FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Conjugal Love
Alberto Moravia
Marina Harss, translator
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In this novel, the Italian author (who died in 1990) writes extraordinary prose about Silvio, an ordinary man who wants to create a masterpiece. Before Silvio confronts his lack of talent, he blames his poor literary output on lack of tranquility and consuming passion for his wife, Leda. Originally published in 1951 in both Italian and English, the new, flowing translation by Maria Harss brings the book back into print.

Moravia wrote short stories, essays, newspaper articles and film reviews, but he is most remembered for his novels, which typically deal with themes of sex, love, and alienation. *Ghost at Noon* (1954) and *The Conformist* (1951) inspired major European films by legendary directors Jean Luc Godard and Bernardo Bertolucci. *Conjugal Love*, like most of his famous works, is told in the first person.

The narrator and protagonist, Silvio, is a subtly unreliable, wealthy dilettante. To finish his novel, Silvio plans a countryside sojourn. He convinces himself that making love to his wife interferes with his writing, so they make a pact not to have sex.

Silvio descends from delusions of grandeur to a discovery that he has little literary talent. Moravia is neither sentimental nor cruel in developing Silvio's rise and fall. Just after moving to the countryside, Silvio's ego balloons, and in a sarcastically overwritten passage, Moravia writes, as Silvio: "Upon waking, I found myself ready and vigorous and light, my head full of ideas that had blossomed there like grass in a field after a rainy night." Midway through his own novel, Silvio loses his wife's respect when he refuses to defend her from his lecherous barber, Antonio. He cannot fire Antonio, who visits him every day, as he can't fathom shaving himself. Leda mocks him for his impotence.

Later on, when his marriage and novel seem to be crumbling in sync, Silvio realizes: "The story, which seemed like a masterpiece as I was writing it, was actually stillborn … and I

am an unredeemable mediocrity."

Moravia achieves a comic, graceful tone, thus preventing the book from being depressing. *Conjugal Love* is not action-packed; even at just over 150 pages, it's a slow ride with little dialogue and few plot points. Patient readers will be rewarded with an insightful portrait of a self-involved man who made the error of taking his loving, kind wife for granted.

Silvio is an ordinary man in a turbulent time (Italy, 1937). His most lofty attribute is his instinctual love for his wife. Moravia presents Silvio as a simple man whose wealth confuses him into thinking he must be some sort of genius.

Jennifer Shahade