 'I'll come for you with the jeep.' Then he waved good-bye, but Useppe remained with his fingers clutching the railing, obviously refusing to return the good-bye. Then Ninnuzzu ran back up two or three steps, to say good-bye more properly, near him: 'How about giving me a little kiss?' It was the twenty-second or twenty-third of September."
p. 500

"It was she who had killed Ninnuzzu; and now, one by one, she dug up the countless proofs of her own crime: from his first breath and the milk she had given him to the final wickedness: not having prevented him, with whatever means (perhaps with the intervention of the law) from going off to die ...Suddenly, the defendant Ida turned prosecutor; and she blamed Ninnarieddu, calling him gangster and criminal, as she had in the days when they lived together This comforted her for a moment, as if he were really there to hear her; but immediately, with a shudder, the knowledge returned that he no longer lived in any place."
p. 530

"As soon as they came from the building into the open air, they could promptly be seen rushing off, veering, skipping, tumbling toward the unknown; and at her loud calls, Bella would reply from the distance with considerate barking, 'All's well. Don't wear yourself out. Go on home. I'll take care of Useppe! I can manage flocks of a hundred, two hundred, three hundred quadrupeds. Don't you think I'm able to deal with one little man?'
Perforce, Ida finally entrusted Useppe entirely to Bella."
p. 555

"Apparently the song was popular among birds and had become the fashion, seeing that even sparrows knew it. And perhaps this one knew no other, since he continued repeating it, always with the same notes and the same words, except for a few



imperceptible variations:

'It's a joke

a joke

all a joke!'"

p. 573

"Ah, I still can't believe it...All these months have gone by and it still doesn't seem real to me! I expected anything but that. That I didn't expect! That he would leave me all alone with my big belly, and go off. I was expecting that. But not this other, not this! Then, again, she smiled at Useppe, her face swollen from crying, and nodding her head, she said to him, in a voice a little maternal and a little infantile:

'Ah, Useppe, he really loved you, he did! I was even jealous, because he loved you more than me! He even hit me once, when I said something about you!'"

p. 613



Topics for Discussion

Is there one particular point Morante attempts to drive home with the personal stories of her characters? If so, discuss what that point may be, and how the different characters illustrate it.

Is this simply historical fiction, or is it realism? Which factors make it so? Does Morante base her stories on research or imagination?

Does little Useppe die from epilepsy? Is his epilepsy the only reason for his strange imagination and behaviors? Provide documentation to support your opinion.

Morante assigns human characteristics to the two dogs in the story. In the passages where the dogs seem to be communicating, does Morante let the reader assume that this is simply Useppe's imagination? Why, or why not?

Carlo Vivaldi, or Davide Segre, is a tragic character. He is Jewish, but pretends otherwise. What is it that leads to Davide's death? Explore the chain of events in his life and their effects on him.

Discuss the name Nino gave his dog, Blitz. What could the meaning and/or irony be in the name, given the period of history?

Discuss The Thousand. What advantages or disadvantages do they bear compared to Ida and Useppe? How does Morante use them to support her story and her intent?

How is it that Nino is at first supporting the Axis and Mussolini, but later supports Russia, and even later decides he is an anarchist? What drives Nino's political beliefs? Is he a deep thinker?

Why is Ida so protective of Useppe? Why does he become her reason for living? Does she continue to be ashamed of him? Why does she give up after Useppe dies?

Most political philosophies are based on opinions about the greater good of a people or nation. What point is Morante trying to make with regard to political philosophies and who they protect? Who, generally, pays the ultimate price for the flaws in them?