The Baron in the Trees

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ITALO CALVINO

Calvino was born in 1923 to Italian botanists and agronomists. His father spent time in Mexico before moving to Cuba, and his mother gave Calvino his first name to remind him of his Italian heritage—though Calvino's family moved back to Europe when Calvino was two years old. His parents were openly derisive of both the ruling National Fascist Party and of religion, and as such, exempted Calvino from religious classes at school. During World War II, Calvino enrolled at the University of Turin and then at the University of Florence in their Agriculture departments, hiding his literary interests. He went into hiding rather than joining the military, decided that Communists had the most convincing argument, and joined the Communist Italian Resistance in 1944. Following the war, Calvino returned to Turin, completed a master's thesis on Joseph Conrad, and became active in Communist groups and publications. He began publishing novels and stories to great acclaim in the late 1940s, but his realist novels received poor reviews. After this, he began to write fantastical novels, all of which were well-received. Calvino left the Italian Communist Party after the Soviet Union invaded Hungary in 1957, and though he retained his belief in communism as a concept, he never joined another party. Immediately following this, Calvino wrote *The Baron in the Trees* over the course of only three months, and it went on to become one of his most famous works. He died in 1985 of a cerebral hemorrhage.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Baron in the Trees draws heavily on the wars, intellectual movements, and social happenings that happened before and during Cosimo's time in the trees, which begins in 1767. Most prominent is the tension between Enlightenment and Romantic ideas. The Age of Enlightenment saw the rise of science, philosophy, sociology, and political theory, and most of the Enlightenment's great minds were based in France. Many concepts that are familiar today, including the scientific method and the basic tenets of elected representative governments, including those of the US, were developed during this time. Enlightenment philosophers' ideas circulated through a robust culture of salons, coffeehouses, and scientific academies, as well as thanks to a rise in printing and publication, which made books and pamphlets accessible to more people than ever. Many historians consider the French Revolution (1789-1799) to be the end of the Age of Enlightenment, while the turn of the 19th century is considered to be the beginning of the height of the Romantic era. The Romantic era was in part a rejection of the rational, reason-based ideas of the Enlightenment. Romanticism proposed that intense emotion (rather than detached rationality) is the best way to react to something, and much Romantic artwork focuses on the awe-inspiring beauty of the natural world. In the novel, this transition from Enlightenment rationalism to Romanticism is represented by Viola and Cosimo's fraught relationship.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Baron in the Trees is part of Calvino's fantasy trilogy known as *Our Ancestors*. It follows *The Cloven Viscount* and precedes *The Nonexistent Knight*, and the entire series focuses on questions of identity, reason, and storytelling. The first half of *The Baron in the Trees* draws directly from *Emile, or On Education*, a treatise by Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau on education and the nature of man (and *man* specifically, though he does include a chapter in which he describes the "proper" educational trajectory for women as well). Like Cosimo, Emile spends time interacting with the world on his own terms and learning from his mistakes, moves on to learning a trade, and eventually turns his attention to becoming a contributing, empathetic member of society. Emile eventually receives his "perfect" wife, Sophie, but in Rousseau's half-finished sequel, *Emile et Sophie*, the couple experiences a tragedy similar to what Cosimo and Viola experience. Within the novel, Cosimo reads work by a number of other contemporary philosophers and writers as well, including the full set of Diderot's *Enclycopédie* and Samuel Richardson's epistolary novel *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Baron in the Trees (originally published in Italian as Il barone rampante)
- **When Written:** 1957
- **Where Written:** Rome, Italy
- **When Published:** 1957
- **Literary Period:** Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Philosophical Novel
- **Setting:** The fictional Genoese town of Ombrosa, beginning in 1767 and ending in the early 1800s
- **Climax:** Viola and Cosimo end their romance.
- **Antagonist:** Broadly, upper-class society and its trappings
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

White Lie. In his letters, Calvino was openly skeptical about

using biography to understand someone. Because of this, he allowed rumors to circulate throughout his life that he was actually born in Italy, as he thought the lie said more about who he was as a writer than the truth did.

Special Privileges. From 1959-1960, Calvino spent six months in the United States—despite tight US restrictions against allowing individuals with communist views into the country.

PLOT SUMMARY

It's June 15, 1767. In the Italian village of Ombrosa, the di Rondò family—Baron Arminio, his illegitimate brother the cavalier avvocato, and his wife the Generalessa; their children, Battista, Biagio, and Cosimo; and the boys' tutor, Abbé Fauchelafleur—sit at the lunch table, where Cosimo refuses to eat his snails. When Cosimo turned 12, he and eight-year-old Biagio began eating at the adults' table, ending a period of mealtime mischief. Since then, Cosimo has been rebelling against his parents. Refusing to eat the snails is a grave offense, so Cosimo runs from the table and climbs into a **tree**. He declares that he's never coming down and climbs into the garden next door, which is owned by Baron Arminio's rivals, the D'Ondariva family. In the **D'Ondarivas' garden**, Cosimo finds a beautiful young girl swinging. The girl, Viola, taunts Cosimo, but they discuss rules for a game in which Cosimo cannot come down from the trees. When Viola's aunt appears and invites Cosimo to have hot chocolate, Cosimo, prideful, refuses and climbs away. Back in his own garden, Cosimo announces to Biagio that he's not coming down. This disturbs Biagio, but he does as Cosimo asks and brings him a blanket and other supplies.

Cosimo wakes the next morning and goes in search of the fruit thieves, a band of local boys who steal farmers' fruit. They taunt Cosimo for being wealthy and mention a girl they call the Sinforosa. Their laughter alerts the farmers to their whereabouts, but Cosimo leads them to safety through the treetops. Gradually, Cosimo learns that the Sinforosa is Viola, and she used to protect the fruit thieves—until she betrayed them and caused them to get caught. Meanwhile, Cosimo desperately wants to impress Viola. When he and the thieves hear her hunting horn one day, they race to her, the boys on the ground and Cosimo in the treetops. Cosimo blurts out that he hasn't left the trees and the children begin a game of chase. Viola seems to lose interest when the fruit thieves abandon the game, and Cosimo suspects she started the game to make all the boys angry. Around this time, the Generalessa begins watching Cosimo through a field telescope and is the first in his family to accept that he's not coming down.

For his first few days, Cosimo explores the treetops. After a while, Baron Arminio sends the cavalier avvocato to the D'Ondarivas' garden to capture Cosimo. This attempt is unsuccessful and only drives Cosimo to try harder to impress Viola. To do this, Cosimo ventures deep into the woods, where he comes upon a vicious wild cat and manages to slay it. He carries the cat back to show Viola, but she shows little interest as she climbs into a carriage to leave for school. Cosimo is heartbroken, but he makes a fur hat out of the cat's pelt. Baron Arminio spends his time worrying that his claim to the local dukedom is ruined now that his heir lives in the trees, a worry that Biagio suggests was silly to begin with—Baron Arminio will never get the duchy. One day, Baron Arminio finds Cosimo and they discuss the possible, unforeseen consequences of Cosimo's rebellion. The next day, Cosimo resumes his lessons with the Abbé Fauchelafleur, but from the trees. From this point onward, things are normal between Cosimo and his family, aside from Cosimo's choice of living quarters. Baron Arminio tries to keep Cosimo's rebellion a secret, but this fails when the Count d'Estomac visits. The Count finds Cosimo delightful and promises to spread word of Cosimo throughout the courts of Europe. The young Count d'Estomac, meanwhile, surprisingly gets engaged to Battista.

Soon Cosimo knows how to live and work in the trees, but he needs a hunting dog. One day, he sees a dachshund puppy tagging along with some hounds. When the hunters insist the dachshund isn't theirs, Cosimo encourages the puppy to raise a fox, adopts the puppy, and names him Ottimo Massimo. He discovers that the puppy belonged to Viola, so he carves his name, Viola's name, and Ottimo Massimo's name in a tree in Viola's garden. For the rest of Cosimo's adolescence, he essentially runs wild. Cosimo gets to know the cavalier avvocato and begins to reevaluate his dislike and distrust for him when Cosimo learns his uncle keeps bees, but in a way to escape Baron Arminio's notice. The cavalier avvocato sometimes talks to Cosimo about aqueduct systems, but their talks don't go anywhere in practice. Mostly, Cosimo takes his uncle as an example of what not to be: separated from society.

Rumors circulate that the bandit Gian dei Brughi is on the loose, but as Cosimo listens to itinerant charcoal burners, he gradually comes to suspect that the bandit isn't someone to fear. Thus, when the bandit himself runs under Cosimo's tree to escape capture one day, Cosimo helps dei Brughi. He discovers that dei Brughi loves to read novels and begins ferrying books to him. In Cosimo, this ignites a lifelong love of reading and learning. For dei Brughi, however, this leads to his demise: his love of books makes him a poor thief, and constables capture him. Cosimo reads to dei Brughi through the bandit's cell window, and in the moments before dei Brughi hangs, Cosimo tells him the ending of their current book. Following dei Brughi's death, Cosimo begins seeking the Abbé Fauchelafleur out for lessons, but Cosimo is often the one to act as the teacher and so introduces his tutor to Enlightenment ideas. This results in the Abbé's arrest, as those ideas are considered heretical. The Abbé's arrest doesn't stop Cosimo, however; he

begins writing to the great minds of the era and purchases the entire set of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedia*.

Over the dry summer, arsonists set fire to the woods. Cosimo dedicates himself to starting a fire brigade and proves himself a skilled and charismatic leader. On Cosimo's 18th birthday, Baron Arminio seeks Cosimo out, gives him his sword, and reminds him of his duty to the title of Baron di Rondò. Around this time, Cosimo also notices the cavalier avvocato behaving strangely. He eventually learns that his uncle is in cahoots with Turkish pirates and is helping them rob ships. When Cosimo discovers the pirates hiding loot in a cave, he leads the hungry charcoal burners in fighting the pirates so the charcoal burners can eat the foodstuffs. Cosimo finds himself on the mast of a boat with Ottimo Massimo and the cavalier avvocato. The cavalier avvocato mutters the name Zaira and when they come across a pirate ship, the pirates kill the cavalier avvocato. Cosimo later tells the story to make his uncle's death honorable and glorious to try to save Baron Arminio from grief, but Baron Arminio dies of depression not long after. Cosimo is now the Baron di Rondò, but little changes in his life.

When Cosimo learns of a group of Spaniards living in the trees of Olivabassa, a nearby city, he travels there to meet them. A Jesuit named Father Sulpicio introduces Cosimo to the leader of the nobles, Frederico Alonso Sanchez (Don Frederico), and a man named El Conde. King Carlos III banished these nobles, and now they wait for an invitation home. Cosimo soon falls in love with Don Frederico's daughter, Ursula, and he also introduces his new friends to Enlightenment ideas. El Conde is especially taken with those ideas, which causes Father Sulpicio to announce that he's opening another arm of the Inquisition. Not long after this, Don Frederico invites Cosimo to return to Granada with them and marry Ursula, but when the Spaniards receive the word to return home, Cosimo instead returns to Ombrosa. Back home, Cosimo woos many women. Biagio struggles to relate what exactly happened during this time, since he was touring Europe and only returned home when the Generalessa's health declined. Not long after the Generalessa's death, Ottimo Massimo takes off across a meadow owned by Duke Tolemaico that Cosimo cannot cross. A few days later, a beautiful woman rides into the meadow on a horse. It's Viola, Duke Tolemaico's widow. She agrees to meet Cosimo, seeming both angry and gentle, and their adult romance begins.

According to Biagio, this is the most wonderful part of Cosimo's life. Cosimo and Viola have different ways of loving—Viola wants her lovers to tie themselves in knots and prove themselves, while Cosimo wants to think about love rationally—which often leads to fights. Viola often leaves for weeks after these fights, and once, while in Paris, a friend tells Biagio that Viola has other lovers all over Europe. Biagio passes this on to Cosimo, but he doesn't believe it. Not long after, however, Viola begins to court the Englishman Sir Osbert and the Neapolitan Don Salvatore. She tries to convince the men to share her, which neither they nor Cosimo want to do. Eventually, Viola calls off her romances with all three men and leaves for England with Ottimo Massimo. Cosimo seems to go mad and declares that he's a bird. He sets up a press in the trees and prints pamphlets railing against humanity. Things only begin to improve when wolves threaten Ombrosa, and Cosimo leads the effort to thwart them.

Biagio isn't sure of the exact timeline, but sometime around this period, Cosimo becomes a Freemason. It suits him perfectly, given his connections with other Enlightenment thinkers in Europe and his home in the trees, but he eventually abandons the group—his life in the trees means that he has no interest in building things with bricks. By the time the local Masonic lodge becomes a proper lodge Cosimo isn't involved. He does, however, meet up again with Father Sulpicio and two cronies, who are trying to infiltrate the Freemasons. Cosimo stabs Father Sulpicio in the stomach.

As Cosimo gets older, he begins to help with the grape harvest as he becomes light enough to walk across the trellises. When the peasants begin resenting how much of the grape harvest they send to nobles, Cosimo introduces them to the French Revolution idea of creating a "complaint book," but this exercise does little but incite rebellion. One day during harvest, the peasants and Cosimo drive out the collectors and celebrate. Soon, however, the Austro-Sardinian army, led by the young Count d'Estomac, arrives to put a stop to the rebellion. Cosimo evades capture and spends the years of the French Revolution helping French soldiers, especially those led by Lieutenant Papillon. Briefly after the end of the war, Cosimo sits on the local council, but nobody reads or implements his plan for constitutional government. He feels duty-bound to support the French, but helps local peasants evade Napoleon's cruel tactics. Napoleon does visit Cosimo, but not long after, Cosimo meets Russian soldiers chasing Napoleon out of their country. Cosimo falls ill but refuses to come out of the trees, so when an out-of-control hot air balloon passes by, he grabs onto it and drops himself into the sea to his death.

Biagio isn't sure what comes next. The 19th century is going poorly, and the ideals of the Enlightenment are dead. He tries to study the newspapers, but without Cosimo, it's meaningless. Further, all the trees Cosimo lived in are gone and now, the only trees are exotic ones. He wonders if Ombrosa only existed because Cosimo lived there.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò – The protagonist of the novel. He is the son of the noble Generalessa and Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò and lives in the fictional Italian village of Ombrosa. When the reader meets Cosimo, he's a stubborn and

independent 12-year-old who enjoys tormenting his tutor, the Abbé Fauchelafleur, and causing general mischief with his little brother, Biagio. However, after a battle of wills in which Cosimo refuses to eat the snails that his sister, Battista, has made for lunch, Cosimo climbs into one of the family's oak **trees** and declares that he's never coming down. In his first year of living in the trees, Cosimo dedicates himself to discovering his new home and meeting his neighbors. These include the neighbor girl, Viola—with whom Cosimo falls immediately in love—the fruit thieves, and the peasant farmers. He soon learns to hunt, and his love of inventing means that Cosimo rigs up all sorts of things to help him live comfortably without ever having to set foot on the ground. Though Cosimo lives in the trees, he never truly leaves humanity, and instead sticks close to Ombrosa and his family. As an older teen, Cosimo travels to Olivabassa to live with exiled Spanish nobles who also live in the trees, where he falls in love for the first time with a young woman named Ursula. Here, he begins to exercise his love of Enlightenment philosophers and tries to put their ideas into practice by helping the nobles craft letters to their king. Throughout his life, Cosimo organizes a number of societies and groups with the goal of bringing people together around a common purpose. He protects the trees, protects sheep from wolves, and is possibly one of the founders of the local Masonic lodge. Cosimo's goal, according to Biagio, is to create a perfect society using the teachings of some of his favorite Enlightenment philosophers, whom he studies throughout his life. His dedication to his studies, however, mean that he's unprepared for the romance he develops with Viola when she returns after more than a decade. Though their love is passionate, it's also emotionally taxing for both of them and ultimately dissolves. Cosimo experiences periods of madness in his old age, but remains a respected figure in Ombrosa. He dies after dropping himself into the ocean from a hot air balloon.

Viola d'Ondariva/Sinforosa – Cosimo's love interest. Cosimo first meets Viola when Viola is 10 years old. At this point, Viola already looks mature beyond her years—her hair and clothing are styled maturely for a girl of her age. She's haughty, controlling, and her moods change constantly and instantaneously. She's friendly with the fruit thieves in Ombrosa and alerts them when there are farmers around—but she also betrays them once, so they don't entirely trust her. This is one of the ways in which Viola maintains power throughout her life: her suitors never know how she's going to behave, and it's impossible to say how she's going to react. Though Viola is half the reason Cosimo decides to stay in the **trees** (it begins as a game between them), she feigns indifference to Cosimo's displays. She leaves to attend school only a few weeks after Cosimo goes into the trees, leaving behind her dachshund puppy whom Cosimo adopts and names Ottimo Massimo. She returns about a decade later, newly widowed after a year of marriage to Duke Tolemaico. As an adult, Viola is little different than she was as a child. She is still spoiled and demanding, even insisting that she got what she wanted with the Duke in that she chose specifically to marry an old man so that she'd be a widow (and free) faster. Upon returning to Ombrosa, she again gets exactly what she wants when she reunites with Cosimo, beginning their adult love affair. Her relationship with Cosimo is tumultuous and passionate. They often fight, as Viola wants to see her lovers perform sacrifices and act heroically in order to prove that they love her, a system that drives Cosimo into rages. Their relationship begins to falter when Viola begins to court two officers and tries to get them to agree to share her, something that all three men find unacceptable. Though Biagio suggests that Cosimo and Viola's love is genuine, when neither lover is willing to admit their faults, apologize, and confess their true feelings, Viola leaves, taking Ottimo Massimo with her. Cosimo spends the rest of his life missing her.

Biagio Piovasco di Rondò – The narrator of the novel; Cosimo's younger brother. Despite being very different from Cosimo in many ways—where Cosimo is stubborn and individualistic, Biagio wants to please, is compliant, and cares what others think—the two are close and mischievous as boys. Their relationship suffers when Biagio agrees to eat the snails their older sister, Battista, has prepared for lunch, while Cosimo refuses and climbs into the **trees** for good. Initially, Biagio is scared and somewhat hurt when Cosimo announces that he's going to stay in the trees, as he suspects that Cosimo resents him somewhat for not rebelling with him against the snails. However, Biagio soon comes to terms with Cosimo's choices and ferries supplies to him for the rest of Cosimo's life. As a young adult, Biagio tours Europe and shocks people like Voltaire, who have heard of Cosimo and are surprised that Cosimo's brother is so normal. Following his return, Biagio takes his father, Baron Arminio's, place and becomes the honorary Baron di Rondò in that he maintains the family's estate and farms, and pays the taxes. He also gives Cosimo a modest income to live on. Biagio marries, has children, and becomes what he suggests is a normal, predictable nobleman—but he says little about his own life, and instead focuses on his perception of Cosimo. Especially later in life, Biagio expresses views that are shockingly similar to Baron Arminio's (such as that it's unbecoming for Cosimo to accept charity). Much of what Biagio relays to the reader comes either directly from Cosimo or is what Cosimo told the audiences who would listen to him tell stories in the square; Biagio makes it clear that he can't always attest to the truth of Cosimo's stories. Biagio's narration after Cosimo's death suggests that he sees that the Enlightenment died along with his brother, as he suggests that the 19th century began horribly and it's impossible to say if it will get any better. Without Cosimo, Biagio struggles to truly find meaning, and instead focuses on how everything is changing.

Cavalier Avvocato Enea Silvio Carrega – Cosimo, Biagio, and Battista's uncle; he's Baron Arminio's illegitimate brother. The

cavalier avvocato spent much of his youth in a Muslim country (Biagio suspects Turkey) and was extremely happy there. There, he learned about hydraulics and aqueduct systems and was supposedly in contact with sultans and other people of major import. The cavalier avvocato ends up back in Italy when Cosimo and Biagio are young, and they dislike him and distrust him from the start. This is in part because he speaks more Turkish than French or Italian, and partly because he seems so wildly unhappy and stifled. This, however, is mostly a product of Baron Arminio's treatment of his brother. Though Biagio recognizes that Baron Arminio must've loved his brother, Baron Arminio is overbearing and often talks over the cavalier avvocato. He also makes the cavalier avvocato keep the estate's records, a difficult task. Despite having very practical skills, the cavalier avvocato is extremely idealistic and struggles to finish everything he starts. However, Cosimo begins to reevaluate his thoughts on his uncle when he discovers that the cavalier avvocato keeps bees, as this makes Cosimo think that the cavalier avvocato is not so strange after all—he is simply a private person. Cosimo also takes the cavalier avvocato as an example of how *not* to be: the cavalier avvocato separates himself from society as much as possible, something that Cosimo takes great care not to do. The cavalier avvocato dies when Cosimo catches him working with Turkish pirates to steal goods from Ombrosa. His death is tragic, as Cosimo recognizes that the Turkish pirates who behead him believe he ratted them out—when all he really wanted was likely to return to the only place he was ever happy. Cosimo tells fantastical stories about the cavalier avvocato's death after the fact, in part to make Baron Arminio feel better.

Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò – Biagio and Cosimo, and Battista's father; the Generalessa's husband; and the cavalier avvocato's brother. Biagio describes his father as dull, but only because Baron Arminio is focused on something that is never going to happen in his lifetime: becoming the Duke of Ombrosa. His focus on achieving the Dukedom means that he spends his time scheming and concerning himself with genealogy, neither of which gets him any closer to achieving his goals. This focus also influences how Baron Arminio manages his family: Biagio explains that he insists on forcing his sons to dress as though they are expecting an invitation to a European court any day, with few concessions to the fact that they live in a provincial area. Furthermore, the courts Cosimo suggests Baron Arminio admires were at their height years ago by the start of the novel, making the case again that Baron Arminio is stuck in a time long gone that will never return. Because of this focus on improving his family's position, Baron Arminio is aghast when, one day, Cosimo climbs into the **trees** and declares that he's not coming down. Cosimo is the future Baron di Rondò, and Baron Arminio finds it embarrassing that his firstborn son chooses to live so differently. At first he tries to keep Cosimo a secret from the wider world, but he's ultimately unsuccessful in this endeavor. Baron Arminio eventually comes around somewhat to Cosimo's choice to live in the trees, as he gives Cosimo his sword and reminds him of his duty at Cosimo's 18th birthday. Baron Arminio dies not long after, after the death of the cavalier avvocato. Biagio suggests that the cavaliere's death, combined with Cosimo's rebellion, sent his father into a depression from which he couldn't recover.

Gian dei Brughi – A fearsome thief who terrorizes everyone in Ombrosa. He has a reputation for being ruthless and uncompromising. In the weeks before Cosimo meets him, he discovers that all the robberies attributed to Gian dei Brughi haven't actually been committed by the man himself; many thieves work with dei Brughi and use his name to protect themselves. This begins to change when, in dei Brughi's old age, he meets Cosimo while escaping from some constables, and the two develop a relationship in which Cosimo passes novels to the bandit. A lifelong reader, Gian dei Brughi is thrilled to finally have access to books, though the relationship becomes trying for Cosimo since dei Brughi wants to know about all the books Cosimo gives him, so Cosimo has to at least skim them first. Though dei Brughi is happy for the first time in a long time with his novels—especially Samuel Richardson's novel *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*—this newfound habit ultimately leads to his death, since his desire to get back to reading means that he bungles an attempted robbery and is captured. In dei Brughi's final days, Cosimo learns several important lessons about what it means to help someone be happy and die with dignity. He reads dei Brughi the rest of a partially-finished novel and begins reading another one that's happy in order to lift the bandit's spirit. Cosimo shares the book's ending with dei Brughi on the day of the bandit's hanging so that dei Brughi can die satisfied. Biagio also insists that Cosimo learned the importance of helping others from dei Brughi.

Battista Piovasco di Rondò – Cosimo and Biagio's older sister. At the beginning of the novel, she's the house nun and takes on much of the cooking. She became a nun after an incident with the Marquis della Mela, in which he supposedly raped her, but evidence instead points to the possibility that she was the aggressor. Though Biagio insists that Battista has all the qualities of a good cook, such as passion and creativity, she also has a sadistic streak that means her dishes are often an ordeal for those eating them. She enjoys creating dishes that may or may not taste good, but are sure to shock the family at dinner, such as pâté made with mouse liver, porcupine, and a snail dish in which the snails are arranged to look like swans. In general, Battista likes to keep the family on its toes by doing strange and unexpected things, such as hunting mice at night with a pistol and chewing her fingernails in a way guaranteed to attract attention. Her snails are the reason why Cosimo goes into the **trees**. Not long after Cosimo goes into the trees, Battista marries the young Count d'Estomac and, for the most part, exits the story. She briefly returns with her husband to live with Biagio during the French Revolution, bringing with her a model

guillotine so she can regale people with tales of the executions in Paris.

The Generalessa – Biagio, Cosimo, and Battista's mother, and Baron Arminio's wife. As a girl, the Generalessa accompanied her father, a general, on his campaigns in the War of Austrian Succession, which earned her the nickname Generalessa (her real name, which no one in the novel uses, is Konradine Von Kurtewitz). Because of her upbringing, she knows all about battle tactics, ballistics, and navigation. Though Biagio describes her as a good parent, she doesn't have much of a sense of humor and her only focus is on somehow getting her sons to join the military. The Generalessa spends her days either making lace or embroidering; all of her work is military themed. Her focus on the military means that she has "military manners" and is exacting, so Baron Arminio's pointless scheming is frustrating for her. Though she's initially concerned when Cosimo goes into the **trees**, she's the first to accept that he's not going to come down and makes sure he has what he needs to stay warm and dry. She signals to him with military flags, something that hurts Biagio—she never played with them with the flags, or taught the boys how to signal with them, until Cosimo disappeared. It's implied that Cosimo and the Generalessa have a close relationship until her death, as Cosimo keeps a vigil at her window all the time in her final days.

Father Sulpicio – The religious leader for the group of Spanish nobles that lives in the **trees**. He's a Jesuit, which makes Cosimo suspicious of him to begin with. This suspicion quickly proves to be correct and reasonable: Father Sulpicio is a thin, snide, and conniving man who, when he catches wind of the Enlightenment ideas circulating among the nobles (many of which aren't especially supportive of the power religion has in society), he opens up what he deems a new arm of the Inquisition and attempts to harm El Conde. He does his best to get Cosimo banished. Years later, Cosimo runs into Father Sulpicio and two Jesuit cronies, trying to get into Masonic lodges to presumably shut them down. It's unknown if Father Sulpicio dies, but Cosimo stabs him in the stomach and he's never seen again.

Abbé Fauchelafleur – The di Rondòs' spiritual leader and Biagio and Cosimo's tutor. He's an old, sleepy, and vacant man; Baron Arminio chose him mostly because the Abbé is a Jansenist and not a Jesuit. The Abbé is a poor caregiver and under his watch, the boys get away with all sorts of mischief. Later, after Cosimo climbs into the **trees**, the Abbé's world begins to open up. Cosimo is able to convince him to sometimes climb into the trees for lessons, and the Abbé becomes very interested in Enlightenment ideas. When he starts ordering books by Enlightenment philosophers, however, higher-ups in the church arrest him. Biagio explains that Abbé Fauchelafleur dies unsure of what exactly he believes in, but trying his hardest to believe in something, nonetheless.

Ottimo Massimo / Turcaret – A dachshund whom Cosimo adopts as a hunting dog soon after taking to the **trees**. He discovers that Ottimo Massimo used to belong to Viola, which makes Cosimo even more interested in having the dog. Despite his diminutive stature, Ottimo Massimo becomes a skilled hunter and thinks highly of himself. He often courts female dogs much larger than he is, such as Great Danes. Ottimo Massimo is the first to realize that Viola has returned to the area and he's instrumental in reuniting Viola and Cosimo. This becomes a happy time for the elderly Ottimo Massimo, whom Viola calls Turcaret. When Viola breaks things off with Cosimo and leaves again, she takes Ottimo Massimo with her.

Frederico Alonso Sanchez – The leader of the Spanish nobles who live in the trees in Olivabassa, a city near Ombrosa. A large man with liver spots, Don Frederico is melancholy and somewhat hopeless about his situation. He has three daughters, one of whom, Ursula, becomes Cosimo's first love. Don Frederico enjoys Cosimo, and much to Father Sulpicio's chagrin, he invites Cosimo to come back to Granada with them to marry Ursula.

El Conde – One of the Spanish nobles whom Cosimo meets in the trees of Olivabassa. When Cosimo learns that King Carlos III tortured El Conde's son, Cosimo realizes that El Conde is the only Spanish noble who is truly suffering. This, however, means that El Conde is one of the only Spaniards to express genuine interest in Enlightenment ideas. He's also the only one who insists that they need to put those ideas in practice by taking to the courts after King Carlos III invites the nobles to return to Spain.

Ursula – A young Spanish woman who becomes Cosimo's first love. Their love is fun and passionate, and Ursula is thrilled when her father, Don Frederico, invites Cosimo to marry Ursula and return to Granada with them. Years after Cosimo and Ursula part, Father Sulpicio tells Cosimo that Ursula died in a convent, but Biagio suspects that this is a lie designed to hurt Cosimo.

The Neapolitan/Salvatore di San Cataldo – An officer who, along with Sir Osbert and Cosimo, vies for Viola's affections. He and Sir Osbert agree to not share Viola, but they continue to see her together and make a number of concessions to try to win her love. Following Viola's flight, the two officers embark on their own adventures through the courts of Europe.

The Englishman/Sir Osbert Castlefight – An officer who, along with Don Salvatore and Cosimo, vies for Viola's affections. Hgreat!e and Don Salvatore agree to not share Viola, but they continue to see her together and make a number of concessions to try to win her love. Following Viola's flight, the two officers embark on their own adventures through the courts of Europe.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Marquis della Mela – A young man who, sometime before the

novel begins, possibly raped Battista. Biagio, however, implies that Battista was actually the aggressor, as servants found the Marquis della Mela screaming, with his pants in shreds. He refused to marry Battista after this incident.

Lieutenant Agrippa Papillon – A lieutenant in the French Army. Lieutenant Papillon loves nature and is a natural poet; he's a poor leader and disinterested in making war. Cosimo discovers Papillon's unit in the woods around Ombrosa, and sees that all the soldiers are growing moss and ferns out of their uniforms.

The Fruit Thieves – A band of impoverished boys, including Ugasso and Bel-Loré, who steal fruit from Ombrosa's farmers. They're considered a nuisance, and before taking to the **trees**, Cosimo never thought them worthy friends. He begins to run with them when he learns that they're friends of Viola's.

The Young Count d'Estomac – Count d'Estomac's son, and eventually, Battista's husband. As an adult, young Count d'Estomac leads a regiment of Austro-Sardinian soldiers and briefly lives with Biagio. But when the French conquer more land in Europe, young Count d'Estomac and Battista have to flee.

Ugasso – As a child, Ugasso is one of the fruit thieves in love with Viola. Along with Bel-Loré, he engages in banditry with Gian dei Brughi as an adult. In the months after Gian dei Brughi's capture, he and Bel Loré light fires in the woods surrounding Ombrosa.

Bel-Loré – One of the fruit thieves who's in love with Viola in his childhood. In adulthood, he becomes one of Gian dei Brughi's bandits. Later, angry at Cosimo, he sets fires in the woods surrounding Ombrosa.

Count d'Estomac – A count who visits the di Rondò family not long after Cosimo climbs into the trees. Cosimo delights him, much to Baron Arminio's chagrin, and he spreads news of Cosimo throughout the courts of Europe.

Napoleon Bonaparte – A general early in the French Revolution, and later the Emperor of France. He meets Cosimo in Ombrosa after being crowned Emperor in Milan, Italy.

General Konrad Von Kurtewitz – The Generalessa's father. He was a general in the War of Austrian Succession, and he took his daughter with him on his campaigns.

Zaira – It's unclear if Zaira is real or a figment of Cosimo's imagination, but she appears in Cosimo's story of the cavalier avvocato's death. If real, she's possibly a former lover or a daughter of the cavalier avvocato.

King Carlos III – The king of Spain. He banishes the Spanish nobles whom Cosimo meets in the trees.

Voltaire – An Enlightenment philosopher whom Biagio meets in Paris. Voltaire has heard of Cosimo, and Cosimo reads Voltaire's work.

Duke Tolemaico – An elderly duke in Ombrosa who owns a vast hunting ground. He marries 21-year-old Viola, but dies after a year of marriage in his early 80s.

Don Calisto – A Jesuit who masquerades as a Freemason. He conspires with Don Fulgencio and Father Sulpicio.

Don Fulgencio – A Jesuit who masquerades as a Freemason. He's in cahoots with Don Calisto and Father Sulpicio.

Viola's Aunt – One of Viola's caregivers.

The Marquis d'Ondariva – Viola's father.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

EDUCATION, CONNECTEDNESS, AND THE WRITTEN WORD

The Baron in the Trees tells the story of Cosimo, a young Italian noble who, after an argument with his parents in which he refuses to eat snails for lunch, climbs into the **trees** and lives there for the rest of his life. This move to the trees, however, doesn't meaningfully hinder Cosimo's education—indeed, after a period of a few years in which he essentially runs wild, Cosimo dedicates himself to reading and learning everything he possibly can, a pursuit that eventually puts him in written contact with such Enlightenment philosophers as Denis Diderot and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In this way, *The Baron in the Trees* makes it clear that Cosimo's solitary life in the trees does enforce a degree of physical distance between Cosimo and other people. But what doesn't suffer as a result of this distance—and indeed, is helped greatly by it—is Cosimo's theoretical education and his focus on the written word. Thus, the novel argues that self-education and the written word are powerful tools that can foster a sense of connection with other people.

During the time in which the novel takes place, education for young nobles like Cosimo and Biagio (Cosimo's younger brother, who narrates the novel) looked very different from a contemporary school system. Boys like these would've been educated at home by tutors—by the Abbé de Fauchelafleur, in the case of the di Rondò family—and would've learned languages, philosophy, history, and science. Once Cosimo's interest in education is rekindled as an older teen, Biagio makes it very clear that living in the trees doesn't hinder Cosimo's early education at all. In fact, Cosimo learns more than he ever might have on the ground. It's also worth pointing out that Biagio, who chooses to stay on the ground and presumably receives a similar education, seemingly never does anything

noteworthy in terms of academics. Indeed, Cosimo actually begins to take on the role of a teacher in his later lessons with the Abbé de Fauchelafleur, whom he convinces to join him in the trees. Things take a sinister turn, however, when the ideas that Cosimo introduces the Abbé to turn out to be considered heretical and the Abbé is arrested. This suggests that the unconventional education Cosimo receives is dangerous for those who are part of an organization, like the church, that either doesn't value education or has a very narrow view of what education should look like. Only when someone is able to be more like Cosimo and exist outside the constraints of organizations like these, the novel suggests, is one able to fully take advantage of everything there is to learn.

It's important to note, however, that while Cosimo's *theoretical* education isn't at all hindered by his choice of home, his *practical* education is. Though Cosimo is able to understand his uncle the cavalier avvocato's aqueduct plans on a theoretical level, Cosimo is never able to gain the actual experience of digging and constructing them. Similarly, Biagio points out the irony in Cosimo becoming a Freemason, given that the organization has its roots, at least in name, in builders' guilds—and Cosimo, who lives in the trees, has no use for building things with bricks, as interesting as he finds the Freemasons' interest in Enlightenment ideals. Further, though there are enough trees for Cosimo to be able to travel surprisingly far without touching the ground, Biagio is the brother who actually makes a tour of Europe and even meets Voltaire. The tour of Europe is portrayed as the capstone on Biagio's education, and it's not something available to Cosimo while he still insists on remaining in the trees. Again, while Cosimo's education isn't impacted in terms of theory, the distance imposed on him by choosing to stay in the trees does deprive him of opportunities to learn things firsthand, or even to see more of the world than the forests surrounding Ombrosa.

While Biagio is careful to point out the ways in which Cosimo's education did suffer, he also makes it very clear that Cosimo was able to maintain a surprising degree of connectedness to the outside world, mainly through the purchase of books, the exchange of letters, and of writing his own pamphlets. The written word, in this sense, becomes the strongest connecting thread between Cosimo and the wider world—and indeed, between the novel itself and the reader, as the novel is Biagio's record of Cosimo's stories. This situates the written word, whether in books or letters, as one of the most powerful tools for learning, as well as for bridging gaps and differences of all sorts. Just as Cosimo is able to learn about Enlightenment concepts through his books, befriend bandits through a shared love of novels, and unite local peasants in an attempt to draft a basis for Enlightenment-inspired government, the reader too is able to experience all of these same things by joining Cosimo on his educational journey.

COMING OF AGE, FAMILY, AND THE INDIVIDUAL

In many ways, *The Baron in the Trees* is a classic Bildungsroman, a coming-of-age novel that deals specifically with the protagonist's moral, intellectual, and psychological growth. When the reader first meets Cosimo, he is 12 years old and on the brink of puberty—in other words, he's nearly ready to break free from his family and assert his independence and individuality. As the novel follows Cosimo throughout his life, it makes the case that a natural and normal part of coming of age is asserting one's independence, especially in those ways that either upset or aren't understandable to one's parents. While the novel makes it clear that there's a price to pay for asserting one's individuality like this, it also suggests that this is the only way to truly become a fully-formed, interesting, and respectable person.

The beginning of the novel introduces Cosimo and Biagio as children in a variety of ways—but children who are on the cusp of becoming adults. Biagio recalls with nostalgia the fun of eating at what was essentially the kids' table with Cosimo and the boys' tutor, the Abbé Fauchelafleur, playing numerous tricks on the Abbé and generally having a rousing good time as unencumbered, mischievous children. This all begins to change soon before the novel begins, however, when the boys' father, Baron Arminio, requests that they start eating at the adults' table, something that puts a stop to their antics. In addition to having to use their manners, eating at the adults' table also means accepting whatever their sister Battista makes for lunch—an uncomfortable and often disgusting proposition for the boys, as Battista is fond of tricking her family into eating artfully-prepared dishes that include porcupine, mice, and snails. Battista's snail soup is the last straw for Cosimo: for him, eating it represents giving in to an overbearing system in which he's allowed no agency or free thought. That Biagio *does* eat the soup, meanwhile, foreshadows his adulthood as someone who falls into line and does what's expected of him—a difference that brings about a rift in the boys' relationship.

Cosimo's choice to live in the **trees** doesn't go over well with their parents for the first few years. Rather than dedicating himself to his studies and the work of preparing to succeed Baron Arminio as the next Baron di Rondò, Cosimo runs around with the fruit thieves, flirts with the neighbor girl Viola, and forms relationships with the poor individuals who work for the family. Up to this point, Cosimo wasn't even supposed to acknowledge any of these whom he befriends. Among the nobility and farming peasants alike, the fruit thieves are thought of as dirty savages, while Viola is a member of a rival family whom Baron Arminio does everything in his power to humiliate and show up once Cosimo begins visiting them. This begins to suggest that as a result of Cosimo's independence, he also has the power to decide who's worth his time—and for him, those individuals his father deemed unworthy are the ones who

go on to teach Cosimo the most. This is most apparent in Cosimo's relatively brief friendship with Gian dei Brughi, a much-feared bandit who, in his old age, develops a love of reading to rival Cosimo's. After months of funneling books to the bandit, Cosimo sees his friend captured and sentenced to death. However, rather than drop his friend, Cosimo reads to the bandit through his cell window and, in the moments before Gian dei Brughi hangs, tells Dei Brughi how the novel he is currently reading ends, allowing the man to die satisfied in peacefully. In this sense, Cosimo's independence helps him develop a sense of compassion unheard of in noble circles, which turns him into a beloved, if eccentric, figure in the community during his years in the trees.

Cosimo's coming-of-age in the trees occurs by himself, without ever fully taking on the role of the future Baron di Rondò, and refusing to play by his father's rules of polite noble society—something that Biagio suggests allowed Cosimo to find meaning in life that Biagio and the boys' parents, the Generalessa and Baron Arminio, were never able to do. The rest of Cosimo's family, Biagio included, cling tightly to the way things were, are, and should be, rather than asserting their own individuality in ways that would provide more meaning or import to their lives. Baron Arminio spends his life hoping and waiting to be given the dukedom, something that never happens. However, this isn't something that might happen because Baron Arminio did or didn't do something; rather, it's something that will just happen of its own accord. The Generalessa, on the other hand, grew up accompanying her father, a general in the War of Austrian Succession, and so spends her days making military- and battle-themed lace and praying that her sons will one day be soldiers—again, not anything she takes any action practically to make happen. Meanwhile, as Biagio comes of age himself, he simply accepts his role as the honorary Baron di Rondò and later in life, expresses views astonishingly similar to those his parents might have held. In this sense, all three live boring, forgettable lives exactly because they didn't assert their independence and their desires, as Cosimo did as he came of age.

In particular, Biagio's trajectory, though it exists on the periphery of the story, presents an alternative to Cosimo's that Biagio himself suggests is less fulfilling. The novel closes as Biagio recounts his brother's dramatic suicide and explains how, since Cosimo's death, the landscape of Ombrosa has changed to not allow for the kind of individualism that Cosimo represented—and indeed, that while Biagio is a respected old man in his own right, his legacy is part of a line of Barons di Rondò and has little to do with who he is as an individual. In this way, the novel asserts that if individuals wish to leave a lasting legacy, it's absolutely essential to separate from one's family as much as possible and create an identity that can stand up all by itself.

VIRTUE, DIGNITY, AND KINDNESS

While it's possible to construe Cosimo's choice to live in the **trees** as a fundamentally selfish one—and indeed, Baron Arminio does just this for a long time—it's also impossible to ignore that Cosimo dedicates his life to making his community and the world a better place, whether by creating brigades to fight fires or by expanding on philosophers' ideas of how to form just, ethical governments. In many ways, Cosimo exhibits a spirit of generosity and goodwill unheard of in his life as a noble confined to the ground, and he sets an example of how to be a useful, generous, and moral contributor to society.

As a child, Cosimo is understandably selfish. He wants to be free to do as he pleases, whether that be playing silly games (which the Generalessa forbids) or eating meals at a separate table (which Baron Arminio puts a stop to not long before Biagio begins his story). However selfish Cosimo is, the novel makes it clear that his selfishness is a product of misguided attempts to control him on the part of adults in his life, not something actually wrong with Cosimo himself. After Cosimo resolves himself to living in the trees, much of his young life is spent running wild and learning about the world around him. But this time Cosimo spends learning and bettering himself leads directly to his development of a moral compass—and, as a young adult, his understanding of how important it is to use his skills, station, and location to help others. To this end, Cosimo begins to dedicate himself early on to helping farmers prune their trees, something he can do easily from his perch and something that, incidentally, helps him in the long run (he effectively trains the trees to grow in such a way as to facilitate his passage among them, especially in his old age). Through this, the novel begins to suggest that kindness and virtue are innate states of being for Cosimo, at least when he doesn't have to field annoying pressure from his parents. It also suggests that giving back to others has direct, tangible, and positive effects for the one giving that are just as meaningful as the positive effects for those on the receiving end.

Over the next several decades, Cosimo acts on his desire to give back again and again. He develops a fire brigade to protect the dry forest from arsonists and neighboring fires one summer, and during the few years he spends with exiled Spanish nobles who also inhabit the treetops, he helps them draft letters and petitions to King Carlos III explaining why they should be allowed to return to their homes. Even more compelling than the way that Cosimo can mobilize groups of people in pursuit of a common goal, however, is the way that he is able to bestow a sense of dignity and humanity upon people whom society has, for the most part, discredited or left behind. These include the cavalier avvocato (Cosimo's uncle) and Gian dei Brughi, a terrifying bandit who develops a voracious appetite for books in his old age.

The cavalier avvocato is Baron Arminio's illegitimate brother

and so is the black sheep of the family to begin with. This sense of being different and unwelcome is heightened by the fact that the cavalier avvocato spent much of his youth in Turkey. During his time in the trees, Cosimo learns that his uncle isn't just the weird eccentric everyone thinks he is. In reality, the cavalier avvocato is a kind, private man who keeps bees and has a talent for designing and developing canal and aqueduct systems—and who feels stifled and mistreated by his brother. Though Cosimo learns later that the cavalier avvocato is actually helping Turkish pirates smuggle goods out of the city, Cosimo weighs his options and decides to tell a story that allows his uncle to, in the public mind, die a dignified death by spreading the lie that the pirates captured and killed him, rather than that he died in the middle of a traitorous act. The novel proposes that this is one of the most generous things Cosimo could've done for his unhappy and misunderstood uncle—and also commends Cosimo's choice to alert the homeless charcoal burners who live in the woods to the existence of the loot, so that the foodstuffs go to the individuals in Cosimo's community who truly need it the most.

Gian dei Brughi, on the other hand, begins borrowing Cosimo's books in the year before dei Brughi's capture and execution. While their relationship in general functions to humanize the bandit and turn him into a sympathetic, human character, what stands out is Cosimo's choice to read to dei Brughi during his time in jail and then tell him the ending of the book in the moment before he dies. This allows dei Brughi to die happy, something that the novel suggests is worth striving for—no matter what wrongdoings or mistakes an individual may have made in their life. In this sense, Cosimo's relationships with his uncle, Gian dei Brughi, and other similar characters speak to the power of humanizing individuals one might initially think aren't worth considering at all. Cosimo's kindnesses, however, make it clear that everyone, no matter how misunderstood, is worthy of happiness, respect, and dignity, especially as they face death.

As Cosimo grows old and his health begins to fail, he begins to trade his role of the generous giver with others in the community. The community at large comes together to pay back the respect and kindness that Cosimo showed them by sending a nurse, doctors, and food into his trees, in addition to a mattress and an armchair. This, Biagio insists, is barely enough to thank his brother for his lifelong generosity. Choosing to record Cosimo's story in this novel, however, is a way for Biagio to make sure that Cosimo's legacy as a kind, giving, and generous individual far outlives him—and allows him to continue to set an example for others for years to come.

THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT VS. THE ROMANTIC ERA

While a fantastical novel in many ways, *The Baron in the Trees* nevertheless is still very reflective of the time in which it takes place. The book begins at the end of the Age of Enlightenment in the latter half of the 18th century, and continues on during the rise of the Romantic era, which began in the last few decades of the 18th century and reached its peak in the first 50 years of the 19th century. As the Romantic era was, in part, a reaction against the Enlightenment, the two eras are necessarily opposed to each other in important ways. Though Cosimo embodies many hallmarks of the Enlightenment and of Romanticism throughout the novel, the conflicts between the Enlightenment and Romanticism are most apparent in the romance between Cosimo and Viola. Through their romance specifically, *The Baron in the Trees* reflects the conflicts of the era in which it takes place and through this, offers the implication that good times—that is, the Enlightenment—and the people who help make them cannot, and won't, last.

The Enlightenment can be characterized as an era in which there was an increasingly open flow of ideas. During the Enlightenment, which is considered to have run from about 1715 to 1789 (roughly, the beginning of Louis XV's reign in France to the French Revolution), philosophers congregated in salons, scientific academies, and Masonic lodges to discuss and circulate their ideas—many of which also circulated in books and pamphlets. Cosimo participates wholeheartedly in this flow of ideas. He corresponds regularly via letters with Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, and Biagio runs into Voltaire—who knows of Cosimo—during his European travels. Cosimo's ravenous desire for books, and specifically his acquisition of all volumes in Diderot's *Encyclopédie* (the first general use encyclopedia with multiple named contributors that sought to amass all the world's knowledge to disseminate it to a wide number of people) reflect his engagement with thinkers and writers of the time. This situates Cosimo as one of the philosophers—especially when he joins in producing texts like these, as when he writes several pamphlets and begins books. What appeals to Cosimo most is the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and rational thought, in part because focusing on reason allows Cosimo to make his stubborn and emotional initial climb into the **trees** something acceptable and in line with the times—especially once his separation from society allows him to make observations that other thinkers find compelling. However, it's also worth keeping in mind that Cosimo's choice to live his life in close proximity to nature is one that's far more Romantic, making it clear that while Cosimo's theories are more representative of Enlightenment ideals in general, he himself still encapsulates the tensions between the two eras.

As a product of the Enlightenment in terms of theory and ideals, love with Viola presents many problems for Cosimo and his love of reason. Since Viola met Cosimo as a child, she has shown that when it comes to love, she cares only about inciting

heroic acts of passion from her suitors. She thus represents a more Romantic way of thinking about things. Though the Romantic era emphasized the important role of the natural world in a way that does indeed appeal to Cosimo, it also elevated emotions like horror, awe, and apprehension—all emotions that, over the course of Cosimo and Viola's adult love affair, Viola cultivates in Cosimo and in her other suitors. Viola often makes the case that suffering is an essential part of love, and uses this assertion to incite fights and send Cosimo into fits of rage, self-harm, and madness. For his part, Cosimo tries to convince Viola to buy into his assertion that everything—including love—is better when it's approached rationally. But for Viola, this is fundamentally not what love is about. Love, for her, is about intrigue, anxiety, and forcing men to agree to ridiculous demands in order to earn her affections. Because of these arguments, Viola and Cosimo's love ultimately dissolves.

Within the world of the novel and within the context of the time period in which Cosimo and Viola's love takes place—the decade before the French Revolution—their romance can be read as a symbolic representation of growing disillusionment with Enlightenment ideals. Further, Cosimo's odd behavior, and possibly legitimate madness that he experiences in his old age (that is, life after Viola) speaks to the sense that, following the formal Age of Enlightenment, Cosimo and all he stands for become somewhat obsolete. Or, at the very least, it suggests that Enlightenment ideals are no longer exciting and revolutionary in the new world created after the French Revolution (which was supported with Enlightenment concepts and normalized them to a degree). In this sense, *The Baron in the Trees* portrays Europe in a time of flux and makes the case that ideas will continue to change and evolve, leaving individuals behind as they do.

CIVILIZATION VS. NATURE

Though related to the Age of Enlightenment as a whole, it's worth taking a closer look specifically at the role that nature plays, both generally and in terms of shaping Cosimo's philosophy. One of Cosimo's regular correspondents, the Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, proposed that humans are born into perfection—but, as they engage with society, become corrupted. This idea of perfection is something that Rousseau ties to the natural world, as opposed to the manmade world of Western civilization. With this understanding, it's possible to read Cosimo's ascent to the **trees** as an attempt to escape from society to become what Rousseau might suggest is an ideal man. In this sense, Cosimo's central conflict is not man versus nature in the conventional sense. Rather, the book examines the societal and cultural trappings of corrupt civilization versus the pure, unadulterated potential of a person in what Rousseau believes is their natural state—ultimately concluding that attempting to break with society to achieve this ideal is impossible.

Though Rousseau didn't come up with it, he greatly popularized the idea of the "noble savage." This idea is considered racist and problematic today—but broadly speaking, it states that Native peoples and "pre-political" people, such as those Europeans encountered in the course of colonizing the globe, were unencumbered by civilization and instead, represented an ideal, pure vision of what human life could look like. Indeed, Rousseau even took this idea a step further in his exploration of human development, as he posited that all children go through a phase in which they occupy a similar state of perfect potential, a phase they grow out of as they develop and become a part of society.

Cosimo's choice to take to the trees reflects, at its heart, the desire to not give in to the corruption as represented by society, or at least the kind of society that Cosimo's father, Baron Arminio, models for him. For Baron Arminio, life is about wanting—but doing nothing to actually achieve—the dukedom at some point in the future, something that represents Baron Arminio's desire to be a part of the powerful elite and a part of civilization. This desire to be a duke means that Baron Arminio forces all his family members to adhere to strict rules of conduct, such as forcing his young sons to eat politely with the adults at mealtimes and forcing them into clothes that Biagio suggests would be more appropriate in the French Court of Louis XIV than in their comparatively modest and rural villa in Italy. Cosimo's reasoning for going up in the trees, then—which he decides to do after a major argument with his parents in which he flat-out refuses to eat snails for lunch—is a concise encapsulation of Cosimo's broader rejection of society as represented by his father.

For his first few years in the trees, Cosimo becomes a truly wild individual: he begins to hunt, fashions garments out of fur, and falls in with a group of young fruit thieves who regularly harass local farmers—uneducated and impoverished individuals who can be read as products of the ills of civilization. While they, like Cosimo, turn to the natural world of the trees when they're unable to feed themselves in Ombrosa, they will never be able to make anything more of themselves. Cosimo, on the other hand, is educated very much in the way that Rousseau proposed was best: after a period of time in which he enjoys being wild and free, he's allowed to return to formal lessons when he' ready and even agrees to wear proper clothing when the occasion calls for it. From the trees, Cosimo is thus able to enjoy the best of both worlds and in this sense, embody the kind of person Rousseau suggests was ideal and worth emulating. He remains, in many ways, a wild and unencumbered man for most of his life, sleeping in his fur sack, hunting, and in his middle-aged madness, insisting that he's actually a bird. However, when he does engage with society, it's in ways that the novel suggests are entirely positive: he organizes fire

brigades, fights off pirates, helps fight in the French Revolution, and even makes a brief effort to facilitate government via social contract—what modern readers might recognize as constitutional government. In all of these endeavors, Cosimo is able to escape the corrupting ills of civilized society, while participating to make them better from his ideal life in the trees.

Despite the novel's implication that Cosimo's life is one to aspire to in many ways, the novel's end suggests that this isn't something that can happen in the present that Biagio inhabits and from which he narrates (an unspecified time in the mid-1800s), or indeed, in the reader's present. Biagio notes that the trees that facilitated Cosimo's separation from the civilized world are now gone, leaving behind only the man-made, built environment that Cosimo found to be so stifling and corrupt, as well as a smattering of **exotic trees**. In this way, while the novel celebrates Cosimo's choices and the way he lived his life, it suggests that it was something only possible at a very specific point in time: in the time after his death, achieving that moral high ground through association with the natural world is something that the novel suggests is impossible.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

OMBROSA'S NATIVE TREES

The trees Cosimo lives in symbolize the specific connections that Cosimo forms with the rest of the world, and more generally, the Age of Enlightenment as a whole. Cosimo moves through the trees around Ombrosa, spreading his Enlightenment-inspired ideas and his focus on coming together as a community, in much the same way that books and pamphlets circulated throughout the Western world and connected people during the Enlightenment. Biagio notes that in the years after Cosimo's death, the native trees that Cosimo lived in were cut down and replaced with **exotic trees** from all over the world. The destruction of the old ones mirrors the end of the Enlightenment era's connectedness and free-flowing ideas.

THE D'ONDARIVA GARDEN AND EXOTIC TREES

While the **native trees** in Ombrosa generally symbolize the Age of Enlightenment and the era's emphasis on connectedness, the d'Ondariva garden—including its exotic trees—symbolizes the Romantic era to come. The garden is full of non-native trees and plants that Cosimo thinks of as being direct opposites of the native trees in which he primarily lives, an observation that speaks to the tensions and conflicts that arise in the transition between the two eras and their guiding principles. When, at the end of the novel, Biagio notes that the native trees Cosimo lived in are gone and have been replaced by ones similar to those that once grew only in the d'Ondarivas' garden, it forcefully illustrates that the Romantic era has not just come to stay, but has entirely overtaken the Enlightenment that came before it.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Mariner edition of *The Baron in the Trees* published in 2017.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ Now, instead, as we dined with the family, childhood's sad chapter of daily grievances took shape. Our father and our mother were always right in front of us; we had to use knives and forks for the chicken, and sit up straight, and keep elbows off the table—endless!—and then there was our odious sister Battista. A succession of scoldings, spiteful acts, punishments, obstinacies began, until the day Cosimo refused the snails and decided to separate his lot from ours.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Battista Piovasco di Rondò, The Generalessa, Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

Biagio sets the stage for his brother, Cosimo's, choice to take to the trees by explaining, in great detail, the shifts that took place as he and Cosimo began eating with the adults and spending more time with their parents. Importantly, Biagio situates Cosimo's choice as an act of rebellion taken directly against their parents and everything they stand for—that is, polite, civilized society. The novel generally portrays society on the ground as something alternately corrupting, boring, and stifling for someone as individualistic as Cosimo. Because of this, rejecting civilized society gives Cosimo the freedom to go on and engage with great thinkers of the time—while also maintaining close ties with society and his family in particular, which allows him to help Biagio in particular bridge the gap between the two ways of thinking. In this sense, Cosimo's decision to spend the rest of his life in the trees is immediately established not as a childish whim, but as an intellectually mature protest

against the trappings of modern society and noble life.

❝ ...dull because his life was dominated by thoughts that were out of step, as often happens in eras of transition. In many people the unrest of the age instills a need to become restless as well, but in the wrong direction, on the wrong track; so our father, despite what was brewing at the time, laid claim to the title of Duke of Ombrosa and thought only of genealogies and successions and rivalries and alliances with potentates near and far.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In describing his father, Biagio suggests that Baron Arminio is dull because he's focused on something—becoming the Duke of Ombrosa—that will never happen. By casting Cosimo's family members as individuals who are stuck in a time long past, even at this point in the novel, Biagio makes the case that time will always inevitably keep moving forward and leaving people and ideas behind in the process. As this happens, there will always be fresh faces and ideas—Cosimo and Viola, at different points in the story—who will rise up and keep things moving forward. Although Cosimo's Enlightenment notions are ultimately threatened by the encroachment of Romanticism, he is still forward-thinking and innovative compared to the traditional society and nobility from which he comes. Though the novel focuses intently on Cosimo's individuality, this makes the case that in this one sense, Cosimo could've been a product of any time—and he would've been entrenched in it and a leading thinker, no matter what time it was.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ But he restrained himself, because he didn't like repeating the things that his father always said, now that he had run away from the table in an argument with him. He didn't like it and it didn't seem right to him, also because those claims about the dukedom had always seemed like obsessions to him...

During Cosimo's first meeting with Viola, the neighbor girl, Cosimo wants to impress her—but he also doesn't want to look silly and like he's obsessed with titles and glory, like Baron Arminio is. This challenge thus becomes a major turning point for Cosimo, as he must figure out who he wants to be when he's on his own and not simply learning to value what Baron Arminio and the rest of Ombrosa's nobility value. Biagio's aside that Cosimo thinks the dukedom sounds like an obsession suggests that Cosimo is a wildly individualistic person, at least when it comes to separating his identity from his family. Were his family to acquire the dukedom, it would eventually fall to Cosimo to be the next duke—something that, even as a child, Cosimo knows he's not interested in doing. Even this early on in the novel, then, it's clear that Cosimo is willing to risk angering his family and alienating himself from them if it means he is able to form his own identity and live authentically.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Viola d'Ondariva/Sinforosa, Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 22-23

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ From the window I strained my ears to that irregular breath and tried to imagine how it would sound, without the familiar womb of the house, to someone who was just a few yards away but completely entrusted to it, with only the night around him, the only friendly object to which he could cling the trunk of a tree with its rough bark traveled by tiny endless tunnels in which the larvae slept.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis

During Cosimo's first night in the trees, Biagio tries to imagine what it would feel and sound like to sleep in a tree. Importantly, this suggests that thanks to Cosimo's rebellion, his family members are already having to consider what else is out there, aside from the comfortable, sheltered life they've lived thus far. In this sense, even though Cosimo isn't yet a real member of the Enlightenment philosophers, he's already doing the work, through his example, of demonstrating for others that there are different—and potentially better—ways of moving through the world. That Biagio is the one engaging in this thought experiment situates him as someone especially receptive to Enlightenment ideals, but it's also worth keeping in mind that he thinks about these things from the comfort of his warm bed. In this sense, the novel shows that Biagio may be receptive to Cosimo's ideas, but he's not willing to go out of his way to embody them or apply them to his own life. In this sense, he's much more like Baron Arminio than Cosimo is.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ She was there waving one of her flags and looking through the telescope when suddenly her whole face brightened and she laughed. We understood that Cosimo had answered her. [...] Certainly from then on our mother changed; her earlier apprehension disappeared, and [...] she finally accepted Cosimo's strangeness before the rest of us, as if she was satisfied now by the greetings that from then on he sent her every so often, unpredictably—by that exchange of silent messages.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), The Generalessa, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52-53

Explanation and Analysis

Biagio explains how the Generalessa came to accept Cosimo's life in the trees before others. Using the flags to communicate with him is a symbolic representation of how practices and customs from different eras can work together to help people communicate across generations. The military flags are a product of the Generalessa's early military training, which she received from her father. It is, in this sense, a mode of communication that's outdated—but in this case, that doesn't actually alter its effectiveness. While Cosimo doesn't have flags to respond to his mother, he does manage to respond somehow. His responses, however he gives them, represent a newer way of thinking and communicating about things. In this sense, this form of communication also offers the hope that Cosimo will be able to maintain relationships with his family members despite living in the trees.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Cosimo's first days in the trees had no goals or plans but were dominated only by the desire to know and possess that kingdom of his. He would have liked to explore it immediately to its furthest boundaries, study all the possibilities it offered, discover it tree by tree and branch by branch.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 60

Explanation and Analysis

Biagio explains that Cosimo spent his first days and weeks in the trees exploring. The fact that Cosimo does this is important in that it dovetails closely to a developmental stage that the Enlightenment philosopher Rousseau describes, in which children seek to explore their worlds and learn about things via natural consequences. This moment, then, becomes the moment in which Cosimo enters this stage of development and takes it upon himself to figure out exactly how his world functions and how he can interact with it. Important, too, is the fact that Cosimo has the opportunity to do this mostly because of the fact that he climbed into the trees to begin with. This gets him closer to nature and the natural world, which has the related consequence of getting him out of the civilized world. In the trees, Cosimo can figure out who he is and what his world is like, unencumbered by needing to fit into polite civilized society. Later, when he's ready to rejoin society, Cosimo will know better how the world works and will therefore be a better contributing member of his society.

That need to enter an element difficult to possess which had driven my brother to make his the ways of the trees was now working in him again, unsatisfied, and communicated to him the desire for a more detailed penetration, a relationship that would bind him to every leaf and scale and feather and flutter. It was the love that man the hunter has for what is alive but doesn't know how to express except by aiming the gun; Cosimo couldn't yet recognize it and tried to let it out by intensifying his exploration.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 65

Explanation and Analysis

Cosimo decides to venture deep into the wild woods in an attempt to impress Viola, an urge that Biagio suggests Cosimo doesn't entirely understand. The fact that Cosimo isn't aware of what exactly is going on with his own emotions reminds the reader that at this point, Cosimo is still an undeveloped child. Because of this, he's still working hard to figure out how he fits into his world—and for that matter, what his world is even like. By exploring the deep woods, Cosimo will gain valuable information about his new home in the trees that will, in theory, help him figure out where he fits into the wider world and how to best serve other people and the surrounding environment.

Biagio's insistence that Cosimo does these things because they're difficult suggests that at his core, Cosimo is naturally inclined to try to better himself. This implies that Cosimo is an ideal student, as he's not interested in doing things that won't make the world better. Instead, he's dedicated to figuring out how things work, even if he doesn't understand how or why, and he'll use these tendencies to grow into a useful and caring member of society when he gets a little older.

Chapter 8 Quotes

"Rebellion is not measured in yards," he said. "Even when it seems just a few handbreadths, a journey may have no return."

Related Characters: Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 81

Explanation and Analysis

During Cosimo and Baron Arminio's first meeting after Cosimo climbs into the trees, they discuss Cosimo's rebellion and what might happen because of his choice. Despite the fact that Baron Arminio is generally a person stuck in a time long past, this statement makes it clear that he understands (at least on some level) that change over time happens when people rebel and advocate for change in their world, something that Cosimo does by taking to the trees. Those rebellions, no matter how small they may seem in the moment, then lead to all sorts of widespread change. In the specific case of Cosimo's life, living in the trees deprives him of ever actually acting as the Baron di Rondò (which he doesn't much care about), but it also puts him in a place where he's able to study the world from afar and write things that situate him as one of the great minds of the Enlightenment. Baron Arminio fears this choice, then, because he understands that it's going to lead to changes that he doesn't understand, living in the past as he does. However, this isn't something unexpected—or indeed, negative—even as Cosimo eventually gets left in the dust, just as his father was.

Chapter 10 Quotes

But I couldn't always escape to join him in he woods. Lessons with the abbé, studying, serving Mass, meals with our parents kept me back: the hundreds of duties of family life to which I submitted, because in essence the sentence that I heard constantly repeated—"One rebel in a family is enough"—wasn't unreasonable, and left its imprint on my entire life.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

As time goes on and Cosimo remains firm in his choice to not come down from the trees, Biagio gradually gets pulled

away from his brother. This begins to illustrate the major differences between the two boys. Where Cosimo yearns for rebellion, new ideas, and the ability to make a difference, Biagio internalizes the idea that Cosimo is enough of a rebel for the family, and he shouldn't do anything to make himself look like a rebel too. In this way, Biagio grows up to become much like Baron Arminio—later in the novel, he even expresses sentiments that are suspiciously close to something that Baron Arminio may have said, were he still alive. Cosimo, on the other hand, abandons all the traditional expectations and duties that Biagio lists here in favor of forging his own path, which allows Cosimo a new perspective on life and keeps him from ever returning entirely to his family.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Understanding the character of Enea Silvio Carrega helped Cosimo in this: he understood many things about being alone that were useful to him later in life. I would say that he always carried with him the troubled image of the *cavalier avvocato*, as a warning of what a man who separates his fate from that of others can become, and he was successful in that he never came to resemble him.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cavalier Avvocato Enea Silvio Carrega, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116-117

Explanation and Analysis

As Cosimo spends more time in the trees and gets to know his uncle, the cavalier avvocato, Cosimo starts to reevaluate his childhood distrust of his uncle—though he also takes the cavalier avvocato as an example of how not to be. The idea that the cavalier avvocato represents an extreme form of isolation and loneliness that Cosimo never fell prey to suggests that while there's something to be said for living alone, as Cosimo does in the trees, that loneliness must be undertaken in such a way that serves others. Unlike Cosimo, who goes on to lead fire brigades and generally dedicates his life to helping others, the cavalier avvocato is never able to use his skills to help others with more than random kind gestures. In this sense, though Cosimo does "separate his fate from that of others" by taking to the trees, he never takes it any further than where he chooses to live. The trees do impose some distance, but they don't make Cosimo unable to be an important, contributing resident of Ombrosa.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ Cosimo had always liked to watch people working, but so far his life in the trees, his movements and his hunting, had always answered to isolated and unmotivated whims, as if he were a little bird. Now instead the need to do something useful for his neighbor possessed him. And this, too, if you looked closely, was something he had learned from the company of the bandit: the pleasure of making himself useful, of performing a task indispensable to others.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Gian dei Brughi, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 141

Explanation and Analysis

Following Gian dei Brughi's death, which takes place around the time Cosimo turns 18 and comes of age, Cosimo begins to dedicate himself to helping others. This is, per the Enlightenment philosopher Rousseau's theories on human development, a natural part of growing up and coming of age. Up until now, Cosimo has lived a solitary life in which he only has to think about himself and what he'd like to do. While the novel suggests that it's fine for a young person to live like this (and in fact, deems it necessary for that young person's education in how the world works and where they fit into it), it's necessary for that young person to, at some point, come back around and essentially rejoin society. Thus, Cosimo's choice to live in the trees doesn't meaningfully separate him from the rest of Ombrosa. While it means he cannot do certain things for his neighbors, it also means that there are certain tasks he can do extremely well for them. Mastering those tasks helps Cosimo become an adult and meaningfully act on his desire to help others.

❝ Thus by his art he helped to make nature in Ombrosa, which he had always found so benign, increasingly favorable to him, friend at once of his neighbor, of nature, and of himself. And in old age especially he enjoyed the advantages of this wise way of working, when the shape of the trees increasingly made up for his loss of strength.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 142-43

Explanation and Analysis

Biagio explains that Cosimo learns how to prune trees and then makes himself indispensible to his neighbors who own woods and orchards. By offering his pruning services, everyone wins: the people who own the trees don't have to climb up and prune the trees themselves, while Cosimo is able to give back to the community and set himself up for success later in life by training the trees to grow in a way that makes it easier to move through them. This shows that it's not just the person on the receiving end who benefits when people give back to their communities. Instead, giving back is something that benefits everyone, especially Cosimo. This arrangement also demonstrates that although Cosimo has opted for an independent and largely solitary life in the trees, this does not mean he is wholly alienated from those around him. Thus, the novel suggests that maintaining a connection with one's community is an important part of coming of age and forming one's adult identity.

Chapter 14 Quotes

❝ He understood this: that associations make man stronger and bring out the individual's best talents, and offer the joy, rarely felt if we remain on our own, of seeing how many honest and good and capable people there are, for whom it's worthwhile to wish for good things (whereas if we live on our own, the contrary more often happens, of seeing people's other face, the one that causes us to keep our hand on the hilt guard of our sword).

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

During the time in which Cosimo develops a volunteer fire brigade, he learns another lesson about the benefits of remaining part of society. For Cosimo, getting everyone to rally around saving the forests from fire allows him to give everyone, including himself, a sense of purpose and meaning. This, the novel suggests, can only happen when there's something, like the threat of fire, that encourages people to band together and work toward something that's good for everyone. When people do this, it causes them to notice all the good things and people in the world, thereby making them even more likely to step up in times of need. This lesson is what makes Cosimo a valuable member of society throughout his life, as he rallies people again and again to important causes that benefit everyone. In these endeavors, Cosimo's choice to live in the trees doesn't make him any less able to rally people. Rather, it allows him to share a different perspective on what's going on and be an even more useful member of society.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Maybe it was a version dictated by the thought of his father, whose grief would be so great at the news of his half-brother's death and at the sight of those pitiful remains that Cosimo didn't have the heart to burden him with the revelation of the *cavaliere*'s treason. In fact, later, hearing of the depression into which the baron had fallen, he tried to construct for our natural uncle a fictitious glory, inventing a secret and shrewd struggle to defeat the pirates, to which he had supposedly been devoting himself for some time and which, discovered, had led him to his death.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò, Cavalier Avvocato Enea Silvio Carrega, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

Following the cavalier avvocato's death at the hands of Turkish pirates, Cosimo tells stories designed to make the cavalier look good after death. This shows that as Cosimo grows, he learns the importance of being kind to people in a variety of different ways—and in this case, he discovers how important it is to help people facing death do so with dignity, even if it only benefits that person's memory and the people who loved them. In this case, telling these stories that the cavalier avvocato was doing good work is an attempt to help Baron Arminio deal with his grief and his mixed feelings about his brother, whom he both helped and hurt throughout their lives. It also shows that Cosimo has developed a more nuanced understanding of the cavalier as he has grown older—although he once viewed his uncle as a peculiar outcast, Cosimo now clearly values his uncle for the

courageous and skilled individual he was. It seems, then, that Cosimo's own experience as somewhat of an outcast from society has allowed him to more deeply empathize with others.

Chapter 18 Quotes

And there, with naive youthful fervor, he explained the ideas of the philosophers and the wrongs of sovereigns and how states could be governed according to reason and justice.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), King Carlos III, Father Sulpicio, Frederico Alonso Sanchez, El Conde, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1887

Explanation and Analysis

In Olivabassa, Cosimo introduces the Spanish nobles there to Enlightenment ideas. This shows first how entrenched and up to date Cosimo is on Enlightenment ideas. He's had several years in which to read philosophers' work at this point, and now, he's able to practice teaching and spreading those ideas to others—others whom, he might suggest, are in dire need of such education.

Then, the specific ideas that Cosimo is talking about (in particular, that sovereigns are wrong) ties in with the general Enlightenment sentiment that government and society as they were at the time were fundamentally corrupt and didn't allow anyone with little power to live with dignity. This is one of the reasons why Cosimo chooses to go into the trees, as it allows him to physically separate himself from society and take the time to learn about it without being too entrenched in it. From this somewhat distant spot, he's able to spread the gospel and help people by introducing them to these revolutionary ideas.

Chapter 21 Quotes

He saw her: she was circling the pool, the little gazebo, the amphoras. She looked at the trees that had grown enormous, with hanging aerial roots, the magnolias that had become a forest. But she didn't see him, he who sought to call her with the cooing of the hoopoe, the trill of the pipit, with sounds that were lost in the dense warbling of the birds in the garden.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Viola d'Ondariva/Sinforosa, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

In the d'Ondariva garden, Cosimo watches Viola, who has just returned to the area after a year of marriage to Duke Tolemaico. Cosimo tries to catch her attention, but he's unable to do so in human speech. The fact that Cosimo cannot talk to Viola because he can only form bird calls is one way that the novel illustrates that while nature may be an important part of Romanticism, which is overwhelmingly symbolized by Viola, Cosimo too embodies elements of Romanticism despite being an Enlightenment thinker. This makes it clear that Cosimo is an individual caught between eras—and to a degree, because of this, he's unable to fully inhabit one or the other. Here, he's too entrenched in the natural world to be able to engage reasonably (that is, in the Enlightenment style of rationalism) with Viola, while at other times, he's too intent on reason to be able to engage with her emotionally (in the Romantic style).

Chapter 22 Quotes

"Why do you make me suffer?"

"Because I love you."

Now it was he who got angry. "No, you don't love me! One who loves wants happiness, not suffering."

"One who loves wants only love, even at the cost of suffering."

"So you make me suffer on purpose."

"Yes, to see if you love me."

The baron's philosophy refused to go further. "Suffering is a negative state of the soul."

Related Characters: Viola d'Ondariva/Sinforosa, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

As Cosimo and Viola reunite in adulthood and embark on a romantic relationship, Viola insists that Cosimo must suffer

for love, something that deeply offends Cosimo. Viola's insistence that suffering is a part of love is reflective of the fact that on the whole, she represents the Romantic era and Romanticism. Romanticism prized intense emotion over anything else, hence why she seeks to make Cosimo suffer—that is, feel intense, heightened emotions—in order to supposedly love her more and better. For Cosimo, however, who leans more toward the Enlightenment, this goes against everything he knows and loves. For him, everything is better when he thinks about it reasonably and rationally, as reason and rationality are the champion ideals of the Enlightenment era. This shows that, in the grander scheme of things, these two modes of thought cannot effective coexist—thus, Cosimo and Viola's relationship is doomed to fail. They each represent something wildly different that, while related, cannot be reconciled, at least in their lifetimes.

Chapter 23 Quotes

"You reason too much. Why in the world should love be reasoned?"

"To love you more. Everything increases its power if you do it by reasoning."

"You live in the trees and you have the mentality of a lawyer with gout."

"The boldest enterprises should be experienced with the simplest heart."

He continued to spout opinions until she ran away; then he, following her, despairing, tearing his hair.

Related Characters: Viola d'Ondariva/Sinforosa, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 240

Explanation and Analysis

Over the course of their romance, Cosimo and Viola argue often over whether Cosimo is too reasonable. As far as Viola is concerned, he is. For her, love is about inciting actions that force her lovers to extend themselves emotionally and prove their love to her—while Cosimo, as he suggests here, wants to conduct his relationship with Viola reasonably and rationally. However, note that even though Cosimo is the only one who, in this exchange, says much of substance, he's also the one who's reduced to wild acts of emotion (tearing his hair) when they're done. This alludes to the inevitability of the Romantic era's arrival, which prized heightened, intense emotional experiences over the comparatively unemotional reason of the Enlightenment era. In other words, while Cosimo may cling to the hope that he can reason his way through this, he'll eventually have to accept the inevitability that Romanticism will arrive and take over.

Chapter 24 Quotes

This fact that the heir of the baronial title of Rondò had begun to live on public charity seemed to me unbecoming, and above all I thought of our dear departed father, if he had known.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò, Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

When Cosimo grows briefly mad and begins accepting charity in the time immediately following his romance with Viola, Biagio is scandalized. This again shows how wildly different the two brothers are. While Cosimo strikes out on his own and forms his own relationships with the peasants, Biagio meanwhile takes the path of becoming a nondescript noble who doesn't think it's appropriate for a baron to have relationships with the peasantry like this. In this sense, Biagio's insistence that Cosimo shouldn't accept charity from the peasants shows that he doesn't view the peasants as equals, as Cosimo likely does to a degree, given his interest in Enlightenment ideals that sought to give the common man more sway in government. Biagio's views represent the past, as shown by his mention of Baron Arminio, who is emblematic of traditional and duty in many ways. Cosimo, meanwhile, represents the future and more progressive ideals about how to live and conduct a society.

Chapter 25 Quotes

How the passion for a life of association that Cosimo always displayed was reconciled with his perpetual flight from civil society I've never understood, and it remains one of the larger peculiarities of his character. One might say that the more determined he was to stay hidden up in his branches, the greater the need he felt to create new relations with the human race.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267-68

Explanation and Analysis

In his discussion of Cosimo's dealings with the local Masonic lodge, Biagio considers Cosimo's seemingly disparate interests of remaining in the trees while also wanting to be a part of society. Though it doesn't make much sense to Biagio, the space Cosimo occupies is, per the logic of the novel, actually a far superior position to hold. Because he's not entrenched in the corrupting ills of society, Cosimo has the ability to look at the world around him and choose what works. Through this, he's able to make the lives of everyone on the ground better as he introduces them to Enlightenment ideas and immerses himself in books that teach him those theories. In this sense, the trees never actually deprive Cosimo of a relationship with everyone on the ground. On the contrary, the trees give him the platform from which to associate with philosophers and help those in his local community.

It was an idea of universal society that he had in mind. And every time he worked to bring people together, whether for specific goals like the fire watch or the defense against the wolves, or whether in trade confraternities [...] there was always an atmosphere of conspiracy, of a sect, of heresy, and in that atmosphere the discourse passed easily from the particular to the general, and just as easily from the simple rules of a manual trade to the plan of establishing a world republic of equals, of the free and the just.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2668

Explanation and Analysis

Biagio continues to consider Cosimo's relationship with the general populace, and the fact that as he participated in trade guilds and the Freemasons, the ideas that guided those groups represented much smaller iterations of ideal government as proposed by Enlightenment philosophers. This passage, then, shows how deeply entrenched Cosimo was in Enlightenment ideals, and how important he was to spreading them. While Biagio only mentions that Cosimo was, for a time, in charge of the Freemasons, it's likely that he still tried to spread some of the ideals espoused by Freemasonry and Enlightenment philosophers to those in other groups.

Further, from his perch in the trees, Cosimo was also in a great place to take what he saw that was working in society and promote it. Unlike those on the ground, he's able to see where things are going well and where they're going poorly, and he's then able to come to a middle ground and propose the ideas he's certain are going to work best for the given situation.

Chapter 27 Quotes

Instead my intervention was providential: the itching of the fleas rekindled acutely in the hussars the human and civilized need to scratch, to rub, to get rid of the fleas; they threw away the mossy garments, the knapsacks and bundles covered with mushrooms and spiderwebs; they washed, they shaved, they combed their hair; in short they regained consciousness of their individual humanity, and the sense of civilization, of deliverance from brute nature, won them back.

Related Characters: Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Lieutenant Agrippa Papillon

Related Themes:

Page Number: 287

Explanation and Analysis

In Cosimo's first-person account of his dealings during the French Revolution, he recalls reinvigorating Lieutenant Papillon's soldiers with fleas, which reminded the men that they were human. In general, Lieutenant Papillon's soldiers—which, having been in the woods for a while and led by a romantic poet, allowed themselves to become part of the landscape—represent taking a love of nature too far. In their case, they become so entrenched in nature that they forget they're human and are no longer able to fight for what matters (in this case, the ideals of the French

Revolution). Reminding them of their humanity is a suggestion that while a relationship with nature can, per the novel's logic, make someone a better person, it's far more meaningful to chart a path more like Cosimo does. Cosimo lives in nature, but he seldom forgets that he has a duty to help the people around him be better people.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ And to say that Cosimo in that time had written and distributed a *Plan of a Constitution for a Republican City with Declaration of the Rights of Men, Women, Children, Domestic and Wild Animals, Including Birds, Fish, and Insects, and of Plants Both Forest Trees and Vegetables and Grasses*. It was a beautiful work, which could serve as a guide for all who govern; instead no one took it under consideration, and it remained a dead letter.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 289

Explanation and Analysis

Immediately following the French Revolution, Cosimo sits briefly on the temporary local council and writes this work. Writing this work situates Cosimo as one of the many philosophers and thinkers who produced such work during this time, but the timing of this one in particular suggests that Cosimo and everything he stands for—namely, his Enlightenment era ideals of reason and rationalism—is already beginning to fall by the wayside. While the French Revolution happened in part because Enlightenment ideals spurred people to rebellion, in its aftermath, those same ideas don't hold as much import, hence why nobody cares about this particular plan. This situates Cosimo as an individual of his time, and a person whose ideas cannot really cross over into the next time period—in this case, the Romantic era. Following this point, up until Cosimo's death, he becomes increasingly odd to those around him and his ideas increasingly out of touch.

Chapter 30 Quotes

❝ Now I don't know what this nineteenth century, which began so badly and continues worse, has in store. The shadow of the Restoration weighs on Europe: all the innovators—whether Jacobins or Bonapartists—defeated; absolutism and Jesuits hold the field again; the ideals of youth, the Enlightenment, the hopes of our eighteenth century all ashes.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

In Biagio's present—presumably sometime in the 1820s—he reflects on how things have changed since the French Revolution. Cosimo is also dead at the time Biagio ostensibly writes the novel, which suggests that Cosimo himself was a symbol for the Enlightenment, at least in Biagio's eyes. This shows that while Cosimo was a major force in his own time, he was truly a product of his time and he couldn't stop things from changing once the Enlightenment began to wane in the last few decades of the 18th century. More broadly, this suggests that the ideals of the Enlightenment era are wholly incompatible with those of Romanticism. However, Biagio's insistence that things are bad and he's not sure where the future is going does leave room for someone like Cosimo to rise up, take his place, and lead Biagio and others into another new, idealistic future—though that person, too, will one day become obsolete.

❝ Then, the vegetation has changed: no more the holm oaks, the elms, the oaks; now Africa, Australia, the Americas, the Indies extend branches and roots here. The ancient trees have retreated upward: on top of the hills the olives, and in the mountain woods pines and chestnuts; down on the coast it's an Australian red with eucalyptus, elephantine with ficus, enormous and solitary garden plants, and all the rest is palms, with their disheveled tufts, inhospitable desert trees.

Related Characters: Biagio Piovasco di Rondò (speaker), Cosimo Piovasco di Rondò

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 306

Explanation and Analysis

In explaining how everything has changed since Cosimo's death, Biagio explains that the native trees Cosimo lived in have been cut down and in their place, exotic trees now grow. This symbolizes the new Romantic era as a whole, as well as heralds what's to come—that is, an era of increased travel and colonialism around the globe, which in turn brings with it the spread of plants and animals to non-native places. In other words, Biagio mostly rejects the idea of change and modernity as a whole when he speaks so disparagingly about the landscape of non-native trees.

This also makes it clear that the landscape is no longer one that can support someone like Cosimo, who survived in the trees in part because the trees themselves were such to allow him to move between them and find places where he could sleep and live safely. The era Biagio finds himself in, in other words, cannot support another Cosimo. Another great thinker like Cosimo would have to make their mark in a different way.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

On June 15, 1767, Biagio's brother, Cosimo, eats with the family for the last time. The family—Baron Arminio Piovasco di Rondò; his brother, the cavalier avvocato; his wife, the Generalessa; their daughter Battista; the tutor Abbé Fauchelafleur; along with eight-year-old Biagio and twelve-year-old Cosimo—gather in the villa's dining room at midday, even though the custom at this point is to eat late in the afternoon. Cosimo refuses to eat his snails. Up until Cosimo turned twelve, Cosimo and Biagio ate privately with the Abbé and took advantage of his absentminded nature to throw things at each other and eat with their hands. At their parents' table, they have to use their manners and put up with Battista, which leads Cosimo to rebel. Biagio doesn't realize until much later that this isn't just a game of children versus adults.

In Biagio's introduction to the story, he makes it very clear that he and Cosimo—but especially Cosimo—are at a crossroads in their development as they face down their impending adulthood. Biagio implies that, to a degree, it is normal for children to resent this transition, making it clear that this is something unsettling and difficult for everyone. However, when he insists that he wasn't aware of how different Cosimo's rebellion was—it wasn't a classic case of kids versus grownups—it also implies that Biagio himself is less independent and rebellious than his brother.

Baron Arminio is a dull man, as his goals are out of step with the times. He fixates on becoming the Duke of Ombrosa and focuses on genealogy, successions, and rivalries. He maintains his home as though he expects an invitation to court any day, though Biagio isn't sure if he expects an invite to the court of Austria or France. The Abbé seems to not care about anything, while the cavalier avvocato steals entire turkey thighs during dinner. The Generalessa has military manners all the time, so dinner is little different. Battista frightens everyone. Thus, the table is where the family fights, as it's where everyone's differences arise—and it's the only place where Cosimo and Biagio deal with the adults.

Again, Biagio paints family—or at least, his family—as naturally difficult to be around, which makes adulthood and growing up look even scarier for his young sons. He also makes it clear that he and Cosimo are under a lot of pressure from Baron Arminio to look and act a specific way, which also contributes to Cosimo's eventual rebellion. Cosimo is far too rebellious to willingly play along with his father's desire for a dukedom he'll never get.

The Generalessa spends her days making lace and embroidering. She's a warrior at heart after spending her childhood accompanying her father, General Konrad von Kurtewitz, along his campaign during the Austrian Wars of Succession. She embroiders and makes lace maps of the campaigns or of ballistic trajectories. Baron Arminio was one of the few Italians who embraced General von Kurtewitz during the war; he married the Generalessa in the hope of becoming a duke. Biagio says that his parents essentially live in the era of the Wars of Succession, even years after—the Generalessa dreams of her sons joining armies, while their father dreams of them marrying grand duchesses.

Here, Biagio suggests that it's somewhat normal for members of the older generation to live most of their lives in the era of their youth, given that both his parents are guilty of this. This idea reappears later in the novel as both Cosimo and Biagio begin to chafe as the Age of Enlightenment—the era of their childhood and formative years—gives way to the Romantic era in the years after the French Revolution. This is something that affects everyone, not just Biagio's parents.

As children, Cosimo and Biagio climb **trees**, explore the countryside, and slide down the banisters. Cosimo begins to clash with their parents when, after they forbid him from sliding down the banisters, he continues to do so and destroys a statue of a great-great-grandfather—and knocks over the Abbé—in the process. Later, Cosimo tells Baron Arminio that he doesn't care about the ancestors. Battista is a rebel in her own way. After the mysterious affair of young Marquis della Mella, in which he supposedly snuck in, raped her, and then refused to marry her (though Baron Arminio found the young man screaming, with his pants in shreds), Battista became a nun and focuses her energies on cooking. She's a creative cook, but enjoys cooking things like porcupine, pâté of mouse liver, and snails, mostly for the shock value.

At this point, Cosimo's rebellious acts look fairly normal for a child of his age. When Cosimo tells Baron Arminio that he doesn't care about their ancestors, however, it's an indicator that Cosimo is actually seriously disinterested in conforming to expectations of what he's supposed to do and care about. In this sense, he represents a radical new way of thinking for the family.

Battista's insistence on cooking snails drives Cosimo and Biagio to rebellion. After Battista presents a dish in which she makes decapitated snail heads and cream puffs look like swans, Cosimo hatches a plan to let loose the next batch of snails. Everything goes according to plan until Battista goes on her nightly mouse hunt, checks the cellar, and finds the snails escaping. She shoots off the gun, forces the servants to help her recapture the snails, and Baron Arminio locks Cosimo and Biagio in the cellar for three days. The fateful lunch on June 15 is the first meal they have with the family after this.

It's important that Biagio joins Cosimo in this anti-snail rebellion, as it allows the reader to see that both boys are starting at essentially the same point. Neither of them is entirely excited about what it means to be an adult member of the family, and they're both still very upset about no longer being able to eat at the kids' table with the Abbé. Later, this makes it easier to identify the ways in which Biagio is very different—and less individualistic—than his brother.

Battista prepares snail soup and snails for the main course. Biagio, tired of fighting, gives in quickly. This disappoints Cosimo, so Cosimo grabs his hat and sword and climbs up into the holm **oak** in the garden. Biagio isn't surprised, as they climb the oak often and it's conveniently in view of the dining room windows. The Generalessa fears for Cosimo's safety, Baron Arminio threatens to punish Cosimo, and Cosimo declares that he's never coming down.

When Biagio doesn't put up much of a fuss about a second round of snails, it shows that unlike Cosimo, he's a pliant individual who's more interested in pleasing others and keeping the peace than he is in asserting his independence and individuality.

CHAPTER 2

Cosimo already enjoys what he can see from the **oak**. The Generalessa and Baron Arminio come into the garden and make a show of ignoring Cosimo, while Biagio tries to get Cosimo's attention. Biagio knows that Cosimo is still angry at him. Cosimo looks to the road and when the Abbé passes, he tosses something small at him. The cavalier avvocato disappears, but Cosimo can't figure out where he went. Cosimo climbs between several trees in the garden, getting close to the wall separating the di Rondòs' garden from the garden of the D'Ondarivas. The D'Ondarivas are rivals, as they hold feudal rights that Baron Arminio wants and also keep an **exotic garden** with plants from all over the world.

Even after less than an hour in the trees, Cosimo has an entirely different view on the world and what it's like than the rest of his family does. This begins to show that from the trees, Cosimo will have different opportunities that will allow him to connect differently to Enlightenment ideas circulating at the time. Biagio, on the other hand, will experience and interpret those teachings in a more conventional way, as he doesn't choose to assert his individuality.

Cosimo climbs over the wall into a magnolia **tree** in the **D'Ondarivas' garden**. Biagio explains that from this point on, he's recounting the story as Cosimo shared it with him. From the magnolia, Cosimo breathes in the scent of the garden and hears someone singing. He catches sight of a young girl (Viola), dressed in clothing that seems too adult, swinging, singing, and eating an apple. Cosimo climbs until he's right above Viola, startles her, and then makes a show of spearing her dropped apple with his sword and offering it to her. Viola resumes her haughty appearance, and when she declares that Cosimo is a fruit thief, Cosimo decides he likes the idea. Viola laughs at him—the fruit thieves are her friends, and they don't wear wigs or gaiters.

Viola is representative of the Romantic era, which prized experiencing intense emotions like awe and anxiety. The Romantic era hasn't really started yet by 1767, but Viola's adult clothing foreshadows that it'll soon arrive, just as adulthood will for her. The D'Ondarivas' garden also foreshadows what's to come, as here, Cosimo finds that he has to defend his way of thinking, just as he'll eventually have to do once the Romantic era arrives and Cosimo's ideas become normal and expected, not revolutionary.

Cosimo blushes—he loves his gaiters, and he feels inadequate to learn that Viola is friends with the despised fruit thieves and not with him. He cries that he said he was a thief to not scare her; he's actually a ferocious bandit chief. Viola insists that bandits have guns and that the bandit chief is Gian dei Brughi, who brings her gifts at Christmas. Cosimo spits back that Baron Arminio is right that the D'Ondarivas are lawless, which makes Viola threaten to have him beaten and thrown off her property. She goes back and forth between a towering rage and cool viciousness, confusing Cosimo. He stops himself from announcing he's the duke of Ombrosa, as it sounds too much like something silly his father would say.

Again, when Viola confuses Cosimo by shifting quickly from one high emotion to another, it shows how ill-equipped Cosimo is (and will continue to be) to be a part of the Romantic era, despite his choice to take to the trees and align himself with nature rather than with society. When Cosimo decides to not sound like Baron Arminio, however, it does show that Cosimo is still trying to differentiate himself from his family and assert his independence.

Viola and Cosimo argue over whether Cosimo is on her land. Cosimo says that the **trees** are his territory, so he's not technically on her land. They discuss the rules of their game—Viola is in Cosimo's territory if she's in the air, but not if she's just sitting on her swing—and Viola insults Cosimo's name and his desire to rule from the trees. Cosimo stands on another swing, but refuses to get down and push Viola. Viola shoves him, turns the seat upside down, and tries to knock him off. Cosimo manages to climb back up to the branch. Viola's aunt calls for her. Viola tells her aunt that she's playing with a boy who can't touch the ground, but Cosimo can't tell if she's trying to humiliate him by giving away their game.

Viola's swing functions as a bridge between the natural world and the civilized world, and between Cosimo and Viola—but, significantly, Cosimo isn't in control of those bridges. This foreshadows Baron Arminio's later comment that it's impossible to know what the consequences of this kind of rebellion will be. While it's impossible to say at this point what consequences Cosimo might face, it's clear from his interaction with the swings that he won't be entirely in control of what happens.

Viola's aunt recognizes Cosimo and calls Viola to her. Being recognized and Viola's obedience makes Cosimo feel ashamed. Viola's aunt invites Cosimo in for a cup of chocolate. Cosimo briefly realizes that he could get revenge on Baron Arminio by accepting and becoming friends with Viola, but he also feels prideful and shy. He climbs back up into the **tree**.

Choosing to decline and not make his father mad suggests that Cosimo is getting to the point where he's staying in the trees as a personal project, not just to annoy someone else. In this sense, he's already becoming far more individualistic.

CHAPTER 3

For Biagio, the afternoon seems to drag on forever. He meets Cosimo in the **mulberry** with cake and dried figs, though Cosimo still acts betrayed. Biagio explains that he had to escape the Abbé to meet Cosimo, and Cosimo announces that he never got down. This confuses Biagio, but Cosimo talks about the **D'Ondarivas' garden** and refuses to take Biagio there. To test Biagio's loyalty, Cosimo asks Biagio to procure things like rope, nails, and planks. He insists that he doesn't care if his parents forgive him—he's not hiding, but he's not coming down.

Taunting Biagio that he won't take him to the D'Ondarivas' garden also foreshadows the boys' relationship in the future: though Biagio reads and is no slouch academically, Cosimo is the one who truly looks to the future by essentially becoming a lesser Enlightenment philosopher. His requests for supplies show that he's planning to remain separated from society, which will allow him to maintain this different perspective on the world.

Baron Arminio calls for the boys and Biagio goes. He tells Cosimo that he's going to report back on what their father says, but he's also worried about getting caught with Cosimo. Biagio returns with the news that all is well: the table is set for tea with slices of chocolate cake on their plates. Cosimo ignores this and asks Biagio to fetch him a blanket. At dinner, the family peers outside. They can just see Cosimo's legs dangling from the **oak**. The cavalier avvocato makes odd comments in Turkish, and Battista seems perturbed that she's not the one keeping the family on edge. The Generalessa talks about soldiers keeping watch, which calms her.

Sticking so close to home so that Baron Arminio and the Generalessa can see him is a way for Cosimo to show his parents that he's stubborn and has some degree of power over them, despite being a child. This somewhat immature view shows that Cosimo is still very much a naïve and stubborn child; he doesn't yet have the maturity or the experience to rationally defend his choice to take to the trees.

After dinner, the family goes to bed. The Generalessa and Baron Arminio decide to ignore Cosimo in the hope that the cold and discomfort will bring him down. Biagio looks outside and strains his ears to hear the sea. He wonders what it would sound like without walls to muffle it. Biagio doesn't turn out the candle in his room and feels as though he's experiencing the joy of being in a warm bed for the first time. He also senses Cosimo's discomfort outside and falls asleep caught between these two thoughts.

Biagio's experience of being aware of what it feels like to be in bed for the first time suggests that Cosimo's choice will have consequences for everyone, and will bring everyone opportunities to gain a new perspective on life. In this sense, Cosimo is already spreading his ideas and his burgeoning personal philosophy.

CHAPTER 4

Biagio admits that he's not sure it's true that in the olden days, a monkey could travel from Rome to Spain in the **trees**. During his lifetime, the trees in Europe were only dense around Ombrosa. Today, the landscape is unrecognizable: the French cut the trees down on Napoleon's orders. Before, Biagio says that people always had trees above them, even in the low lemon groves. Lemons and olives gradually gave way to oaks and then a pine forest on the mountain. Cosimo soon learns all the routes through the trees.

Through these asides about what the world is like in Biagio's present (sometime in the mid-1800s), Biagio forces the reader to constantly remember that what Cosimo does by taking to the trees is something that he could only do at this very specific point in time, when the trees were of a certain type and configuration to allow him to live there.

Cosimo wakes up in the **tree** that first morning and looks around. He senses a wave running through the countryside and occasionally hears cracks and cries coming from cherry groves all over the valley. At first he thinks the cherries are talking and heads for the nearest grove. Cosimo looks up into the eyes of a group of boys—the fruit thieves. They call Cosimo a dandy and spit cherry pits at him. Two attempt to drop a sack over Cosimo, but Cosimo slashes the sack with his sword. The fruit thieves curse, alerting farmers below to their presence. Farmers poke pitchforks up into the trees, intent on saving their crop. Cosimo decides that he doesn't need to be afraid and begins moving through the trees until he passes over a hedge. Most of the boys follow him and race away once on the other side of the hedge.

The fruit thieves as a group can be read as an encapsulation of the ways in which society has, at this point, failed to help people—they're poor boys who, even when they go out into nature to try to help themselves, aren't ever truly welcome or successful. When they follow Cosimo through the trees, it does suggest that individuals like this are willing and capable of following someone who has better ideas about how to move through the world—but those new ideas aren't going to occur to those lower-class individuals themselves.

Later, the fruit thieves are shocked to discover Cosimo sitting in the top of the tallest cherry **tree**, eating cherries. They call him an "ice cream eater," but are intimidated by him. One points out that there are ice cream eaters who are smart, like the Sinforosa. The boys try to make a deal with Cosimo, but Cosimo asks who the Sinforosa is. The fruit thieves laugh, alerting the farmers that are now perched in the trees. The boys run but Cosimo stays put and parries the farmers' pitchforks. A farmer recognizes Cosimo and offers to fetch him a ladder, but Cosimo moves off and away through the treetops. The farmers are shocked, especially when they hear Cosimo singing for the Sinforosa.

Despite the implication that these impoverished individuals won't come up with any Enlightenment-style ideas of their own, insulting the rich (ice cream eater) does point to the current of unrest at this time that influenced many Enlightenment ideas. Many countries were still monarchies, and most Enlightenment philosophers suggested that monarchs were incapable of properly and justly ruling over everyone else.

CHAPTER 5

Gradually, Cosimo learns that the Sinforosa is a noble girl who rides a white pony and, for a while, protected the fruit thieves by blowing a hunting horn whenever she saw farmers. She betrayed them, but the details are hard to parse. It's possible she just lured them to her villa and then let the servants beat the boys, but it's also possible that she courted two of the boys, Bel-Loré and Ugasso, at the same time and the beating had to do with this. Cosimo isn't surprised to learn that Viola is the Sinforosa, but this revelation increases Cosimo's mania. He considers leading the fruit thieves to ransack the trees in the **D'Ondarivas' garden**, but also considers fighting them off to awe her. Feeling melancholy, Cosimo slumps in a tree.

The way that Biagio describes Viola and her games with the fruit thieves suggests that, unlike Cosimo, she's not an especially kind or virtuous person. Instead, she likes to be in charge and make other people angry so that she can feel powerful. When Cosimo considers using and abusing the fruit thieves to impress Viola, however, it reads differently, despite also being a mean move. For Cosimo, this is a childish desire that he'll grow out of—while Viola never grows out of her tendencies to abuse her suitors.

Suddenly, Cosimo leaps up and moves through the **trees**. He passes through the di Rondò garden several times, which causes Baron Arminio to try to convince the Abbé Fauchelafleur that Cosimo is possessed and needs to be exorcised. The Generalessa peers through a field telescope. She spends hours looking for Cosimo and plotting his paths on a map. She sometimes picks up small colored flags and signals to Cosimo, which makes Biagio feel betrayed—the Generalessa never played games with them before now. Occasionally, Cosimo answers her. His answers dissolve the Generalessa's fears and she alone seems to accept that Cosimo isn't going to change. Baron Arminio remains fixated on discussing when Cosimo will return.

Baron Arminio's attempt to have Cosimo exorcised shows again that as far as he's concerned, Cosimo is just rebelling and being a silly, selfish child by choosing to go into the trees. As a woman who experienced a more unconventional upbringing, however, the Generalessa may have an easier time understanding that Cosimo is asserting his independence and will simply become a different person than what she and her husband hoped for.

From behind the Generalessa, Battista offers a dish in Cosimo's direction, but Baron Arminio slaps her and sends her inside. Biagio yearns to follow Cosimo now that he's playing with the fruit thieves. He spends a lot of time watching the valley for signs of the fruit thieves. Biagio is watching on the day they all hear the hunting horn. The fruit thieves scatter and run to Viola, abandoning Cosimo. Cosimo climbs after them and finds them all on the top of a hill. Viola bites her whip, while the boys all bite their fingers or plums. Cosimo emerges from a fig **tree** and blurts that he hasn't left the trees. Biagio notes that saying something like this always makes it seem silly, and Viola kindly tells Cosimo he's clever. The fruit thieves howl with laughter.

Again, Biagio's interest in the fruit thieves shows that he will benefit greatly from Cosimo's new perspective, as it introduces him to what else is possible in the world—and what kind of possibilities his parents are interested in keeping from him. Cosimo, meanwhile, gains valuable experience in how to talk about his choice to stay in the trees—namely, to not talk about it and instead, let others do the talking for him.

Cosimo's branch breaks, but he doesn't hit the ground—his coattails catch on a branch. He stares at Viola and the fruit thieves upside-down and vows to never talk about being in the **trees** again. He climbs upright as Viola blows the horn and takes off. The boys follow her in a game of chase, but they soon realize that the true chase game is between Viola and Cosimo. When they realize this, the fruit thieves abandon the game. This makes it no longer fun for Viola, and Cosimo suspects she started it just to make them jealous and him angry. The fruit thieves pelt Viola and Cosimo with pebbles before leaving for the poorest part of Ombrosa. Viola turns her pony to the beach and Cosimo watches her gallop.

Viola continues to demonstrate that her goal in life is to make others jealous and unhappy so that she can feel powerful and in control. Though she's mostly successful here, she does ultimately lose the fruit thieves' attention, which doesn't bode well for this habit in the future when Viola might genuinely want someone's attention.

CHAPTER 6

Cosimo spends his first days in the **trees** discovering everything he can about the trees, but he also shows up often in the di Rondò garden. However, he's only passing through to the **D'Ondarivas' garden**, even at times when Viola isn't awake. Viola's parents don't worry much about her—none of her aunts can ride, and it's inconceivable that she'd be friends with the fruit thieves—but they do worry about Cosimo. Baron Arminio partially blames the D'Ondarivas for Cosimo's rebellion, so he decides to send a group to capture Cosimo while Cosimo is in the D'Ondarivas' garden. To make it even more aggressive, he sends servants and the cavalier avvocato rather than going himself.

Biagio's insistence that Cosimo spends time exploring is an allusion to Rousseau's theories of child development and the best way to educate a young person: namely, that it's important to have a period to explore one's world and learn what the world is like by testing and experimenting the limits of what one can do. For Baron Arminio, it's natural to blame one of his rivals for Cosimo's rebellion, as the D'Ondarivas have everything Baron Arminio wants: a child who falls into line and more local power.

The D'Ondarivas' servants are confused and think that the cavalier avvocato is looking for a parrot, but they let him in. Cosimo and Viola ignore the group and continue their games, and Cosimo moves from **tree** to tree whenever the cavalier avvocato gets close. Every time the ladder moves, it destroys a flowerbed. After servants usher Viola inside, the Marquis d'Ondariva appears and requests that they hunt for Cosimo elsewhere. He wears a dressing gown and skullcap, which makes him look oddly similar to the cavalier avvocato.

The servants' methods of trying to capture Cosimo read as a reflection of how out of step with the times Baron Arminio is: just as Baron Arminio will never get the dukedom, especially given how he tries to go about it, the servants will never be able to capture Cosimo using this method—as the embodiment of the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, he's untouchable by the past.

As if there's nothing amiss, the cavalier avvocato approaches the Marquis d'Ondariva and begins to share an idea for a water feature in the garden pool. The Marquis surprisingly seems interested and the two men stroll through the garden, chatting. Cosimo takes the opportunity to throw a berry at Viola's window. She opens it and hisses that it's his fault she's locked up. Cosimo feels suddenly desperate and races through the trees all the way to the forest. Biagio suspects that Cosimo wants to master something difficult, but that Cosimo doesn't yet know how to healthily deal with this desire. The wood is thick and Cosimo begins to feel afraid.

The suggestion that Cosimo doesn't know how to deal with his desires in a healthy way reminds the reader that Cosimo is still a child without a ton of experience in managing his own emotions—and to make matters worse, he's also thrust himself into a sort of adulthood far earlier than he might have otherwise by choosing to assert his independence and make a life for himself in the trees.

Suddenly, Cosimo sees yellow eyes ahead. He pushes a branch aside to reveal a wild cat, sighs with relief, and then begins to feel afraid again: the cat is a normal wild cat, but it seems somehow more terrible and dangerous than that. He that realizes this cat is the fiercest in the forest. The cat begins to leap around to frighten Cosimo and Cosimo evades it. When Cosimo is faced with escaping to the ground, his choice to stand his ground surprises the cat. Though the cat scratches Cosimo's face, Cosimo manages to impale the cat. He knows in this moment that he's committed to his life in the **trees**: he can't escape by failing.

The wild cat represents both the unknown and the dangers inherent to the natural world; by killing it, Cosimo essentially asserts his dominance over nature and makes it clear to himself that he has to keep going in this endeavor. This is exactly the kind of experience (albeit a more dramatic one) that Rousseau suggested was good and necessary, especially since it helps Cosimo figure out who he is and how he needs to interact with the world.

Cosimo returns to the di Rondò garden, carrying the cat by its tail. Biagio alerts the Generalessa to Cosimo's wounds, and she prepares a package of medical supplies to take to Cosimo when he comes back from the **D'Ondariva garden**. When Cosimo gets over the wall, however, he sees a carriage and Viola dressed for traveling. Cosimo holds the cat up and asks where Viola is going. She looks contemptuous, says she's going to school, and doesn't look at Cosimo or the cat. Desperate, Cosimo shouts that he vanquished a cat. Viola tells him "bravo" as the carriage pulls out. D'Ondariva servants chase Cosimo out of the garden, so Cosimo hurls the cat at them. He accepts Biagio's medical supplies and then asks for fishing line and a hook. He uses it to fetch the dead cat, which he skins and makes into a fur hat.

As a representation of the Romantic era, Viola's contempt for the dead wild cat and Cosimo's bravery suggests that they're each going off of different ways of showing bravery and affection. Further, learning to do things for himself—like make his own hat out of fur—suggests that going forward, Cosimo is going to align himself with the natural world available to him from the trees, not the civilized, built world Viola will inhabit (as implied by the fact that she's going to school, where she'll learn to be a part of society).

CHAPTER 7

Battista makes the final attempt to capture Cosimo by smearing his favorite **tree** in sticky birdlime one night. In the morning she finds stuck birds, but not Cosimo. Everyone, including Baron Arminio, begins to believe that Cosimo is in the trees for good. Baron Arminio stops going out in public, as he fears for his dignity and his prospects of becoming a duke now that his heir lives in the trees. Biagio notes that this was a silly worry, as Ombrosa's residents laugh at Baron Arminio's requests to be made the duke. Most nobles in Ombrosa don't care about the duchy—life is cheap and pleasant with no monarch, and most don't care that the D'Ondarivas own most of the land. This doesn't stop Baron Arminio from presenting himself to the people every time there's a tax riot. Every time, the people throw rotten lemons at him.

The Baron Arminio continues to demonstrate that he's not with the times and never will be. While Cosimo's choice to live in the trees represents a step into both the future and the present, Baron Arminio's attempts to secure the duchy for himself read as embarrassingly backwards and suggest he's not entirely aware of how to exist in his present—something that, it could be argued, is far more embarrassing than Cosimo's choice to live in the trees. Battista's attempt to capture Cosimo by trapping him like this, meanwhile, also reads as shockingly backwards and anti-nature.

Baron Arminio is also paranoid about the Jesuits, whom he believes are out to get him after a quarrel over some land. This is why he chose the Abbé Fauchelafleur as the family's spiritual leader—he's a Jansenist. The only person Baron Arminio trusts is the cavalier avvocato. Biagio notes that he and Cosimo must've been jealous that their father seemed to love his brother more than his sons, and nobody in the family really liked the cavalier avvocato. The cavalier avvocato is indifferent to everyone and everything. He says little, and it's impossible to know any of his history or if he's actually intelligent. He spent time in a Muslim country where he learned about hydraulics, and was then captured by the Ottomans and the Venetians. Baron Arminio paid his ransom, gave him a study, and made him keep the family's books.

The Catholic Church as a whole didn't like Jansenists because they don't believe a person gets to choose to accept God or not; in other words, free will doesn't matter as much to them. This belief that everything is already decided is likely what leads to the Abbé's inability to follow through with anything, as whatever he does doesn't matter much. This passage gives the reader insight into the multiple warring factions of the Enlightenment, and shows how someone like Baron Arminio can play different groups off each other for his own gain.

The cavalier avvocato spends little time in his study, mostly speaks in Turkish, and is either bad at keeping books or the di Rondò affairs are worse than Biagio realizes. He dresses in Turkish outfits and spends his days outside. When he is inside, he draws detailed plans for irrigation systems, and occasionally Baron Arminio joins him in the study. Always, after a few hours of being in there, Biagio hears his father yelling and sees the cavalier avvocato march quickly into the countryside. Baron Arminio always goes after him and they return after a while, Baron Arminio still talking and the cavalier avvocato hunched, silent, and with clenched fists.

Though neither Biagio nor Cosimo seem especially enamored of their father, the way Biagio describes Baron Arminio's treatment of the cavalier avvocato suggests that Baron Arminio is overbearing and controlling in all ways. His need for everything to be perfect extends to everyone in the family, including the two people least likely to change: the cavalier avvocato and, now, Cosimo in the trees.

CHAPTER 8

One day, while Cosimo is in the middle of a game with poor children, Baron Arminio rides up. It's the first time they've really seen each other since the day Cosimo climbed up, and they both know now that the snails had nothing to do with it. Baron Arminio spits that Cosimo is making a scene, but Cosimo points out that he can still be a gentleman from the **trees**. In a tired voice, Baron Arminio asks Cosimo to come back down, but Cosimo refuses. Cosimo gives a little when he insists that he doesn't have to stop learning just because he's in the trees, but Baron Arminio points out that even a small rebellion can change everything. Cosimo cries that he can pee farther from the trees. His father points to the sky as it begins to rain and shouts that God can pee on everyone.

For Baron Arminio, Cosimo's rebellion makes it seem even less likely that he'll ever get the local dukedom, as his family is now behaving strangely and not in a way befitting a duke. Cosimo's insistence that he can still be a gentleman from the trees, however, shows that he doesn't want to give up on civilization entirely. Rather, he wants to take the best parts of society and apply what he's learning about the world from the trees to it.

Biagio worries about Cosimo in the rain. The Generalessa initially insists that Cosimo will be fine, but when Biagio suggests taking him an umbrella, she sends him out laden with warm apple syrup and an oilcloth. Biagio locates Cosimo in the **trees** and the two boys struggle to get the packages into the crude tent. They abandon patching leaks and bury themselves in a pile of blankets. Cosimo swears Biagio to secrecy about the location of his tent, and Biagio asks about Viola. Cosimo darkly says that he'd let Viola come up, but she left. He insists that Viola isn't his girlfriend.

This tender moment between the boys suggests that Cosimo's ascent to the trees won't meaningfully impact how close they are going forward. This moment shows that it's possible for the boys to continue to express interest in one another, though Cosimo's unwillingness to talk about Viola much indicates that he's growing up and is still separating himself from his family in this regard.

The next day, Baron Arminio sends the Abbé Fauchelafleur to find Cosimo and give him a Latin lesson. An hour later, Cosimo perches in an elm tree and Biagio plays nearby to watch. After a while, Cosimo helps the Abbé into the tree to help him with a difficult passage. At some point, Cosimo abandons his tutor. When the Abbé realizes he's alone, he fearfully shouts for help.

This passage shows that of all things, Cosimo's education doesn't have to suffer as a result of climbing into the trees. Getting the Abbé to follow him up, meanwhile, foreshadows Cosimo's later role as a teacher who spreads Enlightenment ideas—which are somewhat scary for the Abbé.

CHAPTER 9

After this first lesson, things return to normal—the only difference is that Cosimo stays in the **trees**. He's solitary but seems to care only for the people. He befriends and earns the respect of the peasants by engaging them in conversations about their work, performing little jobs for them, and scaring birds away from grain fields. Cosimo is very impressed with the itinerant poor people, mostly charcoal burners, who camp in the forest. They're afraid of him at first, but they eventually let him listen to their stories at night.

Cosimo's interest in people suggests that his previous childhood selfishness was mostly a reaction to Baron Arminio's unreasonable expectations, not a defining characteristic of Cosimo himself. Rather, when allowed to run free, Cosimo sets out to discover the humanity and goodness in all people—especially those who Baron Arminio might suggest are less worthy.

Baron Arminio does everything he can to keep Cosimo's rebellion a secret, even though this is a futile task. The Count d'Estomac decides to visit on his family's way to France. Baron Arminio introduces Biagio and then explains that Battista won't show since she's a nun, but Battista appears in her nun's cap, covered in ribbons and flounces. The young Count d'Estomac bows to her and Battista laughs hysterically. Count d'Estomac asks about Cosimo, and Baron Arminio answers that Cosimo is hunting. This is true, but Biagio interrupts to say that he brings Cosimo's kills to him in the trees. Baron Arminio is incensed and sends Biagio away, but Cosimo appears.

This entire visit shows that much as Baron Arminio might try to control his family members and his situation, it's impossible for him to do so. Biagio will speak out of turn, Battista will attract attention and make a scene, and Cosimo is guaranteed to shock people by staying in the trees. All three children, in this regard, represent the future, while Baron Arminio's attempts to control them look like an attempt to stop progress in its tracks.

Count d'Estomac is amused and Baron Arminio's deflections don't work. Cosimo bows to the count, who laughs and declares that Cosimo is clever to live in the **trees**. Cosimo cleans his rifle, which delights the count. Baron Arminio looks ready to die when the count declares that he's going to tell royal family members about Cosimo when he gets to court. He also realizes he can't see Battista and the young Count d'Estomac. Cosimo returns from an exploratory mission and declares that Battista made the young count hiccup. Count d'Estomac sends Cosimo back to check, and Cosimo returns with the news that Battista is trying to put a lizard down the young count's shirt. The evening passes like any other, except Cosimo is in the trees and Battista gets engaged to the young Count d'Estomac.

For Baron Arminio, Count d'Estomac's announcement that he's going to talk about Cosimo in great European courts signals that he's never going to recover from the shame of having a son who lives in the trees. Count d'Estomac's belief that this story will go over well, meanwhile, suggests that adults who aren't Baron Arminio may be ready to at least entertain the possibility of change in the near future, at least as a fun diversion from the way things are at this point in time.

CHAPTER 10

Olive **trees** are comfortable for Cosimo, while fig trees are unpredictable and sticky. Walnut trees seem like palaces and make even Biagio want to climb up and live there. Cosimo spends lots of time happily sitting in holm oaks, but he avoids prickly and dense chestnuts and pines. This knowledge of the different trees soon seems like instinct for Cosimo, and once he becomes aware of this shift, it seems like his world changes. The world below flattens and nobody on the ground understands anything about Cosimo's world of cicadas, rustling, scratching, and the sea.

Here, Cosimo's perspective begins to shift. This primes him to become a great mind of the Enlightenment in due course, as he now has a perspective that's fundamentally different than other people's. With education, he'll be able to share this perspective with others and combine it with related Enlightenment theories—while his focus on the natural world shows that he also has a toe, at least, in Romanticism.

In the winter, Cosimo makes himself a fur jacket and goatskin trousers. Biagio notes that winters at this time are mild—hard winters only seem to arrive later with with Napoleon. Cosimo sleeps in a goatskin sleeping bag hung from the trees, and his legs begin to bow after crouching so much. He washes every morning using a gutter system he devises and occasionally does laundry. With Biagio's help, he even fashions a spit on which to roast game. Cosimo lives well on his game and trades some with the peasants for fruit, vegetables, and milk. At first he defecates anywhere, but he soon discovers a secluded part of a river into which neighboring towns toss sewage and creates a toilet there.

Cosimo connects with his community in several ways as he creates his life in the trees: he trades, he keeps himself clean and presentable, and he follows codes of conduct for dealing with his waste. This allows him to become a true member of society, even as he lives above and apart from it—and this enables Cosimo to come of age as well. His continued relationship with Biagio shows that Cosimo will continue to foster a relationship with his family, even though he doesn't live with them anymore.

The one thing missing in Cosimo's life is a dog. Biagio performs the task of a hunting dog when he can, but the family constantly repeats that one rebel is enough and Biagio takes this to heart. Cosimo develops methods of fetching his game using fishing equipment. He stays away when he hears bloodhounds, as he's respectful of the rules of hunting and leaves other hunters to their game. One day, Cosimo notices a fox pursued by hounds. After the main group is long gone, Cosimo hears a whine and sees a dachshund puppy struggle out of the grass, presumably in pursuit of the hounds. The hounds lose the scent and snap at the dachshund before racing away. Cosimo follows the dachshund and is convinced that the fox is hiding in the clearing. He encourages the dachshund and the dog raises the fox.

Though dachshunds were bred as hunting dogs for badgers (and though dachshunds in this time period had longer legs than contemporary ones), this puppy is still an outlier given what these hunters are hunting for. In this way, he becomes a stand-in for Cosimo himself. Clearly this dog can still hunt foxes, even if he's not supposed to be able to; similarly Cosimo can still live in the trees, even if he shouldn't. This then suggests that individuals like this can be meaningful and unexpected contributors to society, if they're given the opportunity to be successful.

Cosimo lets the fox go, sure he shouldn't shoot an animal raised by another hunter's dog. The dachshund chases the fox in a circle and back to the clearing, looking confusedly at Cosimo. The hunters and the bloodhounds return, confused by the dachshund's antics. Cosimo asks if the dachshund belongs to the hunter, but the hunter snaps that he doesn't. When the dachshund raises the fox again, Cosimo shoots it. He names the dachshund Ottimo Massimo.

Following the etiquette of hunting shows that Cosimo isn't out to make enemies. Instead, he wants to be a valued and respected member of the local hunting community, showing again that his true goal isn't to entirely shake up society. Rather, his goal is to improve things that are already good.

Cosimo follows Ottimo Massimo to figure out where he came from, and the dog leads him to the **D'Ondarivas' garden**. The villa is closed up and the garden looks even more otherworldly. Ottimo Massimo dives into a bush and brings a hair ribbon of Viola's to Cosimo. The dog discovers other souvenirs too. With his sword, Cosimo carves his name, Viola's name, and Ottimo Massimo's name into a tree. From then on, whenever one sees Cosimo, Ottimo Massimo is surely around. The dog develops quickly into a good retriever, and both Ottimo Massimo and Cosimo are happy.

At this point, the D'Ondarivas' garden looks so otherworldly in part because it symbolizes a time that hasn't yet arrived, when exotic trees are the norm. Cosimo's interest in the garden then suggests that he's already looking forward and wants to make his mark on the next time period, but he's unable to do so exactly because the world this garden symbolizes simply doesn't come in time for Cosimo.

CHAPTER 11

For his entire adolescence, Cosimo does little but hunt and fish. He seems to become a lot like an animal or a **tree**, but Biagio thinks that it's still clear that he's a human through and through. Despite this, Cosimo eventually stops attending Mass and it seems like he doesn't attend Battista's wedding. Later, Biagio learns that Cosimo was there, watching the festivities through a window. He wonders if Cosimo regretted his choice as he sat and watched.

This idea that Cosimo spends his adolescence exploring the world around him shows that as he comes of age, he's going to follow Rousseau's theories of human development. At this point, Cosimo's entire job is to figure out how his world works so that later, he'll be able to reinsert himself and make the world a better place, using what he learned during this time.

Cosimo has the opportunity to get to know the cavalier avvocato, and he discovers that his uncle isn't at all useless. In the summer, the cavalier avvocato goes out in the hottest part of the day. Though Cosimo usually loses track of him, he always sees bees near where his uncle disappeared. It becomes clear that the cavalier avvocato keeps beehives off the property, so that Baron Arminio can't dip into the earnings or insert himself. Biagio notes that in any case, Baron Arminio is terrified of bees and would never allow hives near the house.

The fact that Cosimo is getting to know the cavalier avvocato shows that growing up wild like this has taught him to humanize people he might not have otherwise. This in turn makes Cosimo a more compassionate and kind person, as he recognizes that everyone deserves dignity and kindness from him.

One day in spring, Cosimo notes that the air is roaring with the sound of bees. He shouts for the cavalier avvocato, who calmly says the bees are swarming and fetches a pot and a pan. He bangs them together and walks behind the cloud of bees until the bees all descend onto a pomegranate **tree**. Cosimo sits at the top until his uncle asks him to shake the branch to dislodge the bees, which fall into the pot. After this, Cosimo and the cavalier avvocato form a kind of friendship. They also work together on hydraulic systems. The cavalier avvocato notices Cosimo drawing water from his gutter system one day, sputters excitedly in Turkish, and eventually conveys his idea of constructing a hanging aqueduct to irrigate an uncultivated part of the valley.

The beekeeping practice represents a perfect intersection of humanity and nature. The bees are something to be respected, but they also give beekeepers valuable honey and wax. In this sense, the cavalier becomes an example to Cosimo of how to interact with the natural world and with other people in a way that doesn't entirely shut him off from people, while also doing good for the natural world he lives in.

The cavalier avvocato often joins Cosimo in the **trees** to discuss the plans. They never move on to actually building anything, and Cosimo seems relieved about this. In the present, Biagio notes that the cavalier avvocato could've done much more with hydraulics: he was passionate and smart, but unable to accomplish anything. Biagio suspects that his uncle could apply himself to something like beekeeping, which he did in secret, but couldn't handle working with and being accountable to others. He often began work and directed others, but seldom showed up on the second day of work. He seemed to remember the water systems in Turkey and wanted to recreate them, but he found it impossible to do so in Ombrosa. Biagio suspects that Cosimo found their uncle instructive: he was an example of what could happen when a person separated too much from society.

Cosimo recognizes that a person's potential doesn't matter much if they can't put any of those ideas into practice. In this sense, the cavalier avvocato is still useless in terms of his contributions to society, as he's unable to finish anything that helps others. However, it's still important for Cosimo to see and recognize that the cavalier avvocato also represents the consequences of shutting oneself off from other people. Because of what the cavalier avvocato teaches him in this regard, Cosimo is able to go on later to make his community a better place by becoming a beloved fixture in it.

CHAPTER 12

Sometimes, Cosimo wakes in the night hearing cries that the bandit Gian dei Brughi robbed someone. Cosimo and Ottimo Massimo scour the forest looking for the bandit unsuccessfully, and townsfolk scorn Cosimo's attempts when Cosimo doesn't even know what the bandit looks like. Cosimo grows suspicious and begins to ask the itinerant people camping in the woods about Gian dei Brughi. Their answers are confusing at first, but Cosimo gradually learns that the extreme fear of the bandit in the valley is something laughable to those who live in the woods.

Though Biagio doesn't elaborate, it's likely that to those in the woods, Gian dei Brughi is either entirely a figment of their imagination—or he helps them, Robin Hood style. Because of this, Cosimo learns to think critically about what he hears and how things change depending on who's speaking and what their motivations might be. This will later help him figure out who is most worthy of his help.

One afternoon, as Cosimo reads a novel in a walnut **tree**, a shabby-looking man races ahead of two constables who shout that they're running down Gian dei Brughi. Cosimo throws a rope down to the bandit, who climbs up. Cosimo moves into a different tree and when the constables arrive, he insists he saw a diminutive man head for the stream. The constables insist that Gian dei Brughi is tall and frightening, but run toward the stream. Cosimo returns to his book, but acknowledges the bandit. The two discover that they both know of the other's reputation. Gian dei Brughi asks if he might borrow Cosimo's book when he's done with it, as he loves to read. Cosimo agrees.

Though Gian dei Brughi is clearly a skilled thief and is probably terrifying in some regard, what shines through here is how human he is: he's a bumbling older man who loves to read, and in this sense, he resembles an older version of Cosimo. When Cosimo agrees to lend the bandit books, it shows that he understands that Gian dei Brughi isn't less deserving of education or of diversions because of his line of work, an Enlightenment idea.

Biagio passes books to Cosimo from the family library at first, but because Gian dei Brughi spends all day hidden and reading, he devours novels quickly. He also has particular tastes, so Cosimo begins to trade game for books from a Jewish bookseller. Gian dei Brughi insists that Cosimo at least skim books before he passes them on and soon, Cosimo spends most of his time reading. He develops a passion for learning and spends most night reading. Eventually, Gian dei Brughi discovers Samuel Richardson's novels and loves them, so Cosimo can read in peace while the bandit, engrossed in his books, ignores the growing resentments of his accomplices.

Especially when Gian dei Brughi instills this love of reading and learning in Cosimo, the novel makes the case that it's possible to learn valuable lessons everywhere—even from someone, like a bandit, who might not be one's first choice of teacher. Buying books also allows Cosimo to broaden his community and pull more people into his circle, thereby introducing him to even more individuals who will go on to influence his philosophy.

Gian dei Brughi used to lead a band of men in trouble with the law, and all of them used his name as cover. He was a formidable, terrifying thief, but as time went on, Gian dei Brughi stopped trying. Once he discovers Richardson, he stops stealing at all. Two young bandits, the former fruit thieves Ugasso and Bel-Loré, decide to "rehabilitate" Gian dei Brughi. They tear out pages of his book until he agrees to rob the tax collector for them. Their plan fails, however, as Gian dei Brughi is too intent on getting his book back to be scary. He runs to the appointed meeting spot with bags of coins, where constables arrest him.

Dei Brughi's downfall suggests that literature and education can actually help someone rise above a lifetime of crime. Given the way the novel treats Gian dei Brughi, this suggests that education, reading, and the connections that a person forms through engaging with their education can be extremely restorative and give someone a healthier outlook on how to be a part of society.

Gian dei Brughi doesn't care at all about his trial—he knows he'll be hanged—but he does care about finishing his novel. Cosimo gets another copy of it and reads to the bandit from a pine **tree** near his window. He then chooses a happier novel. It takes days to get Gian dei Brughi to confess to all his crimes, but finally, the day of his hanging arrives. With the noose around his neck, the bandit hears a whistle. Seeing Cosimo, he asks how the book ends and Cosimo tells him. Satisfied, Gian dei Brughi kicks the ladder away and dies. Cosimo stays with the body until nightfall, chasing away crows.

Through Gian dei Brughi, Cosimo learns the importance of helping someone facing death die in a satisfied and dignified way, which he does here by sharing the ending of the book. Though this is a small kindness on Cosimo's part, it's extremely meaningful for the bandit. This shows Cosimo that even the smallest kindnesses can be extremely meaningful, and in this way, he learns to be a kinder and more compassionate person.

CHAPTER 13

Cosimo's friendship with Gian dei Brughi instills in him a lifelong passion for reading and learning. After the bandit's death, Biagio often finds Cosimo with a book, taking notes. Cosimo begins to seek out the Abbé Fauchelafleur with questions and for lessons, but the Abbé often isn't much use. Instead, Cosimo regales the old man with tales about Rousseau and Benjamin Franklin, when he's not hunting to pay for books. Gradually, Cosimo becomes the teacher and the Abbé the student, and Cosimo convinces the Abbé to spend more and more time in the **trees** arguing about monarchies, republics, religion, and empiricism—often for so long that the Abbé misses Biagio's lessons.

Again, the ideas that Cosimo introduces to the Abbé Fauchelafleur, while normal by today's standards (many democratic governments of today were built on Enlightenment theories of government), were new and scary for monarchs and church officials in charge at the time the novel is set. This means that the Abbé is undergoing a change his higher-ups won't appreciate, as he's learning about ideas that would jeopardize his role in the di Rondò family.

The old Abbé vacillates between passive acceptance and a latent passion for spiritual rigor. He absorbs all of Cosimo's new ideas, likes them at first, and then passionately denounces everything. The Abbé begins purchasing books from Cosimo's bookseller and eventually, the rumor circulates that a priest is purchasing the wickedest publications in Europe. The local religious tribunal comes to investigate, finds the works of Bayle in his room, and carries the man away. Cosimo is hunting and doesn't know anything until later. Fearing an assassination attempt by the Jesuits, Baron Arminio locks himself in his room, and the Abbé spends the rest of his life unsure of what he believes in, but trying until the end to believe.

The Abbé's genuine interest in Cosimo's new ideas offers the possibility that even among individuals who, in a sense, shouldn't be interested in Enlightenment ideals, those ideas are still interesting and worth considering. This validates the righteousness of Enlightenment ideas as a whole, while the Abbé's arrest shows how dangerous it can be for someone like him to engage in this kind of academic rigor. Religious bodies, at this point, will only stay in power if they can stamp out these new ways of thinking that seek to take power away from religion.

The Abbé's arrest doesn't stop Cosimo's education. He begins writing to the greatest scientists and philosophers of the age, and Biagio laments that he hasn't been able to find his brother's papers. Cosimo constructs shelves to hold his books and orders the entire set of Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopedia*. He begins to send for books about trades and professions and soon decides he wants to be useful to his neighbors (Biagio insists that Cosimo learned this from Gian dei Brughi). Cosimo learns to prune **trees** and so prunes orchards and gardens in winter. As he prunes, he trains the trees to grow into bridges for his own use, which prove helpful in his old age. Later generations, however, make it so no one can ever again live like Cosimo.

In this moment, Cosimo begins to come of age in several ways. He first begins to write and correspond with Enlightenment philosophers, which suggests that he's joining the ranks of the philosophical elite and sharing his ideas. Then, when Biagio mentions that Cosimo wants books on trades, it falls in again with Rousseau's beliefs regarding human development. This desire to learn a trade represents Cosimo's leap to the next step of development, in which he begins to make himself useful to the community by providing work for it.

CHAPTER 14

Though Cosimo makes friends, he also makes enemies. The iterant people, for one, fall on hard times after Cosimo introduces Gian dei Brughi to books, so one night Cosimo wakes to discover that someone set a fire right under his **tree**. Cosimo's first thought is not for his safety, but about the possible destruction of all his paths and hiding spots. Ottimo Massimo runs away in fear and Cosimo decides to sacrifice the tree he's in to save the rest of the forest. He dumps a keg of liquid in a circle around the fire, containing it. The ash tree he was in collapses as soon as he climbs away. Cosimo shouts for help and the charcoal burners come to his rescue.

Cosimo's selfless love for and fear on behalf of the natural world is an indicator that though he embodies the Enlightenment, he also has a foot planted firmly in Romantic ideals as well. However, he uses his love of the natural world to bring people together in search of an ideal society, an idea that gained popularity during the Enlightenment. He does this here by bringing others to help him.

Rather than decide to stay away from the woods and his enemies, Cosimo worries about how to protect the **trees** from fire. A drought starts a fire along the coast near Provence, and it's possible to see the fire's glow from Ombrosa. Often, the wind carries sparks that start fires in Ombrosa. Cosimo fills barrels with water and hoists them to the top of tall trees. He then puts the cavalier avvocato to work developing plans for pools and dams, and Cosimo supervises landowners, woodcutters, and the charcoal burners in carrying out those plans. Then, Cosimo develops a fire brigade. This gives everyone a sense of purpose, and Cosimo realizes that working together brings out the best in individuals. Later, Cosimo discovers that when the purpose disappears, the associations aren't as useful.

This is a defining moment for Cosimo, as he learns that helping others doesn't just help the community and make him feel good. Rather, helping others gives everyone involved a sense of purpose and community, and allows people of all stripes to rally around a common goal. Through this, Cosimo learns how to channel his strengths as an individual in pursuit of goals that help more than just him. Getting the cavalier avvocato to participate, meanwhile, shows that Cosimo can even rally people who don't buy into these ideals—important qualities in a leader.

Eventually, the fire brigade discovers that Ugasso and Bel-Loré are the arsonists and banish them from the area. Everyone has only good things to say about Cosimo in regards to the fire brigade. The Generalessa wonders if the fire brigade could morph into a militia, while it's impossible to tell if Baron Arminio is impressed with Cosimo or embarrassed. One day, Baron Arminio gets on his horse and goes looking for Cosimo. They exchange pleasantries and Cosimo points out that since the di Rondòs own part of the woods, it's natural that he'd want to bring people together to save them. This pleases Baron Arminio, but he is suspicious at the type of people who are part of the brigade. Cosimo suggests that it's his job to give ideas to others and lead where he can.

Here, Cosimo shows that at least in conversation with his father, he can draw on older ideas that will appeal to Baron Arminio as he talks about the things he's doing that make little sense to Baron Arminio. This is why he mentions saving the di Rondò trees; for Baron Arminio, of course someone in the family would want to do something to save them—it's saving everyone else's *trees that's a foreign concept. This showcases the generational differences between the two, and it shows that Cosimo is capable of bridging these divides to some degree.*

Baron Arminio bites back an insult, sighs, and announces that since Cosimo is 18, it's time for him to be considered an adult. Cosimo promises to be worthy of the name Baron di Rondò and accepts his father's sword. Baron Arminio rides away. Cosimo wonders if he should've saluted his father with the sword, but he reasons that it's not a plaything.

With this, Cosimo formally comes of age. When Baron Arminio makes this choice to recognize his son, it shows that he's resigning himself to the fact that the things he holds dear won't necessarily happen, but he doesn't need to sacrifice his family in support of those things.

CHAPTER 15

Around this time, Cosimo begins to notice the cavalier avvocato behaving strangely. He begins spending time at the port, chatting with sailors about pirate activity. Biagio explains that Barbary pirates still make raids, but these days they steal cargo rather than take sailors as slaves. As a whole, the piracy is casual, as it's in both sides' best interest to not fully shut down the other. Biagio makes it clear that the story he's going to tell is one that Cosimo told to him in many different versions, but he's going to keep to the most detailed and logical version.

The way that Biagio describes piracy shows that at this point in time, the world is becoming more connected. Relationships between different parts of the world contain elements of good and bad, not just one or the other. Biagio's aside about the truth of the story to come helps him connect more with the reader. It makes Biagio seem more human and in this sense, more sympathetic.

While watching for fires one night, Cosimo sees the cavalier avvocato walking rapidly down to the valley. This is unusual; the cavalier avvocato usually goes to bed early. Once he gets to the beach, he begins waving his lantern until a small boat appears. The men in it wear turbans and speak Turkish. Cosimo picks out the names of Ombrosotti ships and realizes that the cavalier avvocato is telling the pirates about routes, schedules, and cargo of local ships. Cosimo sits in his **tree**, stunned. As a child he thought his uncle was untrustworthy, but his recent dealings with his uncle made him think otherwise—and now, the cavalier avvocato has proven himself a traitor. Cosimo wonders if his uncle is nostalgic for the only countries where he was ever happy, or if he's angry at Ombrosa, which has done nothing but humiliate him.

Though it's clear that the cavalier avvocato is the bad guy here, it's still telling that one of Cosimo's first thoughts—at least when he goes on to tell this story—is to wonder why his uncle did such a thing. This shows that Cosimo is becoming kinder and more compassionate, and he recognizes that his uncle isn't just a one-dimensional villain. Instead, he understands that the cavalier avvocato is probably wildly unhappy in Ombrosa and though this attempt is misguided, it's an attempt, nonetheless, to find happiness elsewhere.

Cosimo is torn. On one hand, he wants to alert the local port officials; on the other, he knows that Baron Arminio will suffer if word gets out. He also vowed after Gian dei Brughi's death that he'd never attend another hanging, and he can't bear the thought of essentially sentencing the cavalier avvocato to death. Cosimo decides to take the middle road by frightening the pirates and the cavalier avvocato so that they'll be too afraid to work together again. He lies in wait for two nights and on the third night, he sees his uncle approach the shore. This time, the pirates unload loads of goods and hide them in a cave. Later, Cosimo realizes that this is so that the Barbary ship can pass a search at the port, since it pretends to be legitimate.

Deciding simply to scare everyone into not continuing with this arrangement reads both as wildly naïve and as extremely kind—if it's successful, it will allow the cavalier avvocato to maintain what little status he has in the community, and it'll keep him from a brutal death. That Cosimo thinks this plan will work, however, shows that he's still very young and doesn't understand all the things that could be outside his control in this situation.

Cosimo considers alerting the local merchants, but instead alerts the impoverished charcoal burners. The charcoal burners grab whatever weapons and containers they have and follow Cosimo to the beach. Suddenly, a pirate jumps out at them, and Cosimo stabs him. Pirate chiefs are meeting in the cave and when they hear their lookout's cry, a battle begins between the pirates and the charcoal burners. The pirates are ill prepared, as their guns are damp. The battle eventually becomes a battle of throwing stones and when the opportunity arises, the pirates flee to their boats. Cosimo leaps onto their mast and kills the three pirates on board, stunning pirates still on land.

Alerting the transient and poor charcoal burners is another way for Cosimo to demonstrate his growing kindness and generosity, and it's another way for him to justify putting a stop to something that possibly allowed the cavalier avvocato a sense of purpose in the world. When the pirates' guns don't work, the battle becomes significantly more primitive and focused on using the natural world against one's foe—which, given the logic of the novel, makes it more honorable.

Cosimo feels triumphant until he sees the cavalier avvocato racing for the boat. He leaps into Cosimo's boat and begins to row for the sea. Cosimo doesn't know what to do: this is clearly the only way his uncle can survive this ordeal, and he doesn't want to kill his uncle. He realizes that Ottimo Massimo is in the bottom of the boat and decides that all is well. The cavalier avvocato begins weeping and speaking in Turkish about a woman named Zaira. Cosimo wonders if Zaira is a lover or a long-lost daughter and figures that the cavalier avvocato will now be able to get the Turkish pirates to take him to her.

Though Biagio later suggests that Zaira isn't real at all, that Cosimo thinks of her and comes up with these options as to who she might be shows that Cosimo is nevertheless trying to humanize the cavalier avvocato and understand where he's coming from. Since Cosimo himself is motivated by love for Viola still, it's certainly understandable to him that his uncle may miss a former lover.

The cavalier avvocato begins to hail a nearby pirate ship. Cosimo hides and watches two pirates lift his uncle into their boat. He hears an argument, the cavalier avvocato mention Zaira, and he understands that the pirates think the cavalier avvocato betrayed them. After hearing a thud, Cosimo shows himself. He sees his uncle floating in the sea, only his face visible above the water. Cosimo sends Ottimo Massimo into the water to rescue the cavalier avvocato. Ottimo Massimo obeys, but he returns with only the cavalier avvocato's head.

Sending Ottimo Massimo after the cavalier avvocato is a way for Cosimo to, in his mind, make it clear to his uncle and to Baron Arminio that he cares about them and is a part of the family, even if the cavalier avvocato is now definitely a bad guy. When Cosimo is unsuccessful in this, it reminds the reader how naïve Cosimo's plan was—it's likely Cosimo's attempt at meddling that led to the cavalier avvocato's death.

CHAPTER 16

Biagio tells the reader that at first, Cosimo told a very different story. He first insists that pirates kidnapped and killed the cavalier avvocato and then, when Baron Arminio becomes depressed, Cosimo constructs a glorious story in which the cavalier avvocato struggled to defeat the pirates and died. He conceals the part about the cave until a few weeks after the event, at which point the charcoal burners have eaten everything. After the cavalier avvocato's death, Baron Arminio seems to age. He attempts to care for the bees and finish a canal project, but these attempts end when bees scare him and he falls into a canal. He recovers, but falls into a deep depression.

At this point, Cosimo begins to use storytelling as a way to perform kindnesses for others; here, for Baron Arminio. Though he's unsuccessful in helping his father, Biagio does make it very clear that Cosimo is successful in helping the charcoal burners eat for a while. By focusing on this, Biagio encourages the reader to look for the good and the unified aspects of Cosimo's life, rather than focus on Cosimo's mistakes and shortcomings.

Baron Arminio seems disinterested in life. Nothing in his life has gone according to plan: he's still not a duke, Cosimo is still in the **trees**, and the cavalier avvocato is dead. Baron Arminio begins to rave against the Jesuits and dies. Cosimo follows the funeral procession, but the cypress trees around the cemetery are so thick that he can't enter. Instead of throwing dirt on the coffin, Cosimo throws a branch. This makes Biagio think that the entire family was just as distant from Baron Arminio as Cosimo was.

When the trees separate Cosimo from his father, it suggests that Baron Arminio was far too caught up in the civilized, built world to ever connect with his son. Biagio's suggestion that everyone was distant from Baron Arminio suggests that they all were thinking ahead of him to some degree, especially since the Generalessa came around to Cosimo's choice to take to the trees when Baron Arminio never did.

Even though Cosimo is now the Baron di Rondò, his life changes little. He appears more often in the city and tells stories from his **tree**. He often recounts the story of the cavalier avvocato's end, but in order to appease his listeners, he adds in the part about Zaira to make them feel sorry for the old man. Biagio suggests that this was the most truthful version, but Cosimo gradually distorted the story over time. Everyone is interested in Cosimo's stories, and Biagio asks the reader's forgiveness—if the stories seem far-fetched, it's because he's sharing Cosimo's version of events. For instance, when someone asked if it's true that Cosimo hasn't left the trees, Cosimo tells a story of jumping onto a buck's antlers and staying there through a fight with another buck. Biagio says that Cosimo's stories went from true to invented and back again.

At this point in Cosimo's life, telling stories is a way for him to shape his identity and experiment with who he wants to be in the world. Biagio's narration asks the reader to understand, first and foremost, that this is and was a game—and that nothing Cosimo says should be taken at face value. Instead, readers should consider how or why Cosimo might have edited the story, and what purpose that might have had. For instance, while the story about the bucks may have begun when Cosimo simply watched them fight, insisting he was in the thick of it allows him to look closer to nature and more a part of the natural world.

Underlying Cosimo's storytelling is the fact that he hasn't been in love and feels his life has no point because of this. He looks at girls, but none are quite right. He starts dreaming of love but is embarrassed when he sees lovers enter the woods. Instead, he watches animals mate. Ottimo Massimo often courts dogs much larger than he is, and though Cosimo sees that, like Ottimo Massimo, he's different, he's not sure how to find love in the trees. He grows increasingly dissatisfied until he learns that in Olivabassa, there's a group of Spaniards that also live in the trees. He travels to Olivabassa.

Desiring love represents the next step for a young man, per Rousseau's theories of human development. At least on an intellectual level, Cosimo is fully an adult now, even if he's not entirely sure how to conduct himself in a truly adult way. Seeking out the Spaniards in Olivabassa will give Cosimo more connections to the outside world, showing again that living in the trees doesn't cut him off from relationships with other people.

CHAPTER 17

As Cosimo gets closer to Olivabassa, people greet him in Spanish even though it's obviously not their native language. Finally, he comes upon groups of nobles in the **trees**, and they greet Cosimo in a tone of bitter understanding. Cosimo identifies the man who looks like he's in charge, Frederico Alonso Sanchez, and introduces himself. Father Sulpicio, a lanky man in black robes, translates. Don Frederico is in awe that Cosimo has *chosen* to live in the trees. Cosimo learns that these nobles are Spanish aristocrats who rebelled against King Carlos III, who exiled them. They reached Olivabassa, where they were told they couldn't touch the ground per an agreement with the Catholic Church. Thus, the exiles were allowed to live in the trees, and now they're waiting for Carlos III to let them return. In the meantime, their money reinvigorates Olivabassa's economy.

This kind of exile that these nobles find themselves in is exactly what many Enlightenment philosophers spoke out against through their work, as exile like this means that the monarch has outsize power to do as they please and aren't accountable to the people. This again situates the story in the height of the Age of Enlightenment. By showing these nobles and their situation, the novel creates the sense that something needs to change—which it does with the French Revolution later in the novel.

Cosimo peppers Father Sulpicio, a Jesuit, with questions about how the Spaniards live in the **trees**. He's cagey about answering, but Don Frederico answers some of the questions. Father Sulpicio shows Cosimo around. Men sit in saddles, while women sit on embroidered cushions, sew, and pet their cats and birds. They tell Cosimo about the palaces they left behind. The way they speak about King Carlos III is confusing, so Cosimo often doesn't know how to react when he comes up in conversation.

The Ombrosotti don't have a monarch to worry about, so it's possible that Cosimo simply doesn't know how to talk about monarchs. This does situate him as an outsider in terms of Enlightenment philosophers, as he's not coming from a place where he has to overthrow a monarchy to institute change.

Father Sulpicio introduces Cosimo to an old man named El Conde. El Conde continually looks at a distant hill, and Father Sulpicio murmurs to Cosimo that El Conde's son was tortured on King Carlos III's order. Cosimo realizes that this man is the only one of the exiles who truly suffers—and he's the one who shows the others what it means to suffer and hope. One day, Cosimo notices a beautiful young woman. Her name is Ursula and she's Don Frederico's daughter. Cosimo impresses her by picking an out-of-reach rose and then introducing her to his pulley system to get into faraway trees. They kiss and fall in love. Cosimo thinks that love is beautifully simple and should always be this way.

Interestingly, Cosimo's assessment of El Conde reads as far more Romantic than anything else, in that it's his emotional *suffering that makes his plight understandable and commendable. This again makes the point that while many things that Cosimo believes in align with the Enlightenment, he is truly between eras and ways of thinking. His simple, reasonable love with Ursula, meanwhile, is far more Enlightenment in that it's not built on high emotions.*

CHAPTER 18

Cosimo and Ursula spend their days in the blooming fruit **trees**. Cosimo makes himself useful by teaching the Spaniards how to move through the trees and introduces them to some of his tools. His desire to invent means that he even creates a confessional for his hosts, even though this goes against the writings of his favorite authors. He sends for books to share with Ursula, and he often joins meetings in which the exiles draft letters to King Carlos III. The letters start out indignant and threatening, but always end with a plea for forgiveness. At the end of every meeting, El Conde rises, speaks his heart, and everyone abandons the petition for forgiveness.

With these nobles, Cosimo gets to experiment with what it's like to be a part of a community of people who are different from him in ways almost more important than those in Ombrosa are: they have different beliefs, rather than just a different living space. This means that Cosimo has to begin to grapple with how to honor what he believes is good and correct, while also not offending his hosts.

At the meetings, Cosimo naïvely talks about philosophers' proposals that sovereigns are wrong, and that reason and justice can govern states. Only El Conde and a few smart girls can follow, however. Gradually, El Conde decides he wants to read philosophers' books. Unbeknownst to Father Sulpicio, some others ask Cosimo for a novel so they can read the sexy passages. Soon, the talk during meetings focuses on creating a revolution in Spain. It takes Father Sulpicio a while to realize his post is in danger, but eventually—possibly receiving letters from higher-ups in the Church—he announces that the devil has arrived and will obliterate the group.

The Enlightenment saw many people reevaluate their relationship to organized religion and to God. For the most part, philosophers generally took issue with how much control the Church had over people's lives and beliefs, which lead to the rise in Protestantism. This is what Father Sulpicio is reacting to here.

One night, Cosimo wakes to the sound of someone crying. He discovers Father Sulpicio tying El Conde to a tree. Father Sulpicio announces that this is part of the Inquisition and Cosimo is next, but Cosimo draws his sword. He's shocked to discover Baron Arminio was right: Father Sulpicio insists that the Jesuits need to settle their score with the di Rondò family. The two fence until everyone wakes up, but Father Sulpicio pretends nothing happened and apologizes to Cosimo. Cosimo realizes that Father Sulpicio is likely making Don Frederico suspicious, as Don Frederico stops pretending he doesn't know what's going on between Cosimo and Ursula.

Discovering that Baron Arminio was right about the Jesuits being out to get him allows Cosimo to begin to think differently about his father in much the same way he learned to think differently about Gian dei Brughi and the cavalier avvocato. Now, he has an instance in which his father was right to be so afraid of something, even if it seemed silly at the time. This allows Cosimo to develop even more empathy for his father.

One day, Don Frederico summons Cosimo. With Father Sulpicio next to him, he asks Cosimo's age—21—and much to everyone's surprise and displeasure, insinuates that Cosimo needs to build a house if he wants to marry Ursula. He brushes aside Father Sulpicio's concerns that Cosimo reads Voltaire and invites Cosimo to come back to Granada with them. Cosimo uncomfortably agrees to think about it and goes to Ursula. Ursula is thrilled, but Cosimo insists that he wants to stay in the **trees**. Soon after, Don Frederico receives a letter from King Carlos III, inviting everyone home. The people of Olivabassa help everyone down and nobody listens to El Conde when he says that they need to take to the courts. Don Frederico calls for Cosimo, but Cosimo refuses to come. Servants keep Ursula from trying to stay with Cosimo, and the Spaniards head for home.

For Father Sulpicio, Cosimo's possible return to Granada would mean that Cosimo would be able to continue spreading Enlightenment ideas throughout the Spanish nobility that threaten his own power and control, something he can't have happen. Don Frederico's invitation, therefore, indicates that there's some willingness to change and move forward in Spain. Despite this, it's telling that El Conde is the only one who's interested in keeping up with their newfound philosophy after returning home, as it suggests that he's the only one who has truly internalized Cosimo's Enlightenment messages.

CHAPTER 19

Back home in Ombrosa, rumors circulate that Cosimo has many lovers all over the valley. Men become territorial, and women whisper and tell Biagio about their meetings with Cosimo. Cosimo stops wearing furs and dresses in a tailcoat—and it's possible to tell by his dress whether he's hunting or meeting a lover. Biagio says that an older noblewoman often meets Cosimo out near the woods. She sends her carriage driver to gather mushrooms while she sees Cosimo. Biagio doesn't believe most of these stories. For one, if Cosimo had so many lovers, than how does one explain the many nights that Cosimo roamed the **trees**, yowling for a woman? Old men kindly send Cosimo on his way, while bold girls go to their windows and climb into the trees with him.

As with Cosimo's wild tales about being on the buck's antlers, these stories about women are impossible to verify and seem far-fetched. However, when Biagio admits outright that he can't verify them and he's right with the reader in thinking they're not true, it helps the reader identify with him and humanizes him to his audience. Regardless, Cosimo's courtships show him that he can bridge the gap between living in nature and having a normal life as clearly, women are willing to climb trees to have sex with him.

Cosimo dedicates himself to studying and writing a *Plan for the Establishment of an Ideal State Based in the Trees*. It begins as a treatise on law and governments, but it soon turns into a fantastic and complicated story of adventures, including a chapter on marriage law. Biagio suggests that the book's epilogue should've said that the author, after establishing the perfect state in the **trees** and convincing everyone to live there, now lives on the earth. However, Cosimo never finishes the book. He does send a summary of it to Diderot, who sends Cosimo a thank-you note in return.

Writing this book situates Cosimo as one of the many individuals in the Age of Enlightenment who produced works like this. This shows again that living in the trees doesn't hinder his education or, for that matter, his ability to communicate with the other great minds of the era. Denis Diderot is one of the most famous Enlightenment philosophers, which makes the fact that Cosimo is in contact with him even more compelling for readers familiar with Diderot.

CHAPTER 20

Biagio admits that he doesn't have much to say about this period. He turns 21, and since Cosimo doesn't need much, Cosimo agrees to let Biagio use the property in exchange for paying his taxes and managing the affairs. Before Biagio takes this on, he tours Europe and discovers that Cosimo has quite the reputation. In Paris, he meets Voltaire. Voltaire has heard of Cosimo and is surprised that Biagio is Cosimo's brother. When Voltaire asks if Cosimo lives in **trees** to get closer to the sky, Biagio answers that Cosimo believes that in order to study the earth, it's necessary to have some distance. Voltaire likes this answer and insists that it's an example of reason.

Voltaire's question can be taken in several ways; he could be asking whether Cosimo is trying to study the stars (a more Enlightenment possibility) or whether he's trying to get closer to God (which could perhaps be Romantic or Enlightenment,). Biagio's answer makes it clear that Cosimo is a true member of the Enlightenment philosophers, as he wants to study what's here on Earth and write about it in ways that he can then use to spread his ideas to others.

Biagio returns to Ombrosa when he receives word that the Generalessa is ill. He finds Cosimo sitting outside the Generalessa's window and is struck that the Generalessa speaks to Cosimo as though he's there in the room. Cosimo is able to give her things using a harpoon, and she only asks Cosimo for things he can reach. Cosimo spends all night in her window, distracting her from her pain. One sunny day, Cosimo blows soap bubbles and for the first time, she seems to enjoy the game. She bursts bubbles, smiles, and dies. A year later, Biagio gets engaged to a local girl and goes to great lengths to convince her that Cosimo is trustworthy. Even after they marry and have children, she avoids Cosimo and eventually moves into the old castle to get further away from him.

The tenderness between Cosimo and the Generalessa in her last days shows that in important ways, Cosimo has never truly distanced himself from his family. The Generalessa has taken it upon herself to fully accept Cosimo's choices and give him every opportunity to be a part of the family, whenever possible. Biagio's wife, meanwhile, represents change, as she's unwilling to accept that Cosimo has anything meaningful to say from his perch in the trees. She therefore points to the future, when Cosimo becomes obsolete.

Eventually, Cosimo becomes aware of the passing time. Ottimo Massimo is old and no longer wants to join the bloodhounds or court Great Danes. Cosimo restlessly climbs to the tops of **trees**, unsure of what he wants. One day, Ottimo Massimo restlessly sniffs the wind. Suddenly he starts off through the woods towards a hunting reserve that belongs to Duke Tolemaico, an old man who doesn't hunt but who employs vigilant guards. Cosimo curiously follows. Ottimo Massimo reaches two pillars topped by stone lions and beyond, a meadow. It's entirely silent and disturbs Cosimo, but Ottimo Massimo races across the meadow. Anguished, Cosimo realizes he's waiting for something beyond the meadow.

It's telling that this is the first time that Cosimo has truly wanted something he cannot have, per his personal philosophy. That he doesn't know what it is suggests that it's something more instinctual and emotional—and, in that sense, Romantic—but Cosimo has to sit here and wait for it in a very patient, rational, and Enlightenment-style way. The fact that even the very unique Ottimo Massimo can cross the field drives home for Cosimo how separate he is from the rest of humanity.

A game warden passes below. Cosimo asks the man if he's seen Ottimo Massimo. The man hasn't, but asks if Cosimo caught anything good—Cosimo can hunt here now, as Duke Tolemaico has been dead three months and doesn't care. He says that the heirs of Tolemaico's first two wives are now fighting with the third wife, who is in her early 20s, was only married to the old man for a year, and doesn't like any of the things she inherited. The man says that the widow has been going from property to property, staying for a few days before declaring everything ugly and letting the heirs have at it. She's at the hunting pavilion now.

The deaths in this chapter, even of minor characters like Duke Tolemaico, makes it very clear that time is passing and Cosimo isn't a young man anymore. His adult individuality, however, means that Cosimo is stuck hanging in trees and waiting for whatever is across the meadow to come to him, showing him the consequences of his choice to live separate from everyone else.

Cosimo waits for Ottimo Massimo until the following evening. The dog appears, wags at Cosimo as though inviting him to follow, and then runs back across the meadow. Two game wardens pass later and tell Cosimo that Ottimo Massimo is with the widow duchess. Cosimo remains in the **tree** at the edge of the meadow, studying the meadow as though it is the one thing able to teach him about distance and waiting.

In a sense, the meadow really is the only thing that can teach Cosimo about distance—even though many of his correspondents are in France or elsewhere in Europe, the distance doesn't matter because they can write and send mail. Whatever's across the meadow doesn't allow him that luxury and therefore makes him feel isolated.

CHAPTER 21

One day, Cosimo sees a fair-haired woman on a white horse gallop out of the trees on the other side of the meadow. He hopes that she'll get close enough so he can see her face, but he also hopes that she'll be the answer to what he's been waiting for. Cosimo painstakingly watches her cut diagonally across the meadow. She changes direction and Cosimo notices that two knights are chasing her. The woman continues to change direction as though to disorient her pursuers, and it disorients Cosimo as well. Finally, she passes between the pillars and Cosimo sees that it's Viola. Cosimo feels almost feverish and wants to cry out for her, but he can only make the sound of a woodcock.

The way that Viola leads the horsemen on this chase mirrors the chase game she played with the fruit thieves and Cosimo when they were all children, which suggests that at least in terms of how Viola deals with suitors, not much has changed since she was a child. Cosimo's inability to make human speech, meanwhile, suggests that when confronted with true love like this, he's forced to face how distant he really is from people—here, he's more at home in the natural world than in Viola's human world.

Viola gallops through a chestnut wood and Cosimo leaps through the **trees** after her. She reappears closer and again, Cosimo can only make the sound of a gray partridge. He sees that she seems somewhat in control of the men chasing her, but he still can't pick out her intentions. Cosimo makes the plover's cry and realizes that if this is indeed Viola, there's only one place she'll definitely go. He heads for the **D'Ondarivas' garden** and sure enough, Viola gallops into the yard. She studies the trees, ignores his bird cries, and at the villa, starts shouting orders for the servants to renovate the house. Cosimo's heart pounds with love and fear. Now that Viola has returned, he'll have to give up his memory of her as a girl.

Here, the D'Ondarivas' garden is symbolic of the time period, which is right before the French Revolution. At this point Romanticism is already on the rise and pushing back against Enlightenment ideas, but both eras coexist. The novel shows this by focusing on the ways in which the garden itself has gotten bigger and wilder, while Viola shouts orders to renovate the house: the natural world, as well as the built world of humans like Viola, are converging.

Viola tells her servants where to hang the swing and finally sees Cosimo. She's surprised, but she recovers immediately. Viola tells him to meet her at the end of the park in an hour. Cosimo fearfully races for the big **tree** and Viola arrives on time. Cosimo helps her into the tree and admits that he only knows that Viola is a widow. Viola accuses Cosimo of knowing nothing, even though he's nosy, and she quickly explains that her parents forced her to marry Duke Tolemaico since she's a flirt, but now she'll live on the D'Ondariva estate. She insists that she can do what she likes since she's a widow—and in fact, she married Duke Tolemaico on purpose knowing she'd be widowed soon.

Viola's explanation shows how manipulative and cunning she is, and how she understands how to leverage the social mores of the time to get her way while making others feel that she's doing what they want her to. In this way, Viola is doing much the same thing that Cosimo is in terms of her relationship to her family, as she's asserting her independence in important ways while also giving the illusion that she's an integral part of the family and cares about how things go at home.

Cosimo is stunned and asks who Viola was flirting with. Viola says she'll never let Cosimo be jealous, which startles him. She abruptly asks what Cosimo has been up to. He says he's hunted, fought pirates, read books, and communicated from Diderot. Viola cuts him off and asks if he'll love her forever. She commands him to kiss her and after unbuttoning her blouse, she leads him away through the branches. Cosimo leads her to one of his hiding places and Viola asks if he's brought other women here, insisting that if he hasn't he's worthless—but slaps him for not waiting for her when he admits he has. She becomes suddenly gentle and they have sex. For the first time, Cosimo feels like he knows himself.

That sex is such a transformative experience for Cosimo suggests that, to a degree, Viola's way of loving—by keeping him always on edge and experiencing heightened emotions—is interesting and compelling for him. This again makes the case that Cosimo contains qualities of both the Enlightenment and the Romantic eras, as Viola's way of behaving in a relationship is largely Romantic.

CHAPTER 22

Cosimo leads Viola to the **tree** where he carved their names alongside Ottimo Massimo's. Viola is moved and when she learns that Ottimo Massimo is Turcaret, her childhood dachshund, she laments having to leave him. She suddenly sneers that Ottimo Massimo is an ugly name. Ottimo Massimo is thrilled to have both masters, and the most wonderful part of Cosimo's life begins. Viola rides through the countryside on her white horse and whenever she sees Cosimo, she climbs into the trees. For Viola, love is about heroism and making Cosimo prove himself. They clash sometimes, as Cosimo dislikes sensuality. Viola makes him see the error of his ways, and he even writes to Rousseau about it. Rousseau doesn't answer.

Again, lots of things point to the fact that Viola is a cruel lover who only wants her way, as when she insults Ottimo Massimo's name and makes Cosimo see where he's gone wrong. In this sense, she's unwilling to give in to Cosimo's ways of thinking at all and instead forces Cosimo to accept her way of doing things as the only right way. That this is part of the best time of Cosimo's life suggests that there's a lot to gain from straddling two periods like this.

Nevertheless, Viola is still spoiled, and Cosimo doesn't spark her imagination. This leads to short-lived fights. They talk about their lives, but Cosimo doesn't understand what sets Viola off and often misspeaks. She never tells him what makes her angry, though Biagio suggests that Cosimo may purposefully misunderstand her. When they fight, Viola gets on her horse and races away. When she returns, Cosimo calls for her attention and hurts himself or destroys **trees** until she runs away again. She finally seems suddenly moved by Cosimo's acts.

The possibility that both Cosimo and Viola are acting in ways designed to incite a reaction in the other and bring the other over to their side shows the tensions between the Enlightenment and the Romantic eras. It's difficult for adherents to see the righteousness of what they don't believe in, and in this case, this leads to fights and violence.

Cosimo doesn't understand that the same thing motivates their love *and* their fights, and they often argue about whether suffering is a part of love. Viola insists it is and that Cosimo must suffer to show that he loves her, but Cosimo rejects this on principle. In addition to these moments of despair, Cosimo also experiences explosions of joy and leaps through the **trees**, shouting about Viola. He often recites love poems in other languages, and, once, during a celebration of Ombrosa's patron saint, he leaps onto a greased pole, shouts about Venus, and leaps away again. Viola loves these acts. Though Cosimo admires Viola's love of riding, he's also jealous since he knows he can't have her all to himself if she's on horseback. Sometimes Viola wishes he could ride with her. Viola's horse becomes surefooted, so she asks it to climb trees.

Viola's insistence that suffering is a part of love is a very Romantic idea, while Cosimo rejects it because of his own closely held Enlightenment beliefs. The suffering she mentions is primarily an emotional suffering—which, much to Cosimo's chagrin, he seems to be doing a lot of—which falls in line with the Romantic focus on experiencing heightened emotions. Their jealousy and arguments shows the tensions between the two eras and suggests that this romance cannot last forever.

CHAPTER 23

Biagio says that for the most part, the people of Ombrosa gossip about Cosimo but treat him respectfully. They reproach Viola's behavior but generally talk as though their behavior is normal for nobles. Viola has properties across Europe and so is away for months at a time. When she's gone, Cosimo spends more time in the **oak** in the square. She always leaves after a fight, though they do make up first, but Cosimo lives in a state of anxiety. He tries to return to the way things were, but he also thinks that life without Viola is flavorless. Biagio insists that in this sense, Cosimo loves Viola just like Viola *wants* to be loved, as she's always in control.

When Cosimo spends more time in the square—that is, with people, talking and communicating—when Viola is gone, it suggests that he's going to try to take a step backwards in the direction of his Enlightenment ideals when she's not around. This means that he's going to try to connect more with others and spread his ideas, something that he cannot do when he's too caught up in being in a relationship with Viola.

Their romance always resumes when she returns, but they also argue jealously as Cosimo suspects she sees other men while she's gone. Once, Biagio journeys to Paris on business and in a salon, he runs into Viola. She gives Biagio a handkerchief to pass on to Cosimo, but a friend takes Biagio aside. He says that according to the Paris gossips, Viola goes from lover to lover and then disappears for months, supposedly to a convent. Biagio tries not to laugh—the convent surely refers to her time with Cosimo—but he knows that this will upset Cosimo. Back home, he gives Cosimo the handkerchief and says he heard that Viola is seeing other men. Cosimo shrugs and runs away, but Biagio knows that this is his way of rejecting anything that makes him confront reality.

Reality, in this case, is the knowledge that time is passing, that Enlightenment ideas are becoming normalized and are no longer revolutionary, and that the Romantic era (as represented by Viola) is beginning to run the show everywhere. Cosimo's unwillingness to accept the inevitable changes suggests that in this regard, he's a lot like his father. Like Baron Arminio did for most of his life, Cosimo is getting to the age where he's living in the past, but the future is too different for him to accept.

Viola returns, pleased at how jealous Cosimo is, and accuses him of holding a narrow idea of love since he tries to make his jealousy submit to reason. Cosimo insists that everything, *including* love, is better with reasoning, but Viola says that love shouldn't be reasoned with. A few days after her return, Viola begins spending time with two officers, an Englishman and a Neapolitan. The men lurk around her villa. Viola hangs out the windows in a nightgown, and Cosimo camps out in her **trees** to watch everything. He plans to trick his rivals and hopes that Viola wants to make fun of both of them.

The idea that it's good and right to submit love to reason is a distinctively Enlightenment idea, as it suggests that Cosimo can make everything fit into his worldview. When Viola essentially throws this in Cosimo's face by starting to court the Englishman and the Neapolitan at the same time, it shows that Cosimo is fighting a losing battle here. The Romantic era will come, whether he likes it or not.

One morning, Cosimo watches Viola drop a note to the Neapolitan, asking for a meeting. He then watches her do the same to the Englishman, but he can't decide which one Viola is tricking. Cosimo reasons that they'll probably meet at the summerhouse, so he hides in the **trees** around it. The Neapolitan arrives and Cosimo shoots squirrel dung at him. When the Englishman arrives a moment later, Cosimo hurls more dung. The officers introduce themselves as Salvatore di San Cataldo and Sir Osbert Castlefight, and then begin a duel. They fight until Viola tells them to stop. She feigns confusion as to which one she invited to meet her and invites them both in, suggesting she could see both of them at the same time. The officers are aghast.

The summerhouse itself represents the kind of civilization that Cosimo cannot join, given that he chooses to live in the trees. Though this normally isn't a problem for him as it saves him from suffering some moral corruption, in this case, it's painful to not be able to enter it and make things "right." Viola's treatment of Don Salvatore and Sir Osbert, meanwhile, shows yet again that she's no different now than she was as a child: she wants to be in control and to make her suitors tie themselves in knots to impress her.

Sir Osbert and Don Salvatore refuse to share Viola, so Viola says she'll belong to whoever is the first to *say* that they'll share her. The men turn to their horses. Cosimo is thrilled to exact revenge, but decides to warn the officers since they were so honorable. He tells them to not sit on their horses, but their confusion and Viola's laughter makes Cosimo angry again. The officers decide to sit and sit on porcupine quills. They rush as though to get angry with Viola, but Viola angrily climbs into the **trees** to confront Cosimo. She cries that she wants him jealous like this all the time and throws herself at him. However, when she notes how much the officers love her, Cosimo hits his head against the trunk and declares that they're worms. Incensed, Viola climbs back down and invites the officers into her carriage.

Essentially, Viola just wants to know for sure that everyone wants her and is angry, which is why she's so pleased with Cosimo's jealousy. However, where she sees heroics and grand gestures, Cosimo sees pointless, silly, and overall meaningless gestures that don't do anything but make people angry. This argument brings Cosimo and Viola to their tipping point of their relationship, as they cannot continue while neither of them will concede defeat to the other's way of thinking.

Biagio suspects that this was a time of torment for all four lovers, even Viola. Sir Osbert and Don Salvatore spend all their time with her, remaining firm in their agreement to not share her but constantly agreeing to more and more concessions. Every time they make another promise, Viola rushes to tell Cosimo. Finally, both officers desert and spend their days playing dice while Viola stalks around in discontent. She finds Cosimo in a **tree** one day and says she's tired of all three men, and the officers' promises aren't enough. Biagio says that Viola and Cosimo were in love and were thinking all the right things. They could've made up, but they refused to give any ground and Viola declared she was leaving.

When Viola gets tired of running her suitors in circles, it indicates that the Romantic era will also eventually come to an end, just as Cosimo's Age of Enlightenment is soon to come to an end. However, when Biagio insists that it was Cosimo and Viola's failure to communicate that led to the end of their relationship, it's a concession to the possibility that the Enlightenment was right about something: rational, reasonable communication, at least when it comes to love, is superior.

Viola leaves immediately for France and gets caught up in the French Revolution. She eventually ends up in England, marries a lord, and settles in Calcutta. Sir Osbert and Don Salvatore stay together and go on adventures, but they eventually disappear. Cosimo wanders through the wood, weeping in grief. Then, he destroys **trees**. He doesn't resent Viola, but he does resent himself for losing her because of his pride. He understands now that she was always faithful to him, and bringing other men along was a way to make their love grow. He stays alone in the woods (Viola took Ottimo Massimo with her) and even Biagio has to admit that Cosimo is mad.

Without Viola around, Cosimo can rationalize what happened and make it fit into his personal philosophy. His emotional displays suggest that at least personally for Cosimo, Romanticism has arrived—while he may be trying to rationalize things, what ends up coming out are emotional displays of grief. Taking it out on the woods, however, suggests that Cosimo may also be taking issue with his choice to live in the trees to begin with.

CHAPTER 24

People have always believed that Cosimo is mad, but Biagio says that it's undeniable now. Cosimo begins to wear feathers on his head and clothes, and he stops hunting to instead advocate for birds. He declares that he's a bird and speaks out against humans—and the birds, sensing this change, fly close to him. He decorates his **trees** with written pages, posters, and various other items. Biagio says that in his opinion, the collection only functioned to make people understand that uncommon ideas can be correct.

Biagio's assessment of the purpose of Cosimo's collection of items is one of the most overt statements of support for Cosimo's lifestyle choices that Biagio ever makes. It suggests that Biagio's purpose in writing this novel is to ask the reader to also understand that uncommon ideas—such as living in the trees—can lead to great insight.

Cosimo also begins to write and print pamphlets, which eventually turns into in *The Biped Monitor*. Biagio worries about Cosimo, especially since that winter, Cosimo does little but sleep and accept bowls of minestrone. Biagio finds this unbecoming of the Baron di Rondò, so he sends a servant out with turkey and wine one evening, fully expecting Cosimo to refuse it. Cosimo accepts, and Biagio sends food whenever he can. He says that in all, Cosimo is undergoing a harsh decline.

Just as with his books, writing these widely distributed pamphlets shows how entrenched Cosimo is in the Enlightenment era spread of ideas. Meanwhile, Biagio's suggestion that Cosimo accepting charity is unbecoming shows that Biagio is becoming more like Baron Arminio every day, even as Cosimo continues to assert his independence.

Fortunately for Cosimo, wolves descend on the valley that winter and terrify everyone. People lament in front of Cosimo that these days it's on them to protect him, but he hoarsely tells people to tie sheep in the **trees**. He gets out of his sleeping sack and shows people where to tie the sheep. He dresses as a sheep too and settles in with a gun. Everyone thinks he's truly mad until the wolves attack that night. Cosimo shoots many of them and hunters kill the rest. Later, he tells fantastical stories about fighting off wolves singlehandedly. He becomes extremely sick and as the community cares for him, they begin to speak of him as one of the greatest minds of the age. When Cosimo recovers, it's unclear if he's still mad. He stops doing many odd things, but prints a weekly pamphlet titled *The Reasonable Vertebrate*.

Whether Cosimo is truly mad or not, he still has the knack for bringing people together around a common cause and making them all feel useful and needed while that cause exists. The aside that people begin to talk about Cosimo as one of the greatest minds of the age—but only while he's gravely ill—suggests that it's around this point that Cosimo begins to represent the past, rather than the future or the present. Giving Cosimo this distinction also speaks to the normalization of his ideas, which happened, to a degree, after the French Revolution.

CHAPTER 25

Biagio doesn't become a Freemason until after the first Napoleonic campaign, so he's not sure when Cosimo becomes involved with the Masons. One day, two Spaniards arrive, seek out a local Freemason, and attend a meeting. The next day, Cosimo sneakily follows them from the **trees** to a tavern, where the men meet a man in a big black hat. The man in the hat begins to write a list. Cosimo announces himself and the two Spaniards acknowledge him, but the man in the hat looks down. Cosimo suggests that only spies refuse to show their faces; the man in the hat suggests that members of secret societies may also want to keep their identities secret. Cosimo spews confusing logic about which of them might be a member of a secret society, which causes the man in the hat to raise his head. It's Father Sulpicio.

The fact that Biagio did eventually become a Freemason suggests that he's not entirely stuck in the past like Baron Arminio; like Cosimo, he, too, can immerse himself in things like this that look to the future. Cosimo's desire to figure out who these spies might be speaks to his desire to protect his community—which at this point, if it includes Freemasons, means that he feels duty-bound to investigate any interlopers in the best way he can (that is, from the trees). In this sense, Cosimo's spot in the trees allows him to look out better for his community.

Father Sulpicio announces himself as a Jesuit, Cosimo announces himself as a Freemason, and the two Spaniards introduce themselves as Don Calisto and Don Fulgencio, also Jesuits. Cosimo notes that the pope recently dissolved their order, but Father Sulpicio announces that the Jesuits have formed an armed militia to combat new ideas. They draw swords and Cosimo runs to a sheet strung up between trees to catch nuts. Father Sulpicio joins him, declares that Ursula died in a convent (which Biagio thinks is a lie), and Cosimo stabs his adversary in the stomach. From then on, people think Cosimo is a Freemason.

Again, the idea that the Jesuits are fighting against new ideas shows that they're fighting directly against Enlightenment ideas that challenge their hold on their power. More generally, this war between the Enlightenment and the Jesuits suggests that in some senses, Baron Arminio was right to distrust the Jesuits—and may have been more revolutionary than Cosimo ever gave him credit for.

Because of the secrecy surrounding Freemasonry, Biagio doesn't have the opportunity to learn much about Cosimo's dealings with the local lodge. Some talk about Cosimo as though he strayed later in life, but it's also possible that Cosimo founded the lodge in Ombrosa. For one, early meetings took place in the middle of the night in the woods, and it's possible that Cosimo received Masonic writings from his friends abroad. It's also possible that Freemasonry had been around for a while before Cosimo stumbled upon a meeting, and his intellect made him useful to the lodge.

The idea that Freemasonry would've appealed perfectly to Cosimo shows that there are definitely upsides to the fine line Cosimo walks by living in the trees but still keeping contact with other people. His isolation, given the logic of the novel, does mean that he's not as entrenched in the corrupting power of society on the ground, which may have made him even more appealing of a member to the Freemasons.

Biagio admits he never understood why Cosimo loved associations so much after fleeing from society, but it always seemed as though the more time he spent in the **trees**, the more he wanted to relate to other people. Cosimo throws himself into forming new groups, but he's seldom able to follow through. He wants to create a universal society, and his attempts often include meetings that take place at night where he preaches about establishing a world republic of equals. Masonry thus appeals to Cosimo. Eventually, an English Freemason is shocked to discover the lack of a proper lodge and insists on sending money to build one. Cosimo unmasks Father Sulpicio after the lodge is built. Biagio suspects that Cosimo was aware that he couldn't continue with Freemasonry, since he had no interest in building or living in houses.

In many ways, Freemasonry represents an ideal avenue through which Cosimo could continue to pursue Enlightenment ideals: it's a group, it focuses on spreading Enlightenment ideas of government, and its beginnings take place in Cosimo's backyard. When he distances himself from the Masons, however, it shows that Cosimo adheres too closely to his principles to be able to see any value in veering a little in the name of the common good. Regardless, Biagio's tone suggests that Cosimo did a lot of good, commendable work through the Masons.

CHAPTER 26

Ombrosa is full of vineyards, and as Cosimo gets older, he becomes light enough to walk across the trellises. Every year around harvest time, fights arise over how much to send to the clergy, the nobles, and the governor of Genoa. These arguments lead Cosimo to decide that the Ombrosotti should create "complaint books," after the ones created in France. By this time he spends hours sitting in the square, explaining the news of the French Revolution. He finds a school notebook, hangs it from a **tree**, and asks everyone to record what's wrong in their lives. Cosimo decides it's too sad, so he asks everyone to write what they want most. He writes "Viola" and titles the final book *Book of Complaints and Joys*. There's nowhere to send it, so it gets wet in the rain and the sight drives the Ombrosotti to rebellion.

The historical complaint books were compiled by the clergy, the nobles, and the general population and sent to the government in France not long before the French Revolution. The hope was that the government would be able to address those complaints, but the French Revolution happened instead. Bringing people together to put this complaint book together illustrates Cosimo's commitment to Enlightenment ideals and to egalitarianism especially, as he encourages everyone to participate in putting this together.

Biagio says that in this sense, Ombrosa experiences many of the same things that caused the French Revolution—but, not being in France, there was no revolution. There are battles nearby led by Napoleon himself. In September, people seem as though they're preparing for something. The harvest begins silently but oddly, the mule drivers don't separate out shares for the higher-ups before pressing the grapes. The collectors don't know what to do, but one finally says something. At this, someone blows into a conch, a song rises among the harvesters and Cosimo, and the harvesters pick and crush grapes faster than ever. A battle breaks out and harvesters chase the constables and collectors into the vats of grapes and send them running away, covered in grape residue.

Biagio is a noble who's probably receiving some of the grape harvest, so the narration here is likely filtered though where he was in society. Further, the French Revolution generally heralds the end of the Age of Enlightenment, which shows that at least as this era makes way for the next, it's not an easy or gradual transition. Further, as time goes on, Cosimo continues to get older and less revolutionary in his ideas, which shows that even as time marches on, Cosimo himself will get left behind.

The harvest continues like a party while terrified nobles, including Biagio, lock themselves in their villas. The people celebrate and sing as Cosimo lectures on Rousseau and Voltaire. Soon after, troops arrive from Genoa and Austria to squash the rumor that Ombrosa wants to be a part of France. The troops break through barricades, imprison many (but not Cosimo), and try them. The prisoners prove their innocence and go free, though troops remain in Ombrosa. The young Count d'Estomac leads the Austro-Sardinian troops, and he and Battista set up in Biagio's house. Battista entertains everyone by beheading small animals with a model guillotine, while Biagio thinks of Cosimo on the run in the woods.

That Biagio spends most of the French Revolution thinking about Cosimo again suggests that while he may portray himself as a nondescript noble to the reader, there's at least a part of him that's far more revolutionary than that—if given the opportunity, he may have followed Cosimo. When Cosimo lectures on Rousseau and Voltaire during the celebration, it makes it clear that for him, this is still a theoretical exercise. This may make him susceptible to misreading things and making bad decisions, as he did with the cavalier avvocato and the pirates.


CHAPTER 27

Biagio explains that Cosimo told so many wild tales about his exploits during the war that it's impossible to know what's true. Instead, Biagio will faithfully recount Cosimo's stories. Cosimo listens to soldiers crashing through the woods to figure out if they're Austro-Sardinian or French. A pretty Austrian lieutenant leads a patrol of soldiers through the woods. Cosimo drops heavy pinecones on one, throws porcupines at another, and sets a trap of poisonous caterpillars. The lieutenant keeps going, so Cosimo hurls angry wildcats at them. When this doesn't work, Cosimo leaps ahead to look for French soldiers to capture the Austro-Sardinians.

Here, Cosimo uses the natural world to very literally fight back against the corruption and awfulness of the civilized world. That the Austrian lieutenant is described as being so handsome and well put-together signifies that he's a member of the civilized elite that Cosimo has always scorned to some degree, and because of this, he's a prime target for the French and for Cosimo.


Cosimo hears something move as he reaches a mossy spot. He realizes that what he thought was water is actually French soldiers, wet and flowering with mold and moss. Lieutenant Agrippa Papillon leads this group. He believes that nature is good, so he tells his soldiers to let the twigs and snails stay stuck to them. Cosimo introduces himself as a patriot of the woods and tells Lieutenant Papillon that there's an Austrian patrol ahead. Lieutenant Papillon calls his men to arms, but the soldiers move carelessly and curse. Cosimo offers his own plan: let the Austrians walk into them and get trapped. Cosimo acts as a lookout and the plan works perfectly.

By working with Lieutenant Papillon, Cosimo is truly able to bridge the divide between the natural world and civilization. Lieutenant Papillon's men in general represent what it's like to go too far in the direction of revering nature, but Cosimo is able to start bringing them back by reminding them that they have a goal here that they must reach.

Cosimo collaborates often with the Republican Army. His notoriety as a Jacobin among the Austro-Sardinians spreads, and those soldiers fear an attack by nature. Thus, by making strategic noises, Cosimo can direct troops anywhere. Once, he leads a troop into thick underbrush where wild boars are hiding. Though Cosimo often works alone, he enjoys Lieutenant Papillon and wants to help him. His soldiers have moss and ferns growing out of their uniforms and seem to be growing into the forest, so Cosimo comes up with a plan. He approaches Lieutenant Papillon one night and says that they could rouse the soldiers using fleas. Lieutenant Papillon scoffs that the Republican Army doesn't have fleas, so Cosimo decides to act alone. He sprinkles fleas on the soldiers, which successfully makes them itchy and human again.

Again, Lieutenant Papillon's soldiers represent the dangers of leaning too far into the natural world—they show that it's possible to literally forget that one is human, which makes that person useless in Cosimo's opinion. Reintroducing the soldiers to their humanity allows them to be much more successful soldiers and people, thereby situating them in a state similar to Cosimo's. In this sense, it's not entirely necessary for one to take to the trees specifically; it's possible to gain the same insight Cosimo did through other means.

CHAPTER 28

Battista and the young Count d'Estomac leave just in time to escape capture by the Republican Army, and Ombrosa sets up a government in the French style. Cosimo joins the provisional council despite many still believing he's mad, but Cosimo's wonderful work of the time, a plan for a constitution for a republican city, is never considered. Once the people set up a new Republic, Cosimo isn't a part of the administration. He spends most of his time in the woods with the French Army's Engineer Corps, which builds a road. They tell stories at night and during the day, Cosimo helps them plan a road that works best for French artillery and for the needs of towns without roads.

Cosimo's choice to go work with the Engineer Corps and specifically, the aside that he helped them to help towns without roads shows again that Cosimo cares, more than anything, about helping others. Specifically, getting these towns roads means that those towns will be able to connect with the wider world—and in that sense, they'll be able to engage more easily with the flow of ideas that led to the French Revolution in the first place.

Resentment for the troops grows, so Cosimo points out that they at least are funding the road. Napoleon's men take animals and taxes, and they introduce conscription. Young men hide in the woods, and Cosimo helps by guarding released livestock and keeping a lookout. In all ways he tries to defend the people from Napoleon's abuses. "Bearded outlaws" begin to make life difficult for the French and Cosimo, feeling as though he has to be loyal to the French, does little in support of either side. This is also because he's getting old.

At this point, it becomes difficult for Cosimo to separate his ideals from the group that initially espoused those ideals, hence why he never really denounces Napoleon. This shows that Cosimo is still focused on a time period that, even now, doesn't exist anymore—the Enlightenment is over, and individuals like Napoleon are corrupting those ideas for their own gain.

After being crowned in Milan, Napoleon travels in Italy. The Ombrosotti arrange for him to visit Cosimo, and they choose a beautiful walnut **tree** and decorate it with ribbons. Napoleon arrives hours after the appointed time and begins to speak several times, but he moves around so that Cosimo blocks the sun from his eyes. Cosimo politely asks if he can do something for Napoleon, and Napoleon turns to a viceroy and says that this is just like something he's experienced before. Cosimo pipes up that this is just like the meeting between Alexander the Great and Diogenes in Plutarch's *Alexander the Great*, but Cosimo points out a slight difference. Napoleon says in Italian that if he weren't himself, he'd like to be Cosimo. He leaves, but never bestows any honors on Cosimo. Cosimo doesn't care, but Biagio says the family would've been pleased.

When Cosimo and Napoleon discuss having both read Plutarch, it makes the case that these are both educated and enlightened men, even if Napoleon is now abusing his power. Biagio's aside that the family would've been happy had Napoleon honored Cosimo shows that the di Rondò family as a whole still accepts Cosimo and wants to see their family do well in the eyes of others. An honor from Napoleon would've also helped Cosimo seem more like one of the group, rather than the rebel who took to the trees.

CHAPTER 29

Cosimo quickly becomes very old. Everyone in Ombrosa waits for news as Napoleon's army fails in Russia. Cosimo sits on the edge of the road, looking east. Biagio suspects he's imagining Napoleon returning and asking for Cosimo's writings so they can save the homeland, but this never happens. Instead, one day Cosimo sees three limping, bandaged French soldiers approaching, singing about their country. When Cosimo calls to them, they're barely intelligible, but Cosimo discovers that they're what's left of their regiment and that they're drunk. Cosimo directs them to a stream to wash and drink, where they become melancholy. Cosimo returns to his lookout and sees cavalrymen approaching in uniforms he doesn't recognize. They speak Russian and want to know where in France the road goes. They explain that their czar is chasing Napoleon.

Biagio refers here to the fact that Napoleon chose to invade Russia in the winter and failed miserably. When he suggests what Cosimo may have imagined at this time, it shows that Cosimo still holds up the ideals of the Enlightenment and believes that, if people try, they can still change things for the better. Especially given the sad fate of these three French soldiers, it begins to seem as though Cosimo's desire to push Enlightenment ideas on people is actually an attempt to help everyone, not just those in his immediate community (who were helped by the fire brigade, for instance).

Another officer rides up, sends the riders along, and sadly addresses Cosimo. In French, they discuss Cosimo's experience under Napoleon's army. Cosimo notes that armies always cause damage, no matter what ideas they bring. The officer says that he brings damage, but no ideas. Troubled, Cosimo reminds the officer that he won, but the man seems disturbed. His men return, dragging the bodies of the French soldiers. The officer says that he did the best he could for a few years, but war is terrible—and he fought for ideals that he can barely explain. Cosimo admits that he lives for ideals he doesn't know how to explain, except that he lives in the **trees**. The officer nervously bids Cosimo goodbye.

This officer proposes that at a certain point, the bloodshed of war isn't worth it to spread the ideas that started the war to begin with. Their conversation makes it clear that the Age of Enlightenment didn't end in a way that anyone believed was good and right, given how many people died. In this sense, even though the ideas may be positive and meaningful, this doesn't mean that they cannot still cause harm. Cosimo's insistence he doesn't need to explain things, meanwhile, reads as one place where he's still naïve.

CHAPTER 30

Biagio tells the reader that he's not sure what the 19th century has in store. It started badly and continues to get worse. Innovators have been defeated, and absolutism and the Jesuits are in charge. The ideals of the Enlightenment are gone. He can only express his ideas in this notebook. It was different when Cosimo was still alive. The only reason Biagio knows now that things *have* changed is because Cosimo is no longer here. Now, Biagio studies and follows the papers, but he cannot find what Cosimo wanted to say.

Here, Biagio casts Cosimo as an interpreter of Enlightenment ideas and events. Now that he's gone, Biagio cannot understand those ideas. However, it's also worth noting that Biagio is writing sometime in the 1820s, so the Enlightenment itself is long gone and is no longer revolutionary, as it was in Cosimo's youth and middle age. Therefore, it's simply not as compelling as it once was.

Biagio says that Cosimo started sleeping in the walnut **tree** in the square. He refused to come down but accepted the help of an old woman and the doctor. Biagio and the townsfolk hoisted a mattress and then an armchair into the tree, but one morning, they found Cosimo in the very top of the tree. A doctor and a priest went up, but couldn't get Cosimo down. Then, Englishmen in a hot air balloon lost control of their balloon in a gust of wind. It flew towards the tree and Cosimo caught hold of an anchor hanging over the side. The balloon landed on the other side of the gulf without Cosimo; the balloonists noticed nothing. Everyone believes that Cosimo dropped off over the sea. In the family tomb, Cosimo's marker says that he lived in the trees, loved the earth, and ascended into the sky.

Cosimo's death is fitting for him: it encapsulates the tension between the two eras, for one, as he stands firm in his ideals while also dying in a very dramatic fashion. Further, the first manned hot air balloon flights happened in the 1790s, right around the time that the Enlightenment was giving way to the Romantic era. In this way, Cosimo's cause of death is a concise representation of the two eras he lived in.

Biagio says that as he writes, he stops and goes to the window. Now, the sky is empty—there are no more **trees**. Where there are trees, they're now **exotic trees**. Native trees only live up on the hills. Ombrosa is no longer around, and Biagio wonders if it ever really existed. He wonders if the region only existed because of Cosimo's life in the trees. It could all just be a story.

The exotic trees make it clear that it's impossible, in Biagio's present, for anyone to lead a life like Cosimo did. Cosimo is now a thing of the past, along with his ideas. What will go on is Biagio's story of Cosimo's life, which will allow readers to follow along Cosimo's journey and make the same leaps he did—even if they cannot, in practice, embody Cosimo.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Brock, Zoë. "*The Baron in the Trees.*" *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 4 Dec 2019. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Brock, Zoë. "*The Baron in the Trees.*" LitCharts LLC, December 4, 2019. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-baron-in-the-trees.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Baron in the Trees* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Calvino, Italo. The Baron in the Trees. Mariner. 2017.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Calvino, Italo. The Baron in the Trees. New York: Mariner. 2017.