

Il Giorno Della Civetta Study Guide

Il Giorno Della Civetta by Leonardo Sciascia

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Contents

Il Giorno Della Civetta Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Section 1, pp. 9-22.....	4
Section 2, pp. 22-32.....	6
Section 3, pp. 32-48.....	8
Section 4, pp. 48-53.....	10
Section 5, pp. 53-65.....	12
Section 6, pp. 65-74.....	13
Section 7, pp. 74-82.....	14
Section 8, pp. 82-90.....	15
Section 9, pp. 90-108.....	16
Section 10, pp. 108-120.....	18
Characters.....	20
Objects/Places.....	23
Themes.....	25
Style.....	27
Quotes.....	30
Topics for Discussion.....	31



Plot Summary

Early one morning, a man is shot dead while trying to catch a bus in Sicily. The murder investigation points to the mafia, but no one wants to admit it, for fear of what the mafia will do. In fact, most of the local people say that the mafia is a myth.

One morning, a man named Colasberna, a bricklayer, is murdered in front of multiple witnesses, but no one wants to talk to the police. By a coincidence, a man named Nicolosi happens to see Diego Marchica running away from the scene of the crime, and Nicolosi also disappears. The local informer, Dibella, known as the Little Priest, comes forward, and implicates someone named Pizzuco. Soon the Little Priest is also murdered, but first he gives the police the name of Don Mariano Arena. Don Arena is a very prominent citizen, and is rumored to be a mafia boss, although most people in Sicily will not even admit that the mafia exists.

Police Captain Bellodi is in charge of the investigation, and he brings in Marchica, Pizzuco, and Don Arena. Marchica confesses to the murder of Colasberna, commissioned by Pizzuco, and blames Pizzuco for killing Nicolosi. Pizzuco also confesses, blaming Marchica. With the information from Pizzuco, Bellodi is able to find Nicolosi's body. Bellodi thinks that the reason Colasberna was murdered is because he was the only local building contractor who would not accept the protection of the mafia.

The public is in an uproar over the arrest of Don Arena. He is closely (although secretly) connected with two very powerful government officials, Honourable Member Livigni, who is in Parliament, and Minister Mancuso. When these men hear that Don Arena is in trouble, they decide to do what is necessary to come to his aid, knowing that if he goes down, they will probably go with him. Although Don Arena does not confess to anything, Bellodi definitely has evidence against him, and hopes to use this to stop the stranglehold that the mafia has on Sicily. During the interrogation, Bellodi and Don Arena develop a sort of respect for one another, though this does not mean that they are allies.

Unfortunately, Don Arena's mafia connections furnish an alibi for Marchica, and all charges are dropped. Nicolosi's widow and her lover are blamed for Nicolosi's murder. In mainland Italy, most people think that Sicily is terribly romantic, and find the mafia to be fascinating. Even though he is frustrated with the corrupt system which rules Sicily, Bellodi decides that he still wants to work for justice in Sicily.



Section 1, pp. 9-22

Section 1, pp. 9-22 Summary

In a small town in Sicily, a bus full of passengers is leaving to go to Palermo. A man is shot while trying to catch the bus.

The bus is pulling out, with the usual passengers, mostly old peasant women. The conductor realizes that there is a man who still wants to get on, and he stops the bus. Just when the man is running for the bus, shots ring out, and the man falls dead. Everyone is shocked, and before anyone notices, all the passengers have gotten off the bus and disappeared. After a few moments, the bus driver and conductor get the police, or "Carabinieri" in Italian. The policeman asks the driver who the passengers were, since he wants to question them. The driver says that he is so stunned, he cannot remember who any of the passengers were. The police realize that there is usually a fritter-seller near where the man was shot, and they go off looking for him. When they find him, he claims not to know that there has been a shooting.

At first, no one knows who the dead man was. When the passengers are tracked down, they say that the windows were too steamy to see out of. Other possible witnesses have similar reasons for not remembering the event. Finally the cops figure out that the man is Salvatore Colasberna, a bricklayer. Colasberna has always done high-quality work, much better than most of the building contractors in the city. He and his brothers form the Santa Fara Co-operative Society, along with some other men. Colasberna has been shot with "lupara" or wolf shot, a type of ammunition used for hunting wolves. Colasberna's only criminal record involves another incident on a bus, about six months before, when he got into a scuffle with another passenger.

The police bring in Salvatore Colasberna's brothers and the other members of the Santa Fara Co-op. He questions them, wanting to know if they have any idea who might have killed Colasberna, and why. He already has five anonymous letters revealing what is going on, and each letter tells a different story. One letter says that it was a jealous lover, killing him over a woman, and another claims that Colasberna was shot by accident, because he looks like another man that someone is planning to murder. Guiseppe Colasberna, Salvatore's brother, says that it was definitely not a jealous lover. The police captain suggests that none of these theories are right, but that someone else has done it for business reasons. Guiseppe asks what he means, and the captain explains his theory without ever actually coming out and saying who he thinks has killed Colasberna. The captain suggests that there is a group of people with far-reaching influence, who might have offered to protect all of the building contractors in the area, for a fee. The captain also suggests that this group is willing to kill if people do not bend to them, and that perhaps the Santa Fara Co-operative Society is the only contractor who declined the protection. He points out that he would assume that there would be a sort of warning shot first, and they immediately think of the scuffle Colasberna got into on the bus, six months before.



The men of the Santa Fara Co-op do not say what they think about these implications, and indeed seem terrified to say anything about it at all. Before they leave, the captain asks each of them to write down his name and address, so that he can obtain a handwriting sample. As he expected, one of the anonymous letters is an exact match on the handwriting.

Section 1, pp. 9-22 Analysis

This chapter introduces the police officers, Salvatore Colasberna, and the other Santa Fara contractors. The reader is dropped right into the middle of a scene, as though the novel begins with its climax. At first, all is confusion. As more details emerge, an aura of secrecy and fear is evident in the people.

The police captain is implying to the men of the Santa Fara Co-operative Society that the mafia has killed Colasberna. He never mentions them by name, and neither does anyone else, indicating that these men are afraid of the mafia. They all understand that it has an important influence, and they never know who might be listening. If the mafia has been able to strike a deal with all of the building contractors in the city except one, they would have a strong incentive to coerce the one remaining company to join up. If they can get all the contractors on their side, then no one could build anything without the approval of the mafia.



Section 2, pp. 22-32

Section 2, pp. 22-32 Summary

Two Sicilian men sit in a cafe in Rome. One is a dark man, and the other unidentified fellow considers himself to be a man of honor, or an Honourable Member. This is a sort of pun, indicating that not only does he have honor, but that he is a member of the Italian Parliament. The Honourable Member is complaining to the dark man about an encounter he has had with a certain police officer. The Honourable Member has sunk most of his money into investing in a sulphur mine, and at present there is a crisis in the sulphur industry, so he is going to lose his entire investment. Because money has been so slow coming in, the Honourable Member has not paid his workers their wages for three months, although he himself assumes that it has been about two weeks. The workers, desperate with starvation, have been rallying around his house, protesting and demanding money. The Honourable Member is explaining to the dark man how he asked the police officer for help, and the officer pointed out that the Honourable Member ought to pay his men. Then the officer angrily agreed to intervene, so that the Honourable Member's wife and daughter can go to Mass.

In the police station, Captain Bellodi is interviewing his informer. This informer, called the "Little Priest" because of his hypocrisy and slick manners, is named Calogero Dibella. The Little Priest used to be a sheep rustler, but now that he has served a prison term, his source of income is collecting on debts that people owe to the mafia. People are intimidated by him, and he always collects on debts. Although his job pays very well, he constantly lives in fear that he will be shot by some group or another that he has betrayed. The Little Priest does not know who killed Colasberna, but he makes up a long story to tell Bellodi, so that he will be paid for information. Bellodi already assumes that the Little Priest will lie, but pays attention to what he says, hoping to glean some real information by watching his reactions. After the Priest has told his tale, Bellodi suggests to him that perhaps Colasberna was killed for not submitting to the mafia in regards to his building contracts. Bellodi asks the Little Priest if he has any idea who threatened Colasberna six months ago. The Little Priest points out that he knows nothing, but if he were to guess, he would say Ciccio La Rosa or Saro Pizzuco.

Section 2, pp. 22-32 Analysis

It is obvious that the Honourable Member is not honorable at all. He considers himself very high up and important, and thinks that he and his family deserve the protection of the police, no matter what motivation his workers might have for surrounding his house. He thinks that it is irrelevant how long it has been since any of his workers have eaten, but he is deeply troubled by the insolent attitude of the police officer. As a "man of honor," he thinks that he is above the police, and above the law. He and his companion do not have names, because Leonardo Sciscia, the author, recognized the danger he would be in if he wrote about identifiable political figures.



The Little Priest and Captain Bellodi have very different attitudes toward the law. The Little Priest sees the law similarly to the Honourable Member, thinking that it is totally flexible, and determined by which police officer is enforcing the law. Bellodi, however, thinks of the law as a very important entity, that exists in order to stamp out injustice. He does not want to abuse his power.



Section 3, pp. 32-48

Section 3, pp. 32-48 Summary

Two high-ranking ministers are talking about Captain Bellodi. In this scene, the ministers are referred to as His Excellency, and the Minister. They are concerned with the present situation, with Bellodi investigating the murder of Colasberna. Although the two ministers agree heartily that they do not believe in the mafia, and have never met a member of the mafia, they worry that Bellodi will not feel the same way. They think that Bellodi is obsessed with exposing the mafia in Sicily, and they do not like this. They also worry that Colasberna's death will be blamed on people who are trying to drive out the communists. Since Colasberna was a socialist, the socialists and communists could view him as a martyr for their cause, and use his death as a rallying point. Thus, the two ministers think that it is very important that the police produce a murderer who shot Colasberna for personal reasons, which have nothing to do with politics or the mafia.

Bellodi realizes that Colasberna's murderer must have run down Cavour Street after shooting him, and wonders if there were any witnesses on Cavour Street at six-thirty that morning. He notes that Paolo Nicolosi's house is on Cavour Street. Nicolosi is the tree-pruner who went missing several days before. They bring in the wife of Nicolosi, to question her. By this point, since Nicolosi has been gone so long, everyone assumes that he is dead. Mrs. Nicolosi admits that she last saw her husband immediately after the murder. After further questioning, she remembers her husband coming back into the room to retrieve his cigarettes, and asking her if she heard two shots. She admits that he said that he had seen someone run by, but she claims not to remember the name of the person.

As the police question Mrs. Nicolosi further, she recalls that the name is some sort of nickname, prompting Bellodi to talk at length about the descriptive and sometimes insulting nature of Sicilian nicknames. Finally, Mrs. Nicolosi blurts out that the name is "Zicchinetta." This is a play on "Zecchinetta," a popular card game, indicating that the man loves to play this game. The sergeant-major goes to his barber for a shave, pointing out that his barber knows everyone in town. He returns later, saying that the barber knows no Zicchinetta. The barber has, however, told him that Mrs. Nicolosi has a lover named Passerello, and he thinks that Passerello probably killed Nicolosi, and that it has nothing to do with the murder of Colasberna.

Back at the station, the sergeant-major finds a dossier on Diego Marchica, nicknamed Zicchinetta because he loves gambling so much. Marchica has a long criminal history, and in many cases, charges have been dropped after terrible things happened to the witnesses. Marchica is known to be tightly connected to the mafia, associating with men such as Honourable Member Livigni and Don Calogero Guicciardo. Of course, Marchica loudly proclaims that he does not believe that the mafia exists. The police know that arresting Marchica could be very dangerous, because he has so many friends in high places.



Section 3, pp. 32-48 Analysis

It seems that most respectable people in Sicily never admit to believing that the mafia exists. It is like a tongue-in-cheek joke, since those who are most tightly involved with the mafia are always the ones who are most adamant about never having met one mafia member. No one wants to say anything, especially to the police. There is a code of honor in the silence. Each citizen knows that if they admit that they are being persecuted by the mafia, they will be the next target, and the police will probably be made to cover it up. Even though Mrs. Nicolosi's husband has probably been murdered by Marchica, she is terrified to say so, lest Marchica take revenge.



Section 4, pp. 48-53

Section 4, pp. 48-53 Summary

An old man and a young man, whose names the reader does not know, sit talking about what is going on. The old man has the wisdom of many years, and he comments that he does not like the direction in which things are going, with the murder investigation. The old man talks about how some men are made into police officers, or priests, or cuckolds, but others are born for it. As an example, he tells of a born policeman he knew, years ago, who was happy to become close family friends of the old man. However, when the time came, the policeman came and arrested the old man as though they did not even know each other. The old man also mentions how if a man finds out that his wife is cheating on him, and gets mad, and raises a ruckus, then he is not born to be a cuckold (a man whose wife cheats on him behind his back). However, if a man knows or suspects infidelity, but does nothing, then he is a born cuckold. In the old man's opinion, most of the citizens are cuckolds, allowing the police to make fools of them. People like the two men having the conversation also take advantage of the cuckoldry of the people.

The old man expresses his regret over the way that the Little Priest plays one side, and then the other. He has no problem with the Little Priest being a spy, but thinks that he does not act with enough discretion. The old man sees the Little Priest as setting himself up against Mother Church, and by "Mother Church," he means not just the Catholic Church, but the entire network of mafia connections that lives in the shadow of the Catholic Church in Sicily. He says that anyone who sets himself up against Mother Church is a walking dead man. The old man decides that it is time for Diego Marchica to take a vacation, and suggests to the young man that Marchica should go visit his sister in Genoa (a city in mainland Italy).

Section 4, pp. 48-53 Analysis

It is not clear who these two men are, but their position in the community becomes more clear as they talk. The old man is probably Don Arena, since his ideas and speech patterns match those of Don Arena in a later scene. It is evident that these men are not on the side of the police, and they like police officers who can be bribed to go along with the mafia's wishes. Both men certainly know that the Little Priest is spying for both sides, but this seems to be common knowledge. They clearly have enough power to find a man who is wanted by the police, and get him out of the picture for a while, and they also know the family connections of men like Marchica. With their coded lingo, the men do not make it obvious whether they are getting Marchica out of the way so that he will be safe from the police, or if they are going to have Marchica killed so that he will not talk, and everyone will just assume he is at his sister's house. It is clear that the men are not kind or merciful, as they reminisce fondly about the days of fascism, when Mussolini told everyone what to do. Either way, it is clear that these men see the

common people as chumps, who have to do what they are told by whoever is strong enough to be in power.



Section 5, pp. 53-65

Section 5, pp. 53-65 Summary

The Little Priest feels guilty, because for the first time he has given the police the name of someone who is actually connected with the mafia. The Little Priest is terrified that someone is going to find out, and in his fear, he makes it obvious to anyone who sees him that he has betrayed someone. Finally, in an act of desperation, he writes the names of Pizzuco and Don Mariano Arena on a piece of paper, along with his signature, and a note reading, "I'm dead." (Section 5, p. 56) He mails this to Captain Bellodi. That evening, the Little Priest is murdered on his own doorstep.

The police arrest Marchica, as well as Pizzuco and Arena. A man comes to the police station to talk to them about Don Arena. The man points out that Arena is an old, upstanding member of the community, who does not deserve to be dragged down to the station like a common criminal. This man also says that there is no mafia, and if there were, it would not be a criminal organization. Finally, he sums up his plea for Arena's freedom by pointing out how close of friends Arena is with Honourable Member Livigni, and Minister Mancuso.

Section 5, pp. 53-65 Analysis

The man who comes to plead for Don Arena's freedom thinks that he can sway the police captain by talking about all of Arena's connections and his character. The man muses on how ridiculous he thinks the common ideas about the mafia are, and compares the group, if they do exist, to the Freemasons. Even as he talks about how pure and good the character of Arena is, he also condones aspects of fascism, imagining the potential that system had. Although the man has insisted over and over that Arena has no connection to the mafia, he says practically the opposite at the end of his speech. Since Livigni and Mancuso are commonly known to be very high up in the mafia, their friendship and protection practically proves that Arena is involved with the mafia.



Section 6, pp. 65-74

Section 6, pp. 65-74 Summary

The police arrest Marchica one day before Pizzuco and Arena. After locking up Marchica for a day, the police set him up in the captain's office, in a position so that Marchica can easily see directly into Sergeant-Major Ferlisi's office. Although Pizzuco has only just been arrested, and is only telling Ferlisi his personal information, Captain Bellodi tells Marchica that Pizzuco is telling them everything. Soon, Ferlisi brings the captain a confession that the police themselves have forged, which supposedly Pizzuco gave to them. Meanwhile, Pizzuco is assuming that Marchica has told the police everything, and is secretly cursing him for ratting Pizzuco out.

The confession states that Marchica is guilty of two murders, probably those of Colasberna and Nicolosi. Pizzuco's false confession claims that Marchica's only motivation is a violent temperament, and an insult by Colasberna. It also states that Marchica had no accomplices, but acted alone. Marchica immediately believes that Pizzuco has really confessed. He is enraged at the betrayal, and decides that he will set the record straight, so that Pizzuco will also be implicated.

Section 6, pp. 65-74 Analysis

The interrogation of Pizzuco and Marchica is a masterful piece of deception on the part of the police. By a casual conversation style, the captain manages to catch Marchica in a lie, right away. The two officers perfectly play on the fear and suspicion present in the two suspects, making each one believe that the other has given everything away. Even before Marchica spills the beans, the captain has figured out that he is definitely guilty of something, and that he did not kill Nicolosi. How quickly the two men jump to betray one another shows that maybe the honorable ties which are so often spoken of are not really so honorable.



Section 7, pp. 74-82

Section 7, pp. 74-82 Summary

Marchica, believing that he has already been betrayed by Pizzuco, writes a full confession, knowing that he is sending himself and Pizzuco to prison. Marchica has spent so much time in prison already that he does not really mind. The officers show Marchica's confession to Pizzuco, which fills Pizzuco with rage. He also confesses to his own version of the story, which is surprisingly similar to the false confession that the police had forged.

In Marchica's story, Colasberna insults Pizzuco to the point that Pizzuco offers Marchica a large sum of money to kill Colasberna, and even offers to supply a gun, and a safe place to hide afterward. Marchica kills Colasberna, then later tells Pizzuco that he ran into Nicolosi. Pizzuco assures Marchica that he will take care of the problem, and Marchica hides out in the home of Pizzuco's sister in a nearby town, giving the gun to Pizzuco's brother-in-law for disposal.

In Pizzuco's story, Colasberna insults Pizzuco, who is not threatening him in any way, but merely offering business advice. Pizzuco relates the incident to Marchica, who offers to murder Colasberna because he also has a grudge against Colasberna. Marchica fools Pizzuco into allowing him access to his sister's house and a gun, but Pizzuco has no idea that Marchica is plotting murder. When Pizzuco hears that Colasberna has been murdered, he realizes that his gun has been used and is afraid to go to the police because of Marchica's violent reputation. Thus, he tells his brother-in-law to hide the gun in a rocky network of caves and chasms nearby, called the Gramoli chiarciaro.

Section 7, pp. 74-82 Analysis

The accuracy of the false confession, which is so similar to the real confession that Pizzuco writes, shows that the police officers understand the psychology of a man like Pizzuco. The only reason Marchica caves so quickly is because the confession sounds so much like what Pizzuco would really say. Marchica has admitted to murdering Colasberna, but there is still no indication of who has killed Nicolosi, and how. The police captain suggests that Nicolosi's body might be found near where the gun was supposed to be hidden. There is still no obvious connection to Don Arena.



Section 8, pp. 82-90

Section 8, pp. 82-90 Summary

In the middle of the night, a high-ranking minister known as "His Excellency" is awakened by the telephone, and angers his wife by immediately turning on the light and talking. On the other end is a higher-ranking official from Rome, who has just seen the newspaper headlines. On the front page is a large photograph showing a connection with Don Arena and a certain important minister, although this man is not named. It is probably Minister Mancuso. His Excellency is horrified to hear ugly rumors, and promises his superior that he will do whatever he can to quiete the problem. They are very annoyed that someone like Bellodi has been allowed to rise to power in a place like Sicily, because they like police who will work with the more prominent citizens.

Captain Bellodi begins searching the Grimoli chiarchiaro, looking for the body of Nicolosi. Bellodi is very tired and thinks that the chiarchiaro is one of the creepiest places he has ever seen. They soon find Nicolosi's corpse, which smells really bad, but it is deep down in a cleft in the earth. A peasant volunteers to be lowered by a rope down to the body, so that he can attach more ropes to it, so it can be pulled up. Near the chiarchiaro, Bellodi meets a farmer, who has to call off his dog so that it will not bite Bellodi. Bellodi asks about the dog's name, and the farmer answers that the dog's name means "evil person," because it is the sort of dog that acts very friendly, but then turns on a person and bites them. Bellodi realizes that the dog's name comes from the word "Bargello," which means "chief of police." Bellodi does not bother to question the man, since the man obviously does not trust the police. When Bellodi returns to the station, he is set upon by reporters, who conclude that Minister Mancuso has also been involved in the murders.

Section 8, pp. 82-90 Analysis

When the police are searching through the chiarchiaro, looking for the body of Nicolosi, the sergeant quotes a folk saying to him. In English, the saying goes, "An owl said to its owlets: we'll all meet in the end at the chiarchiaro." In this context, chiarchiaro is meant to be synonymous with death, according to the sergeant. Thus, the meaning of the saying could be that everyone is headed toward death. Even a mother owl tells her babies that they are headed for the chiarchiaro. It is interesting that owls are predators of the night, rather than prey. Even the predators, who must take life in order to live, know that death is waiting for them. In this sense, "The Day of the Owl" could mean the day in which death shows up. This could mean the day in which the police must hunt down a killer, or it could mean the day of death for a specific person.



Section 9, pp. 90-108

Section 9, pp. 90-108 Summary

Two unnamed men are discussing what should be done about the current situation. They want to do all they can to protect their own interests, which are mafia connections. They are worried that if Don Arena should confess, it will implicate many important men in the murders, even Minister Mancuso and Honourable Member Livigni. The conspirators decide that, since Marchica's confession is probably the best piece of evidence that the police have, it is necessary to provide Marchica with an undeniable alibi. They propose to find two men, known everywhere for their honesty, who will swear that Marchica was a thousand miles away at the time of the murder. Marchica can claim that he only confessed to lies under torture.

Captain Bellodi and Sergeant D'Antona are interrogating Don Arena in the captain's office. Don Arena's poise is unflappable, and he answers all questions as though he is perfectly innocent and not afraid of the consequences of the interview. Bellodi manages to establish that Don Arena has lied on his income taxes, and wishes that he could use that charge to take down a mafia boss, like in the United States. Bellodi mentions Don Arena's daughter, who is away at school, and Don Arena angrily tells him to keep her out of it. He is such a composed, confident man, that Bellodi finds himself discussing philosophy with Don Arena, rather than making him sweat. When Bellodi brings in Marchica's signed confession, Don Arena responds by saying how angry it makes him to see Marchica spreading lies about a good man like that.

Bellodi continues to ask Don Arena if perhaps he told Pizzuco to get rid of Colasberna. When Don Arena denies putting any pressure on Colasberna or his company, Bellodi points out other ways in which Don Arena has funded or interfered with other building projects. Bellodi specifically mentions Mr. Fazello, who testified that Don Arena had obtained a corrupt building contract for the Fazello company. When Don Arena hears this, he indicates that Fazello has repaid him by stabbing him in the back in talking to the police.

Section 9, pp. 90-108 Analysis

There is quite a contrast between the attitudes of Marchica and Pizzuco when they are being interrogated, and that of Don Arena. Marchica and Pizzuco are both afraid and nervous, knowing that it will not take much to prove their guilt. They accidentally give away details with their words, thinking that they are revealing nothing. Don Arena is the guiltiest of all, but he has been careful to cover his tracks, so he is not nervous that the police will trick him into confessing. In fact, his calm, gentlemanly manner takes the police off of their guard, so that they do not even realize that he is drawing them into a discussion of the nature of truth, and what makes a man fully human. The difference in the demeanors of Marchica and Pizzuco as opposed to that of Don Arena could be the

reason that he has been able to become a wealthy mafia boss, while they are just hit men, and easily replaceable.



Section 10, pp. 108-120

Section 10, pp. 108-120 Summary

In the following days, the murder case gets a lot of news coverage. By the time the government gets involved, and all of Italy knows about it, Don Arena's powerful friends have stepped in to protect him. Doctor Baccarella, who has a spotless reputation, swears that Marchica was helping him in his garden on the morning of the murder, and several of Baccarella's neighbors back him up. Marchica claims that he only confessed because he was so angry about Pizzuco's confession, and Pizzuco claims much the same thing. Soon, Marchica and Pizzuco are walking free, as is Don Arena. The newspapers ask why Captain Bellodi did not further investigate the rumors that Nicolosi's wife had a lover. Soon, Mrs. Nicolosi and her lover are charged with murdering Nicolosi.

Disheartened, Captain Bellodi takes a leave of absence and goes to Parma, his hometown in mainland Italy. Sergeant D'Antona is also transferred out of Sicily. Bellodi has trouble deciding how to react to everything that has happened. All of his detective work has come to nothing, and no one will even admit any possibility of the existence of the mafia, much less any connection with important officials.

As Bellodi walks the streets of Parma, he runs into a friend from childhood, named Brescianelli. Just as Brescianelli is asking Bellodi what Sicily is like, a woman named Livia comes along, and Brescianelli introduces her to Bellodi. At Livia's suggestion, the three of them go back to her house, where her sister and several girlfriends are hanging out, listening to old jazz records and enjoying the warmth of the fireplace. The group passes a pleasant evening together, with food and drinking. The girls all imagine Sicily to be a terribly romantic place, filled with people whose blood is heated by the sun until they commit crimes of passion, which are covered up in a veil of secrecy.

The girls beg Bellodi to tell them some exciting story about the mafia. Since they clearly do not want to hear a description of how his most recent case fell apart, he instead tells them a story of a medic in a prison in Sicily. This medic notices that the prison infirmary, which is a much nicer place to stay than the real prison, is permanently filled with mafia bosses who are in perfect health. The prisoners who are actually sick have to stay in their cells. The medic transfers all of the mafia bosses to the main prison, and allows sick prisoners into the infirmary. Soon, the medic finds himself alone in a room with all of the mafia bosses, who beat him senseless. The mafia bosses are then transferred to another prison, where they occupy the infirmary. When the medic tries to obtain justice, no one listens to him. Finally, he appeals to the head of the mafia, who for a fee, has someone beat up one of the men who has beaten up the medic. The girls find this story to be juicy and exciting. It makes Bellodi sad, but as he walks home, he knows that he will return to Sicily.



Section 10, pp. 108-120 Analysis

After all that Captain Bellodi has accomplished, it all comes to nothing. It turns out that the political machine connected with the mafia is just too powerful to be taken down using the legal system. It is surprising that Bellodi is not more disappointed, since his reputation has been damaged by the rumors surrounding the case.

Brescianelli talks about Sicily in terms of heat, comparing the way the mafia has spread upward through Italy, to the way palm trees and coffee can be grown further and further north, as the global climate changes. It seems that this is connected to the romantic reputation Sicily has, as though people's emotions are heated up by the sun. When Bellodi is walking home through the snow, he wonders to himself if perhaps predominance of snow or sun makes a big impact on the people of a region. This indicates that, not only are the people of Sicily hot, but that those of mainland Italy are cold, in the way that they turn a blind eye to the way that the mafia runs Sicily.



Characters

Captain Bellodi

Captain Bellodi is a man of integrity, who cares about serving justice. He is from the town of Parma in Italy, but he is stationed as a police captain in Sicily. Those who are from Sicily see him as an outsider, not to be trusted. He especially bothers them, because he will not cave in to local pressure to let the most prominent citizens do as they please. Bellodi does not respect the secrecy and silence surrounding the mafia, and he is not afraid to challenge their power. He understands the system of give and take that is in place, but he still thinks that the law should be in authority. Bellodi is sly in the way he interrogates prisoners, using clever psychological methods to trick them into confessing. When Bellodi is investigating Don Arena, he gets a lot of pressure from the government to drop any charges, but he will not give in. Even though Don Arena hardly knows Bellodi, he tells Bellodi that he is truly a man, meaning that he has good character, and carries himself like a human being with dignity, and not like an animal. Even after Bellodi sees what an uphill battle it is to try to enforce justice in Sicily, he decides that he must keep trying.

Don Mariano Arena

Don Arena is a very unusual man, with a very strong character. He comes from an uncultured, uneducated background, yet he has been clever enough to achieve a very high position in the mafia. Don Arena has committed all sorts of crimes, but some time back managed to make his entire criminal file disappear. Even though he is addicted to coffee, he manages to be calm and collected, even during a police interrogation, after a day of jail. Don Arena claims that all of his income comes from the yield of his land, and that he has such a strong reputation because he just likes helping people in his community. In his opinion, there are very few people who can really be called "men," while the others all fall into the ranks of different kinds of animals. As far as Don Arena is concerned, there is nothing wrong with killing an animal. Don Arena has a daughter, who is away at finishing school, and he wants to keep her out of all of his illegal dealings. Even when there is evidence against him, Don Arena does not lose his poise, knowing that he is too powerful for the police to really keep him locked up. He examines the police officers under heavy eyelids, and draws them into a discussion of philosophy, as though the interrogation were a social call. After the charges have been dropped, Don Arena tells a newspaper that Bellodi is a man, showing that Don Arena respects Bellodi, even though they are enemies.

Salvatore Colasberna

Colasberna is a bricklayer who refuses to cave to pressure from the mafia. He is murdered one morning, setting off a string of murders, and a police investigation.



Calogero Dibella (The Little Priest)

Dibella is the local informant, a double agent who tells secrets to both the police, and different factions of the mafia. Because of his hypocrisy, he is known as "Parrinieddu" or "The Little Priest."

Rosario (Saro) Pizzuco

Pizzuco is one of the men implicated by the Little Priest, and he confesses that he paid Marchica to kill Colasberna.

Diego Marchica, or Zicchinetta

Marchica is known to be a violent man for hire, and he does not mind the thought of going back to prison. He is called "Zicchinetta" because he is so fond of a card game called "Zecchinetta."

Mrs. Nicolosi

Eventually, Mrs. Nicolosi gets blamed for her husband's murder, although he was killed by the mafia for being a witness.

Paolo Nicolosi

Nicolosi is a tree-pruner who happens to see Marchica running past on the morning of the murder. He is killed to keep him from talking.

Honorable Member Livigni

Livigni is a very important member of Parliament, and secretly connected to Don Arena and the mafia.

Minister Mancusi

Minister Mancusi is a high-ranking government official, who has a lot of power. He has a secret association with Don Arena and the mafia.

Sergeant D'Antona

D'Antona helps Bellodi with the interrogation of several suspects in the murder case.

Brescianelli

Brescianelli is a childhood friend of Bellodi's who still lives in the town of Parma. Bellodi runs into him after he has been relieved from the investigation.



Objects/Places

The Mafia

The mafia is a secret criminal network which many people believe is the major power in Sicily, and perhaps the United States.

Sicily

Sicily is an island off the southern coast of Italy, and is legal part of Italy. Most people believe that the mafia controls everything in Sicily.

Rome

Rome is the capital of Italy, and where that country's Parliament meets. Several of the ministers in the story meet there.

Parma

Parma is the hometown, in Italy, of Captain Bellodi. He goes there after being taken off the murder case.

Grimelli Chiarchiaro

Grimelli chiachiaro is a network of rocky chasms and holes in the ground. This is where the killers hide Nicolosi's body.

The Catholic Church

Since the Catholic Church has its headquarters in Rome, Catholicism is very important to Italians. Those in the mafia consider the mafia to be almost the same thing as Mother Church.

Lupara

Lupara means "wolf shot," and it is a popular type of ammunition in Sicily. So many people are murdered with lupara that some people say that Sicily has a government of lupara.



Santa Fara Co-operative Building Society

Colasberna is the leader of the Santa Fara Co-operative Building Society, which is the only building contractor in town that does good work.

Piazza Garibaldi

Piazza Garibaldi is the place where the bus is taking off, when Colasberna is shot trying to catch it. All the passengers disappear into various doorways and alleys.

Via Cavour

Via Cavour is the street that Marchica runs down after killing Colasberna. Nicolosi also lives on Via Cavour, which is why he sees Marchica.

Montecitorio

Montecitorio is the place in Rome where the members of the Government and Parliament meet.

The Carabinieri

The Carabinieri is the name for the Italian police.



Themes

Right and Wrong

The reason Captain Bellodi has such a hard time achieving justice is because he is concerned with right and wrong, and sees himself as the guardian of the law. The problem is that in Sicily, the mafia is powerful enough to go over the law, and they protect those who are powerful in the mafia. If Bellodi were willing to work with the local mafia people and bow to their demands, he would find himself in a comfortable, luxurious position, since the mafia would certainly bribe him generously in exchange for letting them run the island. By going against them, Bellodi ensures that he will be undermined by powerful people, and his case, which is almost solved, is derailed in the end. Not only does Bellodi think it is wrong to bend to pressure from the mafia, but he also feels compelled to uphold the law, even in prosecuting mafia bosses like Don Arena. As Bellodi is considering his options, he thinks to himself that, "A few months' suspension in Sicily of constitutional guarantees, and the evil could be uprooted for ever" (Section 5, p. 57). Bellodi considers respecting the constitutional rights of everyone, even mafia bosses, to be too important for him to sacrifice those rights, even for the greater good. This shows that Bellodi is a man of integrity, who does not think that the ends justify the means.

When Bellodi is searching the Grimelli chiarchiaro for the body of Nicolosi, he finds the area to be very depressing. "The captain thought, 'This is where God throws in the sponge,' associating the sight of the chiarchiaro with the struggle and defeat of God in the human heart" (Section 8, p. 85). Bellodi's thoughts show that he feels defeated by the forces of evil, and he envisions Sicily as a place filled with dark holes in which to hide ugly secrets. Although Bellodi is disheartened by the way that the mafia steals back his victory, he still wants to return to the island. Even if it is a losing battle, he still wants to fight for what is right.

Sicilians

Sicilians are a unique group of people, considered by themselves and others to be different from most groups. Even though Sicily is technically part of Italy, Sicilians are a different breed from mainland Italians, called "mainlanders" in the book. One thing that sets Sicilians apart is the way that the mafia has taken over the island. Although the mafia is feared by people throughout the world, it is assumed that most of the members are Sicilian by descent, if not by geography. Just about all Sicilians are Roman Catholic, as is most of Italy, which is not surprising since Vatican City, the headquarters of the Catholic Church, is in Italy. Sicilians are seen as being extremely family-oriented, with family obligations trumping legal, moral, financial, and career obligations. In fact, the mafia is often referred to as "The Family." As an example of the solidarity which Sicilians feel toward one another, two unnamed men are described with the words, "Both were Sicilian and differed only in physique and manners" (Section 2, p. 23). Since physique



and manners are very significant differences between two people, this indicates that there is something inherent to being Sicilian, which is far more significant than a person's physical appearance or the way they act.

Sicilians are also viewed as being more passionate than other groups of people, meaning that they are both more romantic and more violent than others. In any murder investigation in Sicily, there is a strong suspicion that it is a "crime of passion," meaning that it is over a woman. This is partly to keep police from investigating other possible motives, such as pressure from the mafia. However, it also shows that Sicilians consider their own romantic passion to be strong enough to cause people to kill one another. Captain Bellodi wonders to himself whether the heat of Sicily is the cause of such strong passions. "'In Sicily it doesn't often snow,' he thought, 'and perhaps a civilization's character is conditioned by snow or sun, according to which is more prevalent'" (Section 10, p. 120). He is suggesting that the sun heats up the blood of Sicilians, making them act according to what their emotions dictate.

The Secrecy of the Mafia

Since the mafia operates directly under the noses of public officials, it is necessary for them to keep very quiet about what is going on, so that they will not be shut down. This is why Captain Bellodi has so much trouble trying to prosecute them. No one in Sicily wants to admit that the mafia even exists, since this is the best way to keep the mafia from being attacked by legal groups and the media. In an early scene, two men are discussing their plans, and agree with one another that, "We two, both Sicilians, don't believe in the mafia" (Section 3, pp. 33-34). This is clearly not meant to be taken seriously, since in the same paragraph, the men are plotting how they will use their unofficial connections with people in high places to clear Don Arena of his charges.

This same secrecy enshrouds the people who may be protected, or attacked, by the mafia. No one knows when a complaint about certain mafia members might get back to that member, and no one wants to be accused of criticizing or slandering the mafia, for fear of being murdered. When Colasberna is shot directly in front of a big group of people, no one will say anything to the police. When the police are questioning the bus passengers, ". . . usually they grumbled and swore, now they sat mute, their faces as if disinterred from the silence of centuries" (Section 1, p. 10). The passengers are right to keep silent, for Paolo Nicolosi is murdered simply because Marchica suspects that Nicolosi might know something and go to the police. This secrecy is so important and threatening, that Sciascia (the author) re-edited the story several times, each time taking out details that might be considered to point to some specific person or group. Sciascia himself claimed to be afraid of what the mafia might do to him for talking about them, and openly acknowledging that the organization known as the mafia does exist.



Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of a third-person narrator. It is not clear how much the narrator knows about what is going on. To some extent, the narrator seems omniscient, since he can see into the deep thoughts of Captain Bellodi or the Little Priest. At other times, though, the narrator does not even name the characters in a scene, instead just presenting a conversation as a series of quotes. This could indicate that the narrator does not know very much about what is going on in these scenes, but it feels more like he is holding information back from the reader. This makes sense, since this is a detective story, and the narrator does not want to reveal too much, too early in the story. However, the anonymity of many characters could have more to do with emphasizing the secrecy of the mafia, implying that the men do not even want the reader to know that they are connected with the mafia. The most prominent character is Captain Bellodi, who is not Sicilian but from mainland Italy. His viewpoint is often contrasted with that of the Sicilians, to show how differently they think. Many scenes refer to the political structure in Italy throughout the twentieth century, assuming that the readers (and all the characters) understand how the Italian government works. It is not surprising that the narrator does not explain this system in detail, since the book was originally published in Italy, in Italian. Most of the readers of this first edition would already be familiar with what Italy is like. The readers could be compared to the girls of Parma at the end of the book, who know all about mainland Italy, but would like to know what Sicily is like.

Setting

The book is set primarily in Sicily, an island off the coast of Italy. Many scenes also take place in Italy. The events take place in the 1960s, which was modern day when it was written. Many of the characters remember the old days of fascism in Italy, and often refer to the political climate in 1927. Sicily is a warm island, with lots of sunlight, and many people think that the sun heats up the blood of Sicilians, causing them to be a passionate, violent people. The island of Sicily is dominated by the mafia, and everyone fears the mafia, whether they are involved with the group or not. Because of the combination of the mafia, and years of police corruption and fascism, the Sicilians do not trust the police, and do not want to give the police any information. There is a sort of solidarity to their silence, motivated by fear. The area is mostly small towns and countryside, and some of the towns are too small to even have a hotel. Although the countryside is sunny and beautiful, there are dark, rocky places like the Grimelli chiarichiaro, which reflect the secrecy of the people toward outsiders.

Several scenes take place in Rome, which is both the capital of Italy, and the seat of the Roman Catholic Church. Rome represents the central authority of the government, and since the mafia members are active there, it shows that the government is in no place to



oppose the mafia. Two men scheme in a sunny, pink cafe, which is quite a contrast to the House of Parliament. The cafe is quiet, while the House is a nest of intrigue and corruption, with everyone murmuring lies over one another.

Language and Meaning

It is important to remember that "The Day of the Owl" was originally published in Italian, with the title, "Il Giorno Della Civetta." However, the English translation retains the same tone and meaning as the Italian. Many people are not aware that Sicily has its own language, which is similar to Italian, but not identical. This is significant in the story, because the Sicilians view Captain Bellodi as an outsider because he is from mainland Italy. Bellodi speaks a little bit of Sicilian, but has to have a translator sometimes when he is interviewing the locals. Several concepts are not easily translatable from Sicilian to Italian, showing that these are distinctly Sicilian ideas. There are also various references to other languages, such as French or Latin, reflecting the tendency of Europeans to be multilingual. When Pizzuco is being interrogated by the police, "His speech was thick with imagery, hyperbole and symbolism, couched in an Italianized Sicilian, sometimes more effective, sometimes more incomprehensible than pure dialect" (Section 7, p. 77). This shows that communication happens not just with specific words, but through the way that someone talks. Pizzuco's combination of Italian and Sicilian could be meant to bridge the gap between him and the police, so that they will be more likely to believe him, or it could be meant to confuse the issue, by smudging the boundary between the "official" way of doing things (in the Italian language) and the established way of doing things (Sicilian dialect, representing the mafia). The title, "The Day of the Owl," indicates a hunter who is in a vulnerable position, because he is outside of his sphere of power. Owls are hunters, but they are usually asleep during the day.

Structure

"The Day of the Owl" is a short novel, and so it is not divided into chapters or parts. Instead, there are sometimes scene changes indicated by three asterisks, which makes it feel like the events are happening in quick succession. The structure is unusual for either a detective story, or for a novel. Most detective stories present a string of clues, often hidden within the narrative, and the detective carefully examines the clues until he sees the proof of who is guilty, and the story concludes by tying up all the loose ends. This story, however, makes it easy to guess who is guilty, and never does solve the question of who killed the Little Priest, and the bad guys go free at the end. The story is different from most novels in that the climax of the story happens on the first page, and the action all goes downhill from there. The opening scene is a flurry of action, characterized by running, whether it is Colasberna running for the bus, the witnesses running from the police, or Marchica, running down Cavour Street. From that point on, the story goes back and forth, showing first the police investigation, and then the discussions between mafia members about what to do about it. Three-fourths of the way in, around page seventy, Bellodi interrogates Marchica, Pizzuco, and Don Arena,

and it seems like he has solved his case, since the murder of Colasberna has been fully explained. However, in the last few pages of the book, all that the mafia men have been planning bears fruit, and Don Arena is released. The last section of the book takes place a month after all the rest, summing up the aftermath of the investigation.

Quotes

"The road's the only thing I look at; that's what I'm paid for . . . to look at the road."
Section 1, p. 11

"Compared to shame, death is nothing." Section 1, p. 15

"Wretched dregs, soaked in fear and vice; yet they had gambled with death, staking their lives on the razor's edge of a lie between partisans and fascists." Section 2, p. 28

"But Sicily is all a realm of fantasy and what can anyone do there without imagination?"
Section 3, p. 35

"He was born a policeman, as one is born a priest or a cuckold." Section 4, p. 49

"The people, democracy, . . . are fine inventions; things dreamed up at a desk by people who know how to shove one word up the backside of another, and strings of words up the backside of humanity, with all due respect . . ." Section 4, p. 52

". . . by Mother Church he meant his own inviolable self and the sacred knot of friendships which he represented and protected." Section 4, p. 53

"For the first time in his career as an informer he had given the carabinieri a thread to pull which, if they went about it the right way, could unravel a tissue of friendships and interests interwoven with his own existence." Section 5, p. 54

"I understand that, for you Sicilians, 'slander' is the word used for revealing actions that should never be revealed, though they deserve the proper punishment of the law . . ."
Section 6, p. 71

"The trouble with you is that you don't realize that a man who may be capable of killing ten, a thousand, a hundred thousand people, can also be a coward . . ."
Section 9, p. 90

"The family is the Sicilian's State." Section 9, p. 95

"We ought to do here what they do in America: grab them for tax-evasion." Section 9, p. 101

"Words are not like dogs which can be whistled back to heel." Section 9, p. 103

"Truth is at the bottom of a well: look into it and you see the sun or the moon; but if you throw yourself in, there's no more sun or moon: just truth." Section 9, p. 105

"Don Mariano, however, had wished to express an objective appreciation, like a victorious general praising a defeated adversary." Section 10, p. 115



Topics for Discussion

Why does no one want to talk to the police? What do they think will happen if they do?

Do you think the mafia is real? Do you think the mafia killed Colasberna, the Little Priest, or Nicolosi?

Why do people have such romantic ideas of Sicily? What role does this play in the carrying out of justice?

What sort of man is Don Arena? Do you think he got what he deserved?

What would you do in Captain Bellodi's situation? Could he have handled matters in a better way?

What are some of the differences between Sicilians and mainland Italians?

How does Italy's history of fascism tie into the story? Which do you think is better for a country, to be run by a fascist government, or to be run by the mafia?

Compare and contrast the characters of Bellodi and Don Arena. Why does Don Arena say that Bellodi is a man?

How does the Little Priest ensure his own death? Is there any way he could have gotten out of his situation alive?