

Confessions of zeno cosini

Literature



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Confessions of Zeno But he little knows what surprises lie in wait for him, if someone were to set about analyzing the mass of truths and falsehoods which he has collected here. 1

(Preface statement ascribed to Dr. S.)

Cursed by pains and perceived illnesses, Zeno Cosini begins seeing the psychotherapist known only as Dr. S. As Zeno is approaching the end of his years, Dr. S. encourages him to explore his memories as an aid to deeper internal comprehension. Zeno does this, and embarks on a long, first-person narration covering various aspects of his early adulthood.

Self-obsessed in both the manner he addresses people and the actions he ascribes to himself, Zeno frankly admits to including other characters only in how much they reflect what he was thinking or doing. Not even his long-dead father escapes such limitation, as Zeno decides he will "only go into my father's story as far as it helps me to recollect my own" (34). As the preface quote above brazenly points out, the reader can never fully believe everything Zeno writes, despite his frequent admissions of bad behavior. After sneaking cigars from his father and failing again and again to quit smoking, Zeno goes to a sanitarium to finally break the habit. Unfortunately, he bonds with his keeper, and after a few shared drinks and secrets she smuggles eleven cigarettes to him. After becoming excessively impressed with a prominent businessman, he decides he should marry one of his four daughters, before even meeting them. Upon the formation of the acquaintance, he falls passionately in love with one, and marries another while still infatuated with the first. Following his marriage, he embarks on an ardent affair with a singer reliant on benefactors while still maintaining the pretense of a devoted union with his wife.

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Finally, Zeno abandons therapy as he has not been cured of his pains or wandering eye. This is a memorable and complex portrait of a man with a remarkable perceptiveness and immensely doubtful conduct.

Zeno Cosini. The narrator of the book, discussed at length above.

Dr. S. The instigator of creating this narrative, he is Zeno's psychotherapist.

Zeno's Father. A generally moderate man who fears for his son; his death made Zeno realize "the really decisive part of my life lay behind me and would never return" (35).

Giovanni Malfenti. An important and forceful businessman, he eventually became Zeno's father-in-law. Much esteemed and imitated, he died after a prolonged illness.

Ada Malfenti Speier. Zeno's true love object for the five months he daily visited the Malfenti home. However, she chose to marry Guido Speier. After the birth of twins and a long illness she lost all her former beauty. When her husband died she and their children moved to be with his family in Buenos Aires.

Guido Speier. Ada's husband had a tendency to discuss "all the bad qualities of women" (138). He and Zeno went into business together, though it "produced no results" (259). He also shared his brother-in-law's taste for infidelity. Ruined by gambling on the Bourse, he killed himself with a fatal dose of Veronal.

Augusta Malfenti Cosini. "She squinted, and so badly sometimes that if one had not seen her for a while that squint seemed to sum up her whole personality though she had no exactly a bad figure she was rather broad" (70-71). Despite this impression, she married Zeno after two of her sisters refused him out of hand. Her behavior towards him and their children

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appeared steadfast and irreproachable.

Carla Gerco. During the beginning of his marriage, Carla was his mistress for over a year. As she and her mother had no way of supporting themselves, she was forced to sing by her various protectors despite her dislike of it. Eventually, she left Zeno to marry her latest vocal coach, Vittorio Latti.