Clarion Review

General

The Lanzis: The Boundless Shades of Life
Giancarlo Gabbrielli
iUniverse
978-0-595-52699-4
Four Stars (out of Five)

This deeply moving coming-of-age story, which begins in Italy just after World War I, follows the Lanzi family through the rise of Fascism and the horrors of World War II. The year 1917 finds Roberto and Luisa Lanzi and their two sons living in a small town just north of Venice. Roberto, a chemical engineer, has lost his job because of the war, and the family is struggling to survive. The Lanzis' eldest son, Riccardo, is a soldier in the Italian army, and his parents are suffering the added stress of concern for his safety. On October 25, 1917, the Italian front collapses, and the river near the Lanzis' home flows red with the blood of young men from both sides of the conflict. Fierce bombing of the town claims Roberto's life, leaving Luisa and her nine-year-old son, Lorenzo, to fend for themselves.

With the end of the war in 1918, the situation for the Italian people is dire, leaving the door open for a new figure, Benito Mussolini, known as "Il Duce." Gangs of fascist youths roam the streets, threatening the populace. The family moves to Tuscany for the greater peace and safety it offers. The fascist regime appoints Riccardo to be the director of the local distillery, and it is there that he meets Patrizia, the woman who became his wife and the mother of their precocious son, Roberto.

The warring world, as seen through the eyes of a small boy, alternately enchants, confuses, and terrifies, as Il Duce's autocratic regime engages in a reign of terror. Accustomed to living according to moral and ethical principles, the Lanzis struggle with the continual fear of retribution as Il Duce leads Italy into yet another war. Riccardo takes up arms again, while the family, lacking in basic necessities, flees their Tuscan home for a safer place in the countryside. At the farm where they take refuge, young Roberto meets the girl who becomes his first love.

War is often portrayed as an honorable thing, with parades, medals, and honors given to the soldiers who live to tell their stories. Yet, in all wars, it is often those not directly involved

who suffer most deeply; the women and children left behind often become the victims of men maddened by blood and fear. Giancarlo Gabbrielli has captured the noise and stench of war, the devastation of the land, the loss of husbands and sons, and the struggle for basic survival that can forever mark those who endure it. By taking readers into the mind and heart of a young, observant child, and by including sympathetic characters on both sides of the conflict, the author has made a powerful statement against the obscenity that is war.

Giancarlo Gabbrielli was born in Florence, Italy and resides in Canada. He is an accomplished painter, sculptor, and writer whose essays have been published in newspapers and by the Leonardo Da Vinci Society. He is currently at work on his second novel.