



A Bold and Dangerous Family: The Remarkable Story of an Italian Mother, Her Two Sons, and Their Fight Against Fascism

Caroline Moorehead

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The acclaimed author of *A Train in Winter* and *Village of Secrets* delivers the next chapter in "The Resistance Quartet": the astonishing story of the aristocratic Italian family who stood up to Mussolini's fascism, and whose efforts helped define the path of Italy in the years between the World Wars—a profile in courage that remains relevant today.

Members of the cosmopolitan, cultural aristocracy of Florence at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rosselli family, led by their fierce matriarch, Amelia, were vocal anti-fascists. As populist, right-wing nationalism swept across Europe after World War I, and Italy's Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini, began consolidating his power, Amelia's sons Carlo and Nello led the opposition, taking a public stand against Il Duce that few others in their elite class dared risk. When Mussolini established a terrifying and brutal police state controlled by his Blackshirts—the *squadristi*—the Rossellis and their anti-fascist circle were transformed into active resisters.

In retaliation, many of the anti-fascists were arrested and imprisoned; others left the country to escape a similar fate. Tragically, Carlo and Nello were eventually assassinated by Mussolini's secret service. After Italy entered World War II in June 1940, Amelia, thanks to visas arranged by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt herself, fled to New York City with the remaining members of her family.

Renowned historian Caroline Moorehead paints an indelible picture of Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, offering an intimate account of the rise of Il Duce and his *squadristi*; life in Mussolini's penal colonies; the shocking ambivalence and complicity of many prominent Italian families seduced by Mussolini's promises; and the bold, fractured resistance movement whose associates sacrificed their lives to fight fascism. In *A Bold and Dangerous Family*, Moorehead once again pays tribute to heroes who fought to uphold our humanity during one of history's darkest chapters.

A Bold and Dangerous Family is illustrated with black-and-white photographs.

A Bold and Dangerous Family: The Remarkable Story of an Italian Mother, Her Two Sons, and Their Fight Against Fascism Details

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From Reader Review A Bold and Dangerous Family: The Remarkable Story of an Italian Mother, Her Two Sons, and Their Fight Against Fascism for online ebook

Mimi says

I started this book with very little knowledge regarding Italian history, and I had never heard of the Rosselli family. This book is an incredibly detailed biography of the Rosselli family, primarily the matriarch Amelia and two of her sons, Nello and Carlo. If you are looking for a light read or a smooth story, then I cannot recommend this book. It is too full of historical documents, too full of details that taken separately almost seem random or distracting but when read all together it paints an incredible expansive portrait of what life was like for this family during the time period. The book is so dense that it took me several months to read, but I am glad that I did. I would recommend it to anyone looking for a deeper, detailed understanding of Italian history during about 1880 to 1940.

The book states that early on in his career, Mussolini used funds from British and French secret services to start up his own daily paper.

Excerpts

"[Matteotti] told the Chamber that he was preparing a dossier of fascist crimes which would include evidence of bribes accepted by the fascists from an American oil company in exchange for the right to control the distribution of petrol in Italy."

"One of Amelia's first conscious memories was of being asked by one of their two maids, Giovanna, whom they had decided must go in order to save money, to intervene on her behalf."

"The Pincerles were Jewish, descendants of the Sephardic families driven from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492. By the nineteenth century, Venice's Jews had long since knocked down the walls of their ghetto. Liberated in 1797 by Napoleon, who at the same time ordered the removal of every winged lion in the city, they had fared better than Jews elsewhere in Italy, even after Venice and its hinterland had been ceded to the Austrian Empire. Venetian-Jewish girls were educated, bookish; their parents owned property and worked for the city council. The Pincherles were no more than passingly religious, but they were mindful of the moral precepts of their faith; and they were patriots."

"On 17 March 1861—nine years before Amelia's birth—the Kingdom of Italy, freed at last from foreign domination, long dreamt about by Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli, Cavour, Mazzini, and many others, was formally proclaimed. It included Parma, Modena, most of Lombardy, Tuscany, most of the Papal States and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, with a Piedmontese capital in Turin and a Piedmontese king. But it did not yet include Venice, which joined the new kingdom only in 1866. True unity came in 1870, the year of Amelia's birthday. Italy was thereafter a singly country, with many different languages, one of them Latin, many laws, many taxation systems and many currencies—in Piedmont the lira, in Naples the *ducati*, in the Papal States the *scudi*."

"She felt ashamed of her uncouth Venetian dialect."

"And what she carried away with her when, in her fifteenth year, her father suddenly died and she and Emilia

moved to Rome, was a memory of her watery childhood, along with a strong sense of discipline, integrity and justice, a conviction that one had to distribute what one had not out of charity but as a duty, and that fortitude was not a matter of choice—all beliefs handed down to her by her intensely moral parents."

"I want you to get used to the idea of a woman capable of understanding you, comforting you, and raising you up, earnestly and serenely."

"On one occasion [Amelia] asked the Orvietos if she might reply to a piece in *Il Marzocco*, in which the novelist Neera had argued that, since men and women were different physiologically, it just follow that their rights and duties were also different, and there was therefore no reason why woman should be allowed to take men's work. Amelia's reply was crisp, forceful. Whether or not the future would prove Neera's assumptions to be valid, she wrote, what was important now was to provide all women with autonomy and recognition. And as for those who chose to be mothers, that role too was vital in imparting the ideas of justice and morality to the young; it was a job like any other and needed to be recognized as such."

"At home, Amelia was having trouble with Aldo. Though he did well at school and showed signs of being artistic, he seemed to her to have become boastful and arrogant, and his manner towards the very people about whom Amelia wrote had become 'distastefully superior.' . . . With Laura protesting that she was sometimes too hard on her three children, and Amelia replaying that she abhorred what she called 'moral disorder' and was determined that her three songs should acquire 'strength of will,' Amelia took a most unusual step. She asked a local carpenter whether he would take Aldo as a perfectly ordinary apprentice, after school, making no allowances for him. Thus, three afternoons a week, dressed in rough clothes and an overall, Aldo was to be found sweeping up, running errands, being bossed around by the genuine apprentices. . . . In due course Aldo . . . wrote to Amelia: 'I will be good so as to make you happy.' Some of Amelia's acquaintances were shocked by her treatment of Aldo, but she had no regrets."

"Saying that he had been turned into a socialist by the disastrous Ethiopian wars, Salvemini embarked on a career as an historian and teacher. He promised himself that his life's work would be a search for the truth and that he would give his students 'a key to open locks, a compass to direct them across a sea of facts, to guard them against improbable or false assertions, and to teach them to think for themselves.'"

"In 1897, Salvemini married a girl from Molfetta and became a professor of history at Messina university; they had five children very quickly and moved into a house on the seafront. On the night of 28 December 1908, an earthquake struck the Straits of Messina; it was followed by a tidal wave. Salvemini was thrown from a window by the quake, but his fall was broken by an architrave. His wife, five children, and sister were swallowed up. Salvemini groped in vain among the ruins. Eventually, he found all the bodies except those of his wife Maria and his youngest son, Ughetto. Between a quarter and a third of the inhabitants of the coastal cities of Reggio Calabria and Messina, some 80-100,000 people died that night. What tormented Salvemini was the thought that Ughetto, too small to explain who he was, might have been saved and taken away on one of the rescue ships. For days and weeks he searched the makeshift orphanages. 'I made a mistake,' he wrote later, 'in not killing myself on the first day.' For the despairing Salvemini, the loss of his family served to give shape to what had until now been mostly a spiritual inclination. He was fired with the conviction that he had to devote his life to the problems of the undeveloped south . . . and that he would henceforth no longer talk, reflect, and analyze, but act. What brought him back from a pound wish to die was his determination to work for 'these people, who must and can rise up again.'"

"Another was a blacksmith's son from the Apennine foothills of Emilia-Romagna, a pallid, thick-set young socialist, anti-clerical teacher and journalist called Benito Mussolini. Although . . . still in his twenties, Mussolini was already a man much drawn to power, uncouth and rough in manner, writing fiery articles and

prone to outbursts of fury and glaring looks."

"Nineteenth century Italy had not held women in high regard. Two doctors in Lombardy, investigating the high rate of women with pellagra, a disease of hunger, described how local farming families, having only a single cow, gave the milk to the men, or made butter which the men ate or sold. The men also ate the eggs. The doctors concluded that these women were simply perceived to have *minor bisogni*, 'lesser needs.'"

"Deaf to her appeals, Aldo continued to waste his time and neglect the Mazzini principles she had sought so hard to instill: absolute clarity between right and wrong, the necessity of personal sacrifice and the practice of virtue towards others. Finally, Amelia removed him from his day school in Florence and sent him as a boarder to the Catholic, semi-military College Tolomei in Siena, where he rose at six, spent eight hours a day at his books and had his lights out by nine. Punishments consisted of long periods of total silence, sometimes lasting several days. There were hot baths only on Sundays. When Amelia had news that Aldo's marks were good, she wrote to him as 'Aldolino' and signed herself 'Mammina.' When they were bad, or there were complains about his manners, she was implacable. Could he come home for the four-day break of *Carnevale*? No, he could not. 'When you understand, for once and for all, that by behaving badly you are harming yourself, then you will behave better.' . . . For his part, Aldo was remarkably uncomplaining. His letters were full of references to his desire to earn her approval. 'I must now do everything I can in order to merit being allowed to come home for ever.' As one Christmas holiday approached, Amelia wrote: 'If in the next 20 days your behavior does not improve . . . then you can give up all hopes of coming home.'"

"I have become convinced of something . . . and that is that I have a horror of fighting. The beautiful war predicted by the Nationalists does not exist: or rather, it exists only in a single situation, that of a true war of independence . . . I am ashamed at the levity with which I said that war was something necessary in people's lives. It is a horrible lie."

Mussolini: "Parliament was a pestiferous pustule poisoning the blood of the nation."

"On 23 May 1915, after thirty years as allies, Italy formally declared war on Austria-Hungary. . . . Italy's army was the weakest of any of the great powers, top heavy with administration and red tape and weighed down by useless ancillary units. As many as half of the soldiers were illiterate. Jumbled together in brigades, men from different regions shared no common language."

"Speaking calmly, he told her what she already knew: that Aldo was dead, killed on 27 March during the battle for Pal Piccolo. . . . [Amelia] wrote to Laura that she was suffering 'indescribably' and that the pain never let up. 'I am living two parallel lives,' she wrote, as so many others in her position have written. 'I speak, I laugh, I move about, and behind that person is another . . . I live suspended between these two conflicting states, somewhere in the clouds.' . . . She found no comfort in Carlo and Nello; indeed, their physical presence caused her more agony, with its constant reminder of what she had lost. She sat at meals in silence, counting: one, two, but never again three. What terrified her was the idea that the war would end, and everything would return to normal, 'when nothing can ever be normal again.'"

"The more the days pass,' she wrote to Carlo, 'the more I see the enormity of the disaster that has hit us.' . . . It was very clear to her now, as it was to many who had so fervently supported the war, that many of the men sent to fight had not even known where they were going, or who their enemy was."

"It became clear in Tuscany, perhaps more so than in any other part of the country, the *squadre* were not only supported by the police, army, and judiciary—who saw the fascists as helpful protectors of private property—but that serving policemen and soldiers were taking part themselves in the punitive raids."

"To demonstrate how open-minded they all were, the members of the Circle decided to invite two local fascists to come one Saturday to debate with them. Alberto Luchini, who had followed D'Annunzio to Fiume, spoke at length about the need for a curb on free speech and tolerance and became very angry when contradicted. 'At that moment,' Marion said later, 'we understood . . . that there was an abyss between them and us, and that nothing would bring us together, not even language.'"

"Writing in the monthly *Gerarchia*, Mussolini announced: 'Violence is moral, provided it is timely and surgical and chivalrous . . . private and individual ungoverned violence is anti-fascist.'"

"For Nello, his marriage to Maria was quite different from that of Carlo to Marion. HE was no less committed to the cause of anti-fascism, but the natures of the two brothers became more clearly defined with their choice of wives. If for Carlo marriage was a partnership, for Nello it means escape into loving domesticity with a girl entirely untouched by politics and who expected to spend her future in family intimacy."

"One day, while Maria and Amelia were at the prison visiting him, Nello was handed a typed note. He went first red, then white. It said that he had been sentenced to five years' *confine*, internal exile on a penal island. No reason was given; there was to be no hearing; and he was not told where he would be going."

"Built for 1,000 inmates, it was housing 3,500 in 'filth and confusion.' He was put in a cell, empty of even a bed, and given two blankets, a spoon, a straw mattress; his belt, shoelaces, cufflinks, braces, and tie were taken away. Bugs of every kind—fleas, lice—were rife. He would not have eaten had another prisoner not shared his food with him. In the jail were entire families of fathers, sons and brothers, picked up by the fascists in their trawl for subversive families in southern Italy. Some had been inside for several years, without trial or contact with their wives and children."

"In order for this model state to run properly, its citizens had to be educated not only to work in the national interest but to use their leisure time productively, not fritter it away as 'loafers, dandies and drunkards.' Leisure, as the fascists saw it, was no longer an end in itself, but a means of improving mind and body, of acquiring self-discipline and self-control. On no account, said one keen fascist organizer, 'was the worker to be left to his own devices in his free hours.'"

"But it came to Carlo to make the most moving speech, long remembered in the annals of anti-fascism. 'I had a house,' he said, speaking quietly to a totally silent courtroom; 'they destroyed it. I had a magazine: they suppressed it. I had a university chair: I was forced to give it up. I had, as I have today, ideas, dignity, an ideal: for these I have been sent to prison. I had teachers, friends—Amendola, Matteotti, Gobetti—they killed them.'"

"Much as Carlo's speech at Savona would go down in anti-fascist history, so would Nello's reply to Boselli. His words were brusque and clear. he would never, he told the president, 'renounce the fundamental rights and duties of a citizen,' for to do so would be to 'voluntarily paralyze my brain and my heart.' Furthermore, he was convinced that no real research was possible 'if it is not conducted by a free spirit in a free atmosphere.' A self-censoring historian was an absurdity."

"Because many of the political prisoners were intelligent, energetic and very bored, they set about devising ways to pass the time."

"The Church was given authority over marriage, religious teaching was made obligatory and crucifixes were returned to the classroom. In return, the Vatican recognized the fascist state, and Pope Pius XI graciously

described Mussolini as the 'man whom Providence sent us.'"

"The Italians were fed inconsistencies, falsehoods, contradictions, different interpretations, all designed to mystify and confuse, many of it transmitted in stentorian, martial style over the radio. It was forbidden to mention failures. When, in the early 1930s, the young journalist Luigi Barzini was sent by the *Corriere della Sera* to report on Sardinia, he was instructed to not mention poverty, malaria, or banditry for, officially, these no longer existed."

"As for girls, who had to be protected from the 'unnatural desires of English suffragettes' and the frivolity and worldliness of 'French coquettes,' they were made to dance, garden, iron and knit, and given 'doll drills,' in which they were taught how to hold babies the correct way."

"Since the new man had to be futuristic inside as well as out, [Marinetti] launched a crusade against pasta, saying that it made Italians gross, lazy, complacent and stupid, and led to pessimism and prostitution."

Carlo wrote to Don Sturzo that 'the European situation is a tragedy,' a crisis in which morality had failed, and power and tyranny were being blindly accepted, and it had taken an 'authentic barbarian,' Hitler, to awaken the continent. German Nazism was a harsher animal than Italian fascism, but these two animals were not, in the end, all that dissimilar."

"To many Italians, these were miracle years. Facism, with its Futurist aspirations, was going further and faster: the fastest seaplane, the fastest transatlantic liner, the most successful football player, the most skilled athletes. What no one mentioned was that behind the triumphalist talk, all over Italy petty tyrants ruled through blackmail and beatings. Italy had become a country of subservience, equivocation and graft."

"In the *Italian Encyclopedia* of 1932, Mussolini had written that 'war alone brings to its highest peak of tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it. All other trials are subservient.' Italians, he told the Grand Council, had to be habituated to 'the sight of blood and the idea of death.'"

"The Abyssinian campaign was brutal. The Italians used poison gas on civilians, to horrific effect. Abyssinian casualties kept growing, to an estimated 70,000, while the Italians suffered few losses, not least because Abyssinia possessed neither artillery nor an air force. The delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross described the battle scene as a 'veritable hell,' in which screaming and moaning women and children were 'dying like flies,' their faces made unrecognizable by the burning poison gas."

"In a letter carried by most mainstream papers, Pablo Picasso and André Breton were among a group of intellectuals who wrote that if the death of Matteotti had signaled the death of liberty in Italy, that of the Rosselli brothers had signed its death warrant in the whole of Europe."

Kelli says

First of all, I have to admit an embarrassing huge gap in my knowledge about the political situation in Italy between the two world wars. I knew that Mussolini was a fascist dictator, but he made the train run on time. This was important accomplishment, apparently (?!). That's pretty much it.

With that in mind, I really found this book fascinating. The determination of the Rosselli's to fight against the

oppression of Mussolini's fascist dictatorship, despite quite significant personal and financial risk and sacrifice, was (and is) very inspiring.

The amount of research that must have been required by the author, Caroline Moorehead, is quite impressive. While she may have spent a bit more time than I would have liked on the family history pre-Mussolini, it certainly gave a full picture of Amelia and development of her sons into dedicated fighters for freedom.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in Italian history and/or in the rise of fascism in Europe during this time (and its resurgence in our own).

Erin says

If I began this review by stating that this is a thoroughly well researched book, it might just become redundant. It's quite clear that no author has a finer tooth comb than Caroline Moorehead. Readers can be rest assured that the author wants her readers to **walk away feeling confident that they understand the historical record being examined**. Yes, I felt myself sometimes becoming impatient with some of the more minuscule details like who had a cold or who bought a wool coat in Paris etc, but overall I feel that I came away with a deeper understanding of the rise of fascism in Italy and how one family fought against it. As well as how they suffered for their strong stance against Mussolini and his fascists.

Recently, I watched a film in which two characters discuss what they would have done had they been living in Europe during the Holocaust. One admitted that he always considered that he wasn't brave enough and would have kept silent. When teaching "The Diary of Anne Frank" I always have that one student who reacts with "I would never have allowed this to happen!" A beautiful sentiment of course, but in reality those who protested facism/ nazism were small in number. So, **what makes a family or individuals speak out?** For Amelia and her sons - it went against all that they held dear regarding human rights. They weren't won over by the promises that were being made. "A Bold and Dangerous Family" isn't a book about the Holocaust though this is an Italian Jewish family, , rather, it's a look at "resistance" to new political parties and their ideology.

I am very grateful to my Goodreads friend, Elyse, for making me aware that this book was available on NETGALLEY. It is important that the stories of WW2 are never forgotten.

Thanks to NETGALLEY for an uncorrected proof in exchange for an honest review.

Lynn says

I was given a copy of this book by Harper Collins in exchange for an honest review.

Today's Nonfiction post is on A Bold and Dangerous: The Remarkable Story of an Italian Mother, Her Two Sons, and Their Fight Against Fascism by Carolyn Moorehead. It is 432 pages long and is published by Harper Collins. The cover is a picture of three figures, one woman and two men, walking away from the camera. The intended reader is someone who likes World War 2 history. There is no foul language, no sex, and no violence in this book. There Be Spoilers Ahead.

From the back of the book- Members of the cosmopolitan, cultural aristocracy of Florence at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Rosselli family, led by their fierce matriarch, Amelia, were vocal anti-fascists. As populist, right-wing nationalism swept across Europe after World War I, and Italy's Prime Minister, Benito Mussolini, began consolidating his power, Amelia's sons Carlo and Nello led the opposition, taking a public stand against Il Duce that few others in their elite class dared risk. When Mussolini established a terrifying and brutal police state controlled by his Blackshirts—the squadrists—the Rossellis and their anti-fascist circle were transformed into active resisters.

In retaliation, many of the anti-fascists were arrested and imprisoned; others left the country to escape a similar fate. Tragically, Carlo and Nello were eventually assassinated by Mussolini's secret service. After Italy entered World War II in June 1940, Amelia, thanks to visas arranged by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt herself, fled to New York City with the remaining members of her family.

Renowned historian Caroline Moorehead paints an indelible picture of Italy in the first half of the twentieth century, offering an intimate account of the rise of Il Duce and his squadrists; life in Mussolini's penal colonies; the shocking ambivalence and complicity of many prominent Italian families seduced by Mussolini's promises; and the bold, fractured resistance movement whose associates sacrificed their lives to fight fascism. In *A Bold and Dangerous Family*, Moorehead once again pays tribute to heroes who fought to uphold our humanity during one of history's darkest chapters.

Review- I have read other books by Moorehead and have really enjoyed them but this one falls flat for me. I cannot tell you why this story does not work for me. The story itself should be interesting but I just never connected with the story or the characters. As usual with Moorehead the research is excellent, with full details, and lots of first hand documents and interviews when she can get them. We move from Amelia's childhood all the way to her death with lots of details about her life and the lives of her sons. If you are very interested in Italian history during the rise of Fascism and the people who fought it then you may enjoy this book but if not try another of Mooreheads' work.

I give this book a Two out of Five stars.

Stephen Goldenberg says

There are so many books about the rise to power of Hitler and the Nazis but much less has been written about Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy mainly, I suspect, because it was more subtle in its brutality and nowhere near as efficient and powerful. Caroline Moorhead provides us with the best kind of popular history - a detailed account of fascist rule in Italy through a meticulously detailed account of the lives of the Rosselli's, an upper middle class Jewish family who became Mussolini's leading opponents.

Although, at times, Moorehead tells us much more than we need to know (details of the family's daily life and habits down to the meals they ate and their minor ailments) and the huge caste of both anti-fascist and fascist characters can become overwhelming, I found the book absorbing. It shows the fantastic courage needed to stand up to ruthless autocrats and is especially relevant now when we are beginning to see the re-emergence of fascist organisations in Europe and America.

Charles says

This is an interesting story of an Italian-Jewish family-the Rossellis-which played an active role in the years between the world wars in fighting right wing ideology- specifically fascism & Mussolini & his henchmen. It

documents the horrible abuses of human rights, repression of free expression, extensive spying infiltrating Italian organizations at home & abroad, and the use of murder as a political tool.

The main characters are Amelia-the widowed mother & her 3 sons-Aldo who dies in the conflict with Austria-Hungary, Nello who is an excellent historian but not an activist, & Carlo the restless energetic political activist seeking a middle path in socialism while rejecting Communism & a wide variety of other "isms".

My main objection was the maelstrom of characters & events which the author inflicts on the reader, & which are difficult to remember or even place in context, and the lack of explanation for many Italian terms for the reader who is unfamiliar with them

Stef Smulders says

At about one quarter of the book the author is in fact still in the introduction. Too many details slow down the story. All the shortlived magazines, ever changing meeting groups, temporary acquaintances are described in unnecessary detail. There must be better books about the fascist period. Some interesting details though: the intellectual influence of Mazzini on post Risorgimento politicians and the pre-fascist ideas AND activities of the artists of the Futurism movement. Will never look at their work again without some repulsion.

Barbara says

This story of Carlo and Nello Rosselli, leaders and heroes of the Italian anti-fascist movement, does more than simply tell us about their remarkable and too short lives. We read with horror as we see the populism of Mussolini and the disaster he inflicted on Italy and all too often recognise the parallels to our own times. The brothers (and their mother, and their wives, and their friends and networks) all suffered in their resistance to fascism, Carlo and Nello finally being murdered on the orders of the regime, before they reached the age of 40. They weren't action heroes, they were bookish and thoughtful academics. They had a remarkable circle of friends and acquaintances. This book needs to be widely read, as the story of Italy's early 20th century history needs to be more widely known.

Amanda Dровер-Hartwick says

I received an advanced copy in exchange for my honest, unbiased opinion. Thank you to the publisher, author, and Edelweiss for allowing me to review.

Caroline Moorehead uses letters, family interviews, and photographs to tell the story of the Rosselli family and their courageous actions during the first three decades of the 20th Century. Amelia, a girl who grew up in Venice, triumphed through many hardships to raise her three sons who grew up to become extremely involved in Italian politics. They refused to allow Mussolini and his squaddisti to deter them from standing up to fascism, which ultimately had an enormous impact on Italian history.

Amelia was born in Venice January 1870. She had an extremely lonely and tough childhood. After her father's death Amelia moved to Rome with her mother when she was 15. She met her future husband Giuseppe Rosselli in Rome when she was 19. She gave birth to her son Aldo in 1895, Carlo in 1899, and her

third son Sabatino (Nello) in 1900. In 1903 Amelia moved to Florence with her sons after Giuseppe and Amelia separated. She spent her time writing poems, short stories, and articles for magazines. As an extremely vigilant mother she was sometimes perceived as harsh. In 1911 Giuseppe fell ill, Amelia went to look after him until his death later that year.

There was incredible political tension in Florence at this time. Amelia became extremely involved with fighting for women's rights, in particular education. In May 1915 Italy declared war on Austria-Hungary, and Amelia's son Aldo left to join the war. Sadly he died and she opened a home for children of soldiers who had no mothers and named it after her son, La Casina di Aldo. Her other sons Carlo and Nello went to war, thankfully both returned safely in 1920.

Benito Mussolini took advantage of a broken Italy, created the Fascist Party in 1919, and a military unit called "The Black Shirts" to silence anti-fascists like the Rosselli brothers. Moorehead provides a detailed account of the action-reaction relationship between Mussolini and the Rosselli family over the next two decades. I had never heard of the Rosselli family before reading this book, and am grateful to have gained that knowledge.

My favourite part of the book was reading about Amelia. The book started with her being the star of the story, but as her sons become more involved with politics her thoughts and actions become less visible. This book is obviously well-researched, and it should have interested someone with a minor in history, but I was often bored and feel like it would have been better if useless information was omitted. I debated not finishing this book, which is something I don't do very often (there are only maybe 2 or 3 books that I started and haven't finished). It was the title that drew my attention and made me think this would be an exciting historical account of a "dangerous" family, but in actuality it's extremely dry and academic.

That being said, I do feel like there are many readers who would love to learn more about the Rosselli family and their impact on Italian history. I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy WWI and WWII history, especially if you're interested in learning more about Italian political history during that time period.

For more book reviews check out my blog: <https://amandadroverhartwick.wordpress.com>

June Louise says

This is a very riveting and informative book, blending Italian history – particularly the rise and fall of fascism – with a detailed biography of the Rosselli family, and their mission to combat the fascist uprising. Having been in possession of very little knowledge of this subject area, I finished the book feeling that I have learned a lot, not only about the family that the book focuses on, but also about Italian and European history during the twentieth century. Moorehead's language is easily understandable, and – particularly when describing the islands the convicts are despatched to (*il confino*) – poetic. Although she occasionally hones in on minute details, slowing the pace of the narrative almost to the point of tedium - it is effective in drawing the reader into the text and to get as accurate an impression of characters and events as possible. These details, along with the accompanying photographs, made the characters very relatable; by the end I had become quite fond of matriarch Amelia, admiring her strength and capability despite several family tragedies. I personally rate books on quality if, once I put the book down, I feel as if I have been transported to the world portrayed by the author; this was definitely the case with this book. There were suspense-inducing hooks too, which kept me reading (thereby sacrificing outside activities!) and I finished the book in one day. It is also the kind of storyline which one could imagine being turned into a silver screen

blockbuster.

As mentioned earlier, the only negative thing about the book would be the minute details that the author records, but I think they enhance its memorability. In its addressing the issues of ethnic cleansing and foreign identity, as well as the undercurrent of 'making Italy great again' by re-installing former gender roles and other traditional customs, the book also scarily carries relevance to global politics today.

So, in a nutshell, this is an exciting but poignant history/biography. Although the fine detail can get a little irksome, "non mollare" – don't give up. It is well worth finishing.

Diane S ? says

Leaving unratedd as I am Dnfing this after five chapters. All the information makes me head spin. Not at all connecting with this in anyway.

Sarah Beth says

I received an uncorrected proof copy of this book from HarperCollins.

This work of non-fiction covers the courageous lives of the Rosselli family, who were vocal anti-fascists in Italy during the rise of Mussolini. Amelia Rosselli and her adult sons Carlo and Nello led the opposition and dared to speak out when few others were willing to risk doing so. As a consequence, Carlo and Nello were arrested, imprisoned, persecuted, and ultimately assassinated by Mussolini's secret service.

Although this book is focused largely on the Rosselli family in particular, it spends significant time providing historical context for Italy's political situation at the time period. Not only does this help place the Rosselli family in their time period, but it helps emphasize the risks they were taking by vocally defying Il Duce. It also made it easier for novices to Italy's history in the early twentieth century to still follow this story.

That being said, parts of this book (mainly those providing background coverage of fascism's rise in Italy) were slow going for me. In the book's defense, I probably just don't have enough interest in the subject. The most fascinating portions of this book for me was the beginning, that covered Amelia's childhood, since it gave insight into what life was like in Italy for someone born in 1870. It was interesting to see how much Amelia influenced her sons, since she largely raised them herself. She was the writer (of plays and novels, etc.) well before her sons starting speaking and writing out against fascism. The other most interesting part of this book for me was the detailed description of their imprisonment on penal islands off the coast. Sentenced to five years' exile on two separate islands, the brothers faced "five years of discomfort, extremes of cold and heat, scant and unhealthy food, incessant curfews and roll-calls, little water, restrictions of every kind, complete political and intellectual isolation and crushing boredom" (190).

Although I knew going in that the two men were assassinated, it was still tragic to read, particularly for their surviving family, which included a total of seven young children between the two and their two widows. Early in their marriage, Nello wrote to his mother about life with his wife Maria, saying, "I feel happy

because every morning, when I wake up, I feel pleased at the thought of our long day ahead...Every evening I smile when I think of our shared nights. This is happiness, no?" (172). Yet the two men risked it all to stand up for what they believed was right, when many others stayed silent.

Greg Guma says

The Rossellis — Amelia and her sons Carlo and Nello — were literary and political pioneers, a close, loving family with incredible courage who helped lead the resistance to Mussolini and Fascism before World War II. But this is more than a remarkable family saga, it is a revelatory look at Fascism's key figures and tactics, the scope of its brutality, and the Italians who refused to surrender.

In this case, for me there is also a personal connection. After a trial in November 1926, my great uncle Lorenzo Lupia was "confined" to internal exile in fascist Italy. His crime: as secretary of the officially "dissolved" Socialist Party, he conducted "active propaganda" throughout Rogliano, defending peasant rights and challenging fascism. He was also part of the anti-fascist resistance, and following attempts to assassinate the Duce, a decree increased surveillance, clamped down even more on dissent, and established a system of "forced confinement" on remote and primitive islands.

?

Lorenzo was sent to Lipari, where pigs roamed free to clean up the streets and some of the locals viewed the political prisoners as a pampered "species of nabob." On the other hand, he also got to know other political prisoners, including Carlo Rosselli and Emilio Lussu, other organizers and disillusioned soldiers, and Francesco Fausto Nitti, nephew of the deposed prime minister.

Unbroken by prison, Lorenzo continued to fight for social justice and freedom. As head of a local peasants and labor organization, he helped to liberate land from the remaining baronies and opposed so-called "agrarian reform" that was being used against peasants and in favor of landowners. As a local history noted, he "actively fought fascism with all his might and with the means at his disposal." And unlike Carlo and Nello Rosselli, who were eventually assassinated by a team of Mussolini hitmen, uncle Lorenzo survived and thrived. In the first free elections after the fall of the fascist regime in 1945, he was elected Mayor of Parenti, his hometown, a position he held for the next thirty years.

Sam Law says

This is a true tale at once tragic, and hopeful. Tragic loss, for the family involved, and more grandly for the country, but uplifting for modern times, when we in Europe and beyond see our democracies increasingly under threat from without and within, to see that we can produce these brave selfless men and women, who stand up when others lie down.

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To be fair, the author does not set out to produce a book that will have you manning the barricades, or bursting on to the streets shouting "Give me liberty or give me Death". This book is a meticulously researched analysis of one very unusual family, living in very unusual times. I got this through the free "Borrow Box" app from my local library.

Told across two generations of a mother and three sons, from roughly 1880 to just after the Second World War, it is a story of courage, hardship, honesty, loyalty, moral clarity, and sacrifice. At times, the facts can get on top of you. There are indeed a lot of them, and a lot of relationships to keep track of. However, the real-life drama takes you on, and helps maintain the interest.

Characters:

The initial main character is Amelia Rosselli (nee Pincherle), a truly formidable and personally powerful woman who married badly, and had three sons before her estranged husband dies. She also became a famous playwright, which possibly is behind the families addiction to words and letter-writing (a lost art, today). Her sense of duty and responsibility is immediately apparent, when we read she attended him before he dies, in spite of how he treated her.

Amelia had a lonely and tough childhood, resulting in austerity and intellectual inquiry becoming a hallmark of her life. She raises three boys alone, instilling into them her values of duty, patriotism, and family. They grow into three very different characters, although the eldest (Aldo) is killed in World War One before he really gets started in life, and as a family they remain extremely close. The bonds are not weakened in later life, even after years of separation.

The lives of the Rosselli family, their friends and wider family circle, are explored in parallel and intertwined with the rise of Mussolini, and Italian fascism. Her two surviving sons (Carlo and Nello) take a strong interest in politics, Carlos being the more out-going and action-orientated type, Nello preferring to use his academic research to fight. They are spurred into actively resisting the rise of totalitarianism with the murder of their friend and hero, Matteotti, by Mussolini's secret police, for speaking in parliament against the fascists, and Mussolini in particular.

The author gives quite a lot of detail as to how this minority party grabbed a chokehold on power, through thuggish squadristi street gangs using their manganelli to intimidate, and a politically inept and supine Avantine parliament. Internecine squabbling, mistrust and some overconfidence meant they were too divided, and because they did nothing (the author points out several instances where fascism could have been stopped), they (and Italy) lost everything to right-wing nationalism. The echoes and warnings for today are unmistakeable. Fascism "was not inevitable", but weakness in King and government, and general fear lassitude allowed the bombastic Mussolini to get to a position where he was offered the reins of power. Pius XI said he was the man sent by Providence. The Church literally did a deal with the devil himself.

Carlo is the more extrovert son, making friends and being admired wherever he goes. Over time, and through hard work and challenging mentors, he finds his voice, and is an indefatigable source of energy and motivation to his friends, and a real and constant thorn in the side of the fascist government. He is arrested several times, and sent to various penal colonies, where invariably he becomes a leader and organiser. He plans and executes an audacious escape from his island prison, then joins and rises to the top of the Italian resistance-in-exile in Paris, where with this new-found freedom he rails against Mussolini through his writings and speeches, and courageous (and sometimes hare-brained) attempts at "direct marketing". He is absolutely a man of action, the clearest example being his rushing off to fight in the Spanish Civil War. He is a clearly a prime minister-in-waiting, having the intellectual vigour, political nous and charisma to drive himself forward. One of his biggest failings, however, is his naivety in choosing who some of his friends were. A resistance leader, he is too trusting. His prominence gets him marked by the Italian regime.

Nello fights his fight in academia. He remains in Italy, under close surveillance from the Italian secret police, pursuing his studies into Italian politics, contrasting for example the idealistic principles of the Italian

Risorgimento (the “Resurgence”)which united most of Italy into one kingdom in the 19th century, with the terror and fear of the fascists. No less than his brother, Nello gets involved in opening domestic underground newspapers (so many it is hard to keep track of, as normally they were closed down very quickly) to disseminate the anti-fascist message, amongst other activities, all of which could have gotten him summarily killed. While some people believe resistance should be active, the resistance of words can oftentimes be more persuasive and pervasive, as the written word lasts longer than the spoken, and can reach a wider audience. He, too, has come to the attention of the authorities.

The brothers, invariably positive in outlook, always good-humoured no matter what the situation, unfailingly “serene”, were lucky to have such a strong mother, but equally lucky to have found wives who supported them through all of these struggles, and put their own happiness and dreams aside for theirs. There were seven children in all for the two families though, due to circumstances, the little cousins rarely saw each other growing up. There is another familial tragedy here as well, for example of poor troubled Melina, Carlo’s daughter. The children were deeply affected by the absence, then deaths, of their fathers, and Amelia’s strength saw the two broken families through.

The brothers were shamefully ambushed and killed in France, on June 09 1937, by French fascists allied to and paid for by the Italian fascists. While Mussolini’s son in law has been proven to be involved, there is no concrete evidence that Mussolini himself ordered it, but it is hard to conceive he was unaware of plans to nullify the threat of his biggest political rival, and of his increasingly-renowned brother. 200,000 people followed their coffins when being buried in France, and untold numbers turned out fourteen years later, when they were re-interred in Florence.

There are lots of spies (no good ones) in this book, it is full of intrigue and double-dealing. The historic references are wide and varied, and thoroughly detailed. There’s so much about the cruelty of the regime, the hardships and oppression faced by ordinary Italians, when the dream turned into a nightmare. Lessons abound on the need for freedom of the press, for the Fourth (and nowadays the Fifth) Estates to speak truth to power, without suffering. This is how we keep democracy clean. The power of social Media has been shown (Arab Spring, for example), but the risk of “fake news” is increasing, hence the dire need for honest, unsparing old-fashioned journalism.

This is a book about lost leaders, a lost generation, but you can also see the genesis of the dream of a United Europe, which began to bear fruit in the EEC, now the EU, in these far-sighted men and women.

It is a story about the type of person I would like to think I am, not to lie down but to speak up, to speak out. The lives of this family show you don’t need to have that chiselled chin, or the derring-do of a superhero. These were young, family men, slightly overweight, always smiling. They were first and foremost intellectuals. But they were resolute, had the courage of their convictions, serious of purpose but warm human beings.

The lives and deaths left me truly humbled, and inspired. A must-read, for anyone interested in the sacrifices people have made, to allow us to live in the world we have today.

Angela M says

I got through the first five chapters of this with a little skimming. This was a monthly read along with Diane

S and Esil and we agreed to move to another book. I kept thinking that I wasn't loving it because I just don't read very much non fiction so I was relieved they were just as ready to move on. I felt a little overwhelmed with dates and facts and events and couldn't keep track of the people. There were in these five chapters some things I found interesting - the involvement of the women in the arts and politics, the descriptions of some of the places , especially Venice and the mention of Caserta where I visited the palace there a number of years ago. I like Amelia and also felt for her at times and I like her son Nello - he starts a children's library ! BUT It was just too dry, so no rating since I didn't finish. I'm just not the audience for this style of writing.

I received an advanced copy of this book from HarperCollins through Edelweiss.
