

The Viceroy

Federico De Roberto

Archibald Colquhoun, Translator

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The Viceroy is a fascinatingly twisted and multilayered translation of a classic Italian novel.

Originally written in 1894, Federico De Roberto's *The Viceroy* details the saga of the Uzedas, a noble Italian family of Spanish descent, although noble in the true sense of the word hardly applies. The Uzedas of Francalanza are established in Catania as viceroys, or royal representatives of the Spanish monarchy, in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. The novel begins in 1855, however, when Italian unification threatened such overblown dynasties, and the Uzedas face a daunting future wherein revolutionaries can no longer be beaten down and every "notary thinks himself a prince."

At over 600 pages, *The Viceroy* is a lengthy but engrossing read, rich with details of the time and possessing enough of a historical backdrop to help guide the plot without becoming pedantic. The Uzedas are essentially selfish, hypocritical, oblivious, or just plain mean in varying degrees, led by the greedy matriarch Donna Teresa. Donna Teresa's funeral is *The Viceroy*'s pivotal opening event, but even in death, her scheming presence continues to influence the actions of the rest of her clan.

The Viceroy includes a helpful list of Uzeda family members and their spouses, but as the chapters progress, the characters become memorable enough in their own right. There's the rotten and unholy Benedictine monk Don Blasco, the shrewdly twisted spinster Donna Ferdinanda, and long-suffering Donna Matilde and her philandering, handsome husband Don Raimondo. Raimondo was Donna Teresa's favorite, so much so that she rearranged the fates of her other children like chess pieces to give her thankless third son more than his fair share of privilege.

Through the style of *verismo*, or the Italian literary version of naturalism, De Roberto depicts the general flaws of humankind, particularly humankind raised to believe in its innate superiority. Fine points such as the offerings brought to Donna Teresa's lavish funeral service—cakes, chocolates, crystallized fruit, and bottles of wine—and the sumptuous trappings of the Uzeda manor alternate with Donna Chiara's deformed and miscarried fetus being preserved in a glass jar. Fascinatingly twisted and multilayered, this reissue of *The Viceroy* is a worthwhile addition to any Italian-literature bookshelf.

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