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**The Morality of Ignazio Silone as Developed through his
Narrative.**

Mary Margaret MacLeod

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Glasgow in
accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor
of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts, Department of
Italian, June 2004**

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Abstract

This thesis aims to examine the ways in which the morality of Ignazio Silone is developed throughout the body of his narrative work. The dissertation is divided into three chapters, each reflecting a different time in the author's life and each containing a certain number of texts, eight of which are discussed in total. In each of these chapters the moral code which was so important to Silone is defined and developed through the actions and beliefs of his protagonists: their devotion to man, their regard for the tenets of love, truth, freedom and companionship, and their desire to oppose tyranny at all levels are fundamental principles of Silone's utopia. Chapter One focuses on the period spent in exile, the establishment of what is referred to as his morality and the novels produced upon his departure from the Communist Party in 1931. Chapter Two deals with the novels he wrote after his return to Italy in 1944 and the critical debate that surrounded his literary style. Finally, Chapter Three focuses on the two works which were instrumental in securing domestic recognition for the author and which are generally regarded as representing the pinnacle of his literary career. Although the texts examined in this study are divided into different chapters the hypothesis behind it is that each work is an autonomous part of the whole body of Silone's writing. Through close textual analysis this thesis aims to illustrate that each work is of itself reflective of a consistent, coherent moral vision which was defined at the very beginning of his career and which remained unwavering for almost forty years.

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Closer to home I would like to express my gratitude to the staff of the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh and of the Mitchell Library in Glasgow, particularly for the quiet spaces they provided. I owe a very special thanks to the staff at the University of Glasgow Library for their tireless efforts and their diligence in obtaining most of my inter-library loan requests.

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I owe a great deal to my family, all of whom have been generous in their support and enthusiastic in their encouragement. Lastly, my greatest debt of gratitude is to my mother and father, for their unflinching love and understanding through everything. Anything I have achieved thus far in life is due to them.

This thesis is dedicated to my family

Declaration

I declare that work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Glasgow. The work is original except where indicated by special reference in the text and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other degree. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University of Glasgow. The dissertation has not been presented to any other University for examination either in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Signed: Date: 30th June 2004

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Note on quotations and references

All references and quotations relating to the works under examination in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the following volumes: Ignazio Silone, *Romanzi e saggi, I Meridiani, vol. I, 1927-1944* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1998) and *vol. II, 1945-1978* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1999). References to these volumes in the body of the text will appear in brackets following the quotation. The Bibliography is inclusive and does contain material which, while used for reasearch purposes, is not cited in the text. The style which has been used in this thesis is taken from the *MHRA Style Book*, 5th edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1996).

List of Abbreviations

Font

Fontamara

Vino

Vino e pane

Il seme

Il seme sotto la neve

Una manciata

Una manciata di more

Il segreto

Il segreto di Luca

La volpe

La volpe e le camelie

Uscita

Uscita di sicurezza

L'avventura

L'avventura di un povero cristiano

Memoriale

Memoriale dal carcere svizzero

Introduction

Lo scrittore socialista tradisce la sua missione se non rappresenta la sofferenza umana e non incarna il senso del vero e del giusto che germina negli umiliati e negli oppressi. Non mi considero certo esente da debolezze e da contraddizioni, e confesso senz'altro di non essere fatto di acciaio o di alluminio; ma chi voglia criticarmi prenda i miei libri. Solo in essi mi riconosco interamente. Le altre sono immagini parziali e ormai superate di me stesso.¹

This thesis sets out to examine the morality of Ignazio Silone and to show how it is developed throughout the course of his narrative works. His moral vision is a result of the religious experiences of his youth and of the political experience gained as a member of the Communist Party. Only after having abandoned both these affiliations - leaving the Church during his teenage years then disassociating himself from the Party in 1930 - was Silone able to define that vision. It was of a society in which man had a central role and basic human rights were respected: a society based on the principles of love, justice, liberty and brotherhood, a community of men that encouraged equality and respect. The experiences of organised religion and politics had made him aware of the corrupt nature of tyranny and his turning to literature was a means of giving a voice to those who still suffered under its yoke. In the novels discussed here, those unfortunates are primarily the *cafoni*, the peasants of his native Abruzzo. He was intimately familiar with their situation and therefore equipped to understand their plight. Instrumental to Silone's education as a youth were the teachings of the Church and of the Peasant Leagues. Although, as mentioned, he inherited a mistrust of organised religion and politics, he did not reject the central ethos of both these influences as each celebrated the value of love. From this was born what I shall refer to as Silone's Christian Socialism: his desire to reconcile the theological with the secular in order to establish his ideal community. It is the ambition of all his protagonists:

Questo tentativo, anzi, di conciliazioni tra cristianesimo e socialismo, questo sforzo di dimostrare come il cristianesimo stia alle basi del più autentico socialismo, sembra l'impegno più duraturo e ultimo di Silone.²

Central to understanding Silone's place in Italian literature is the critical debate which surrounded him. His return to Italy in 1944 after many years in exile was not greeted by the critical acclaim that he already enjoyed on the international scene. Critics and the general public were unsure as to where to situate him in terms of literary genre, and his style and treatment of subject matter were very different from those of his contemporaries who were generally considered to be the chief exponents of Naturalism and Neorealism: Alvaro, Vittorini and Pavese. Thus immediately he proved a problematic writer, of whom the critics made the first *caso Silone*. Critical reception of his work had been non-existent in Italy largely due to the fact that his work was not published there until 1945. Prior to this, however, foreign critics had already experienced Silone's writing and in general his reception had been warm, particularly in the United States and in Great Britain. Favourable comments were forthcoming from acclaimed intellectuals, Leon Trotsky and Graham Greene amongst them.³ Their enthusiasm was greatest for *Il seme sotto la neve* where the emphasis on friendship dominated the more political dimensions of the novel. However, it was not until the end of the war that more in-depth analysis was given to his work and by that stage he had returned home.

The dominant forces in publishing and in literary criticism in post-war Italy were Communist in nature and refused to pay any attention to the writings of one of their ex-comrades, a renegade who had openly criticised the Party and had refused to conform. Many of their criticisms were thinly-veiled personal attacks and were entirely unrelated to the literature, particularly those from Carlo Salinari and Giuseppe Petronio. These are

discussed at some length in Chapter Two of this study. The Catholic Press were unable to offer an unprejudiced view of his work because his idea of Christianity existed outwith the bounds of the organised Church and as such caused dissent. Of course, as will be illustrated here in Chapter Three, this reluctance would be removed emphatically with the publication of *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* in 1968. It was not until 1949 that the first truly positive voice was heard, that of the Geno Pampaloni, who recognised the increasingly moral content of Silone's work, to the detriment of the narrative.⁴ Italian critics were beginning to realise that they could not simply ignore Silone on the basis of divergent political or spiritual beliefs, or because they were unable to define his style into some literary tradition. In 1952 Silone published his first novel in Italy, *Una manciata di more*, and in spite of the venomous attacks from Communist circles, critics in Italy had to take note. Indicative of that was the dedication of four pages of *La Fiera Letteraria* to Silone's most recent work. The voices of recognised scholars were now heard not simply discussing Silone, but praising him.⁵ By 1957 Silone had received his first literary prize, the Premio Salento, for the novel *Il segreto di Luca*, but real acceptance came with the publication of *Uscita di sicurezza* in 1965 – that is, apart from the Communist Press.⁶ For the first time Silone received more critical attention at home than abroad. This shift in opinion is discussed more fully in Chapters Two and Three. Luce D'Eramo argues that in the immediate post-war period there was no such thing as a free opinion and that even the favourable comments from the afore-mentioned critical groups were politically preconditioned and therefore lacking in true objectivity.⁷ In response to the critical attacks that had been directed at his work and at his person, Silone remained quiet, sure of his purpose and in the knowledge that his work would one day be appreciated. In fact he benefited from the general lack of ability to actually define his style since it allowed him the freedom to write as he wished and to avoid

being classified or hemmed in by any literary definitions. Of this he had a lasting abhorrence, as Esposito illustrates:

Ignazio Silone, è risaputo, si disse sempre contrario alle mode letterarie, indifferente a tutti gli 'ismi' più o meno contemporanei.⁸

The second *caso Silone*, the subject of enormous critical attention, is the result of the recent allegations made initially in 1996 by Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali.⁹ Through a series of articles that were then developed into a book, these historians have alleged that Silone was a Fascist spy, working as a double agent for the Fascist police (OVRA), corresponding with a certain Inspector Bellone and informing on his Communist comrades from as far back as 1919. The enormity of such accusations cannot go unnoticed and the resulting debate as to the veracity of these claims – as yet speculative and unproven, though certainly serious questions have arisen – has been furious and intense.¹⁰ Silone had always been the standard-bearer for a certain moral resistance, for those who opposed all that totalitarianism offered and who supported the individual rather than the institutional. These allegations, were they proven to be true, might result in a global repositioning on this stance. However, at this stage too many questions remain unanswered: if he was indeed a Fascist spy, a betrayer of the comrades he purported to love, then why did the Communist Party in Italy choose to hide his duplicity?; why was he not exposed as such after the war when the Communists, particularly Togliatti, as the Minister of Justice, had access to OVRA's files?; what was the motivation for this double standard?; why would he have betrayed Gabriella, his companion of some time? Giuseppe Tamburrano has suggested several answers in the author's defence, mainly that he was working as a double agent with the full knowledge of his Communist superiors and was thus actually turning the tables on the Fascists and playing them at their own game. He has suggested that Silone was working with

Bellone to ensure the better treatment of his younger brother, Romolo, and to secure his release (this would seem unlikely since Romolo was arrested in 1928 and the allegations refer to a much longer period of Fascist activity).¹¹ Certainly, many of these accusations remain speculative and, as Tamburrano points out, some are quite simply false, but equally it appears that some have a basis in reality and as such further research and elucidation of these allegations is necessary. However, at this juncture it is imperative to state that for the purpose of this thesis, any possible conclusions reached as a result of the contemporary polemic, whilst important, are not entirely pertinent. The focus of this study is Silone's morality in his narrative work, and his literary career began after his break with the Communist Party in 1930/31. As such, any allusions in this thesis to the current debate are minimal. Silone made a very definite break with the past, and in his final correspondence with Bellone (a letter written on 13 of April, 1930), he admits to wanting to leave the past behind in order to focus on a new, possibly literary, career, and to a very serious ambition: 'quello che voglio è vivere moralmente.'¹² Alexander Stille has suggested that far from negating the validity of Silone as an author, or totally destroying his moral purity, these allegations, if true, would help to elucidate the reasons behind his political disassociation, his subsequent literary career, and the new man who emerged from this time:

And if Silone no longer seemed a man of moral purity, one marvels at his ability to remake himself. He went on to do exactly as he vowed in his last letter to Bellone, 'to start a new life [...] in order to do good,' killing off Secondo Tranquilli and becoming Ignazio Silone.¹³

In order to examine the moral code that is so explicitly consistent in Silone's writing I have chosen to follow the author's own suggestion: to pick up his books and to analyse the text closely to gain a more thorough insight into the man and his work. As shall be illustrated in the following chapters, more often than not it is Silone himself

who offers the reader the most accurate insight into his novels and the reasons for having written them. In terms of critical resources, much of this research was based on articles spanning a period of more than forty years and on the contributions of several respected writers, with particular reliance upon the critical works of Luce D'Eramo, Ferdinando Viridia, R. W. B. Lewis, Irving Howe, and Bruno Falchetto. Lewis and Howe's independent and unbiased works on Silone's opera were seminal, appearing as they did in the 1950s when the critical debate was at its height in Italy and abroad.¹⁴ Over the course of three chapters I aim to focus on eight primary works of interest but reference will also be made to several of Silone's works which, whilst not under immediate examination here, help to provide a more meticulous overview of the subject matter.

In Chapter One critical attention is directed towards the early years, to Silone's childhood spent in the Abruzzo, and then to his political awakening and youthful adhesion to the Socialist Party. From the outset the reader is made aware of a burgeoning social conscience which really came to life during the first two decades of the last century. Already visible are the elements of solidarity, integrity, and compassion, elements that are prevalent in his narrative. Equally present is the author's need to understand the political and social scene of his youth. The focus in this Chapter is on the three novels that were produced in exile following his dissent with Communism: *Fontamara* (1933), *Pane e vino* (1936), and *Il seme sotto la neve* (1941).¹⁵ In these novels the moral vision discussed at the beginning of this thesis and which would guide him throughout his life is delineated. It is based on the observance of two fundamental experiences, that of religion and of politics, and is supported by the tenets love, justice, truth, freedom and brotherhood. It is a vision which recognised the successful combination of his childhood influences, the Franciscan heritage of his

native Abruzzo and the political aspirations of the Peasant League. Through the main protagonists, Silone sought to illustrate his ideal: to establish a community of friends, of like-minded individuals uniting to form a brotherhood in which the laws of love and liberty would take precedence over the power of totalitarianism and corrupt, institutional authority. His attempt to reconcile his Christianity and his Socialism is discussed in detail. His goal was to establish a sense of community based on love, outwith the bounds of the organised Church or any political party. He maintained that any authority becomes tyrannical when organised into a hierarchy, and as such he wanted no part of it. This theme is reiterated throughout his work. The novels discussed in this Chapter illustrate immediately the tension the author felt in trying to reconcile these two ideals after having accepted the loneliness of standing on the margins. His writing is always personal. Here is where Silone first illustrated his moral *impegno* and asked the question: 'che fare?', the answer to which he would spend his literary life trying to find. Indeed, this is where he announced his opposition to tyranny of all kinds, where he devoted himself to the problem of man's angst and when he initiated his search for utopia.

The novels discussed in Chapter Two do not constitute a second body of work but rather a continuation of Silone's themes, a reiteration of his commitment to man and to the cause of the oppressed. They are separated mainly for analytical purposes, though of course the principal difference is that these works were produced upon Silone's return home to Italy after exile. As opposed to the earlier novels, here the characters are more mature, reflective developments of their predecessors and of their author. An investigative, mysterious quality is injected into the narrative, the number of protagonists is reduced and the quasi-adventurous elements of the clandestine life are removed. These are far more thoughtful novels, yet their themes remain the same and

the desire to emphasise the worth of the individual is paramount. For the first time since his expulsion from the Party, Silone voiced his disenchantment in the most openly critical terms in *Una manciata di more* (1952) where the full force of his scathing is vented in no uncertain terms. Equally, in *Il segreto di Luca* (1956) and *La volpe e le cameliae* (1960), the author sought to expose the flaws in a society in which the individual is exploited; where personal freedoms are limited and truth and compassion are seen as irrelevant. On a topographical note, the final work analysed is of interest because the stage is no longer the Abruzzo heartland, but a relatively wealthy area of Switzerland, indicating of course that corruption is global in nature.

The autobiographical *Uscita di sicurezza* (1965) is the most important testament and act of self-criticism that Silone gave the reader and for that reason it occupies a large part of Chapter Three. In this work he offered the explanation for his life choices and his literary impetus. Nowhere did he display his inner self with more honesty or more pain than in this very personal account. The reasons behind all the themes that are present in his work are clearly delineated for the reader, as is the genesis of his moral vision. The change in literary fortune is discussed at some length in this Chapter. There followed the final work published in his lifetime and analysed in this thesis, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* (1968). This play represents the culmination of a life's work and embodies all the themes and preoccupations which had been present in the narrative since 1930. It addresses all the questions that have been asked of Silone and by Silone, and emphasises a cohesion in his morality that had been consistent for over forty years.

Essentially, Silone's interest was in man. Each of the works examined in this thesis demonstrate that commitment and illustrate his search for an authentic

community in which man is of the most important value. That ideal community, that utopia, is not to be found in any facile political or religious posturing, but rather in the heart of men. Love, integrity, freedom, and the ability to take responsibility for our lives and actions are the cornerstones of the vision he sought to bring to the novels and which I hope to elucidate in this study. What Silone suggests in his narrative is that if man chooses to live by these strong moral maxims and in the company of equals, that utopia might not be so distant after all.

Notes

¹Ignazio Silone, in an article for *Unita Socialista*, 24 March 1956 and quoted by Bruno Falchetto in his introduction to the two volumed Meridiano editions of Silone's work, p. lxxvii, the principal source of reference in this thesis.

²Alessandro Scurani, *Ignazio Silone, un amore religioso per la giustizia* (Milano: Letture, 1991), p. 124.

³Maria Paynter, *Ignazio Silone. Beyond the Tragic Vision* (Toronto Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2000). See pp. 183-188.

⁴ibid. See p. 189.

⁵ibid. pp. 191 and 192. This acceptance will be given greater consideration in Chapter Two of this thesis.

⁶It should be noted however that Carlo Salinari and Indro Montauelli were among the first to recant their opinions and accept that Silone was indeed a serious writer.

⁷Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* (Verona: Mondadori, 1972). Refer to p. 85. For further examination of individual critics refer to pp. 254-291. See also Maria Paynter, op. cit., p. 187: 'When a reader projects a preconceived viewpoint on a literary work, rather than extract one from it, the interpretations that result are at best reductive and often enough entirely fallacious.'

⁸Vittoriano Esposito, *Attualità di Silone* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Urbe, 1989), pp. 24-25.

⁹Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali, *L'Informatore: Silone, i comunisti e la polizia* (Milano and Trento: Luni Editrice, 2000).

¹⁰Maria Paynter, op. cit. Refer to pp. 211-212.

¹¹For more information on this refer to Giuseppe Tamburrano, Gianna Granati, and Alfonso Isinelli, *Processo a Silone, La disavventura di un povero cristiano* (Manduria, Bari and Rome: Piero Lacaita Editore, 2001), pp. 15-16.

¹²Dario Biocca and Mauro Canali, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

¹³Alexander Stille, 'The Spy who Failed', *New Yorker*, 15 May 2000, pp. 44-48.

¹⁴R.W.B. Lewis, *The Picaresque Saint* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1960) and Irving Howe, *Politics and the Novel* (New York: Forum Italicum, 1993).

¹⁵It is imperative to note that for the purpose of this study, *Pane e vino* will be analysed in the form of *Vino e pane*, as in the Meridiano version.

Chapter One

The Novels of Exile

When discussing the moral standpoint of Ignazio Silone, it is imperative to begin by understanding what it was exactly that defined this standpoint, what factors were decisive in shaping the character of the man and his work. Equally, it is important to note that when using the term morality, there is no inference that Silone was adhering to any classical school of philosophy but rather to an inherited behaviour established by birth and by the events and cultural ambit of his formative years. In its essence, it is the desire to live a principled life guided by his moral vision of man's true place in the world. According to this vision the dominant force is love, this most important of theological virtues, here celebrated mainly on a secular stage. Silone and his protagonists search for a society in which friendship is of the highest value. The moral tension that is apparent in his work is the result of life experience, of circumstances and situations that determined his path and this tension remains consistent throughout. Silone himself had suffered greatly, having lost almost all his family at such an early age, then losing his second family, the Communist Party, thus alienating himself from all that was familiar and reassuring. He found himself alone, physically and mentally weakened, in a position to analyse his relatively brief, but full, life.¹ At the age of thirty, and in this state of malaise, he decided to make the decisive break with his past, to examine his life and conduct thus far, and eventually to express his new-found consciousness through the medium of literature.² In 1930, Ignazio Silone became a writer, his focus being man and his purpose being to defend man's liberty at all costs. His mission was to act as a witness, to testify on behalf of all men who had suffered at the hands of oppression, who had been excluded from justice and who had been

subjected to the tyranny of hierarchy of any form. Clearly, Silone had personal experience of this. His thirst for justice in an egalitarian society, his abhorrence and rejection of the afore-mentioned hierarchies, his search for honesty and true brotherhood in this world, his love for his fellow man and his desire to act according to conscience, all define what we might call his moral vision and his *modus vivendi*. Silone wrote not only for his fellow man, but for himself, in the hope of breaking free from the errors of his past (most particularly his blind adhesion to Communism and his subsequent disillusionment with the Communist Party) and in so doing enabling himself to live a more honest life based on a particular moral vision. The desire to live a morally correct life, based on truth and principle, inspired by experience and a crisis of conscience, became his goal. Silone's writing is imbued at every stage with a desire to stamp out social injustice and to find like-minded companions to aid him in the task. The protagonists in the novels have similar goals. He wanted to find a balance in life that does not depend on what others may think or do, but rather on what the individual knows inherently to be right, to live according to the maxims of love. After living through some very difficult years, the time had come for Silone to stand still and examine his existence thus far, to put the past to rest and to emerge from the political stasis with a willingness for self-examination and to accept responsibility. In short, Silone is the voice of the offended conscience, of moral indignity, of man in search of redemption from the errors of his past.

Fontamara

With this first novel, Silone embarked upon a journey which would take him through the fortunes of his times and lead him, eventually, to a greater understanding of

man and society. The need to understand and to be understood was a dominant force in the author's life. It was a journey that would lead him through all manner of places and situations, affording him many experiences, awakening him to the self and the possibilities of the self, and one that allows the reader to see that the strong moral principles of the author never wavered. With the publication of the autobiographical *Uscita di sicurezza* in 1965, Silone afforded the public a very real insight into the experiences that coloured his early years. It is an indispensable guide to the author's life and will receive extensive analysis in Chapter Three. The journey was a life-long pursuit in which the author endeavoured to answer the question he first posed in this novel - *che fare?* Silone's conscience was awakened and offended at an early age. Following the tragic earthquake in 1915 and the injustices that ensued, the misappropriation of funds and the apparent disregard of the authorities in Rome for their southern neighbours (more of which will be mentioned in discussing the later work *Uscita di sicurezza*), the young Silone turned to writing as a medium through which to express his moral indignation. One of the three articles which he wrote for the socialist paper, *Avanti!*, was never published.³ The intervention of an influential socialist lawyer prevented its appearance, thus establishing a dangerous and enduring precedent, the suppression of personal liberty and freedom of speech, the first real encounter of Silone with the corrupt power of authority. Rather ironically, this first example of corruption is from a Socialist source. His life's work would henceforth reflect his abhorrence of such behaviour and be an expression of his total rejection of dictatorial and dogmatic authority, his distaste for any power that seeks in any way to limit personal freedom. At the age of thirty, finding himself alone, having rejected the Communist Party and then, in turn, being rejected by those he had once called friends, Silone turned to literature in order to express the afore-mentioned abhorrence and to defend the rights and liberties of his fellow man. *Fontamara* is the first of many works in which

his personal revolt is delineated and it is here that the reader begins to see how his moral code will be defined. Herein begins his search for truth and balance in life, a truth which has as its premise the idea that every man is in possession of a conscience, and balance is to be found through the correct and constant management of this conscience. Therein lies the rub. Silone illustrates how, all too often, it is easier to ignore the dictates of conscience and follow the collective, sacrificing what we know to be right in favour of what is easy, of that which causes the least amount of complication and which is least offensive and disturbing to the governing body. Silone was not judgemental, or at least he didn't stand in judgement simply upon others, for his admonitions on social apathy were inclusive. He was willing to stand up and allow his own actions to be judged, in fact, usually being amongst the first to do just that. Mistakes are the privilege of mankind, and compassion is its gift: having acknowledged our errors or misguided choices, man is then able to correct them. Having already spent a considerable amount of time within a Party in which he no longer had any faith, abiding by rules which were no longer applicable and living a life based on principles to which he no longer gave any credence, Silone's personal experiences led him to rebel against any form of insincerity and brought about an awareness of the self and of the individual's role within society, an awareness which could no longer be ignored. With *Fontamara* the reader can see the genesis of this awareness and is witness to the experiences and inner torment that brought about the author's rebellion and subsequent rebirth into another way of life: he wanted to understand and testify.

The focus of Silone's position as an individual and as a writer is man, his role as an individual and then as an individual in society. Man, in all societies, must be nurtured. He felt the need to write on behalf of his fellow man because he himself was an individual in search of his place in the world, in search of that utopia where the most important value is

love, that same utopia which permitted him to continue to write what seems to be different versions of the same book. His life was devoted to the search as the autobiographical nature of the novels illustrates. This need to testify would accompany Silone throughout his life and, as will be illustrated, is reflected in all his work. He testified not only for others, but for himself, always striving to find his own place in society. His break from the Party and former comrades in 1930, and the subsequent solitude, was a break with a former life, with most of everything that particular life encompassed, allowing him the freedom to search for himself and find a more complete life. From being within a political body that had become more important than family, Silone now found himself alone and rejected by those he once considered friends (this break will be discussed at greater lengths in Chapter Three). It is important, however, to state at this point that in distancing himself from the Communist Party, Silone was rejecting the institution and not denouncing the principles that had led him down that particular, political road. His faith in Socialism remained intact, stronger than before, returning in its essence to the original principles that had initially shaped his political character. His devotion to the ideals of brotherhood was solid. This rejection of institution and not of principles is equally applicable to his stance with regard to the Church. Having rejected the organised Church, his faith in God was severely tested and remained the reason behind many internal conflicts. With the benefit of hindsight and a familiarity with all his work, it would appear he was always a Christian at heart, though as he demonstrated, his belief in Christ differed enormously from that of the established Church. Equally it differed from those within that Church who were content to wield the might of religion as a dominant force or potential weapon, using the fear of God - as opposed to Silone's belief in a loving God - as a means to control individuals and perpetuate the status quo. As Silone demonstrated, although his faith in God was tenuous at times, he (and his protagonists) were possessed with a desire to believe, with a hope that

there might be something better and a firm conviction that, even when their faith was at its most elusive, they felt that they were being pursued by Christ. This will become increasingly clear as the novels unfold. Both his Socialism and his faith are born of ideology, his cultural inheritance, the lessons learned in his youth, but they are not governed by it. The principles that they extol can flourish outwith the parameters of the organised body, be it Party or Church. This is, of course, the Abruzzo, a region with a long religious tradition, and also one of the poorest in Italy. Being intimately familiar with the area, Silone writes from the heart and from first hand experience when he turns to discuss the state of the *cafoni* and the habitual struggle they face at the hands of the authorities.⁴ Silone seeks that elusive balance to life through that which is familiar to him: the *cafoni* were his constant companions and the perfect examples of those oppressed by political and spiritual authority. Much of the time the injustices they suffer are a result of their own ignorance or their unwillingness to stand up to authority. With *Fontamara*, Silone began the quest for balance, seeking to display the worth of the individual, then demonstrating the effect that this knowledge has in enabling the individual to fulfil his role within the community.

Initially then, the reader must examine the tension that naturally arises when the individual is pitted against the collective. After all, the author was rejecting the power of the collective body, whether it be religious, political or social, over the minds of men, yet at the same time was striving for fraternity and community. In this seemingly contradictory tension lies the answer. As shall be demonstrated, the principles and laws that constitute the collective body are not at fault, but rather the body of men that exercises these laws in a corrupt and arbitrary manner. It is this blind collective that will be repeatedly criticised and

rejected by Silone, for it is responsible for the perpetuation of injustice upon the weak and defenceless and the continual deception of the poor and the ignorant.

First published in 1933, *Fontamara* illustrates the tension, confusion, inner torment, and desires of the author. In this, his first novel, he sets forth his intentions, the search for truth, justice, liberty, and community. This thirst for a utopian society will accompany the author throughout his life. The need to testify against all manner of injustice is potent; against social and moral injustice, against the inertia of the Church, against the corrupt political regime, against all those who would deny dignity and respect to the *cafoni* of this world, so that their 'dolore non sarà più vergogna.' (*Font.* p 10) The fact that the political regime in *Fontamara* is of a Fascist nature is almost circumstantial, in the sense that while in itself it provided a great deal of critical matter for Silone, his abhorrence of tyranny stretched beyond any one party or institution and had wider, universal connotations. This particular story is centred on a small, Italian village, but it has more global appeal; this could be the tale of any town in any country in which the inhabitants are ignored or misused by the governing powers. Once again, it is obvious that Silone is writing from what he knows, and it is a familiar story.⁵

L'oscura vicenda dei Fontamaresi è una monotona via crucis di *cafoni* affamati di terra che per generazioni e generazioni sudano sangue dall'alba al tramonto per ingrandire un minuscolo sterile potere, e non ci riescono. (*Font.* p.12)

The *via crucis* extends beyond the metaphor of the stream being diverted, hence the life force being removed, is the eternal struggle of those at the bottom of the social scale, those who are condemned to live the life of their ancestors, fighting for the right to life and to dignity, but never quite achieving it. We are told that in this village the social ladder is

limited to two rungs: 'la condizione dei *cafoni*, raso terra, e, un pochino più su, quella dei piccoli proprietari' (*Font.* p. 9), and this condition has remained unchanged over the years.

In the hierarchy that governs the village, the *cafoni* are of the least importance:

In capo a tutti c'è Dio, padrone del cielo. Questo ognuno lo sa.
Poi viene il principe Torlonia, padrone della terra.
Poi vengono le guardie del principe.
Poi vengono i cani delle guardie del principe.
Poi nulla.
Poi ancora nulla.
Poi ancora nulla.
Poi vengono i *cafoni*.
E si può dire ch'è finito. (*Font.* p. 29)

Given that this condition of misery is inherent, that the peasants share similar misfortunes and social standing, a certain degree of solidarity would be expected from those who 'in mancanza di beni hanno da spartirsi la miseria.' (*Font.* p. 10) Silone illustrates that this is not the case, that bitter selfishness and egocentric behaviour are as common among the very poor as among the very wealthy. At no time are these *cafoni* romanticised. He presents us with a village that has long been asleep under the covers of acceptance and resignation, a blind collective, unable to enforce change. The story of *Fontamara* is that of a journey, during which many of the inhabitants are brought to an awareness of themselves and of each other, and upon encountering the many obstacles set by the authorities, knowingly or not, a collective conscience begins to take shape. The most outstanding example of this transformation comes in the figure of Berardo.

From the outset, Berardo is presented as being somehow different, an instinctive leader and one who moves independently of the crowd. The villagers lend their names to a government petition, one that they cannot read, unaware that they are sanctioning the

deviation of the stream. When the official who has come to acquire the signatures asks them to add Berardo's name, he is told that 'non avrebbe firmato a nessun costo' (*Font.* p. 25), which immediately singles him out. He is the local rebel, from a long line of rebellious characters, and has been responsible for many acts of destruction and violence. Whether consciously or not, as the case is initially, Berardo understands the concept of solidarity in action where most of his fellow villagers do not, albeit a very rudimentary and unrefined concept, and it is this which sets him apart, which makes him a marginal character in as much as many of the older residents of the village see him as a troublemaker, one capable of fermenting revolt.⁶ He is a rudimentary anti-hero, militant by nature but unaware of his own purpose. Even at the end Berardo remains unconvinced of it, but what he does gain is a sense of yearning for clarity; he wants his death to have some meaning, even if that actual meaning eludes him. What the older *Fontamaresti* fail to see, and it must be said that Berardo, too, is unaware of this, is that revolt is necessary if change and justice are to be obtained, that resignation and despondency are an acceptance of defeat. In his naïve sense of right and wrong lies the moral dignity that will lead him to the ultimate sacrifice for the good of the collective. The youth of the village see Berardo as an inspirational force, his politics are simple and clear: 'Non si discute con le autorità.' and that 'coi padroni non si ragiona.' (*Font.* pp. 73 and 89) Berardo understands that the *cafoni* are of no interest to the authorities, that their lack of education helps to keep them in ignorance, and while ignorant they can be controlled. Yet it is too great an assumption to say at this stage that he is aware of his potential as a political force, for he too is a peasant, lacking in education and more importantly, lacking land. 'Io sono un cafone e voglio la terra.' (*Font.* p. 69) Land is the essential thing for a peasant, without it there is no existence, with it there comes the hope of a better future, if not the actual realisation of it. Berardo wishes to marry, but is aware that without land he will be unable to support a wife, therefore the object of his actions is to

obtain some property. Hence the reason he accompanies the other *cafoni* down to the Fucino basin, in the hope that don Circostanza's declaration that 'Fucino deve appartenere a chi lo coltiva' will be fulfilled (*Font.* p. 95). With the realisation that the authorities have once again duped the *cafoni*, that it was always a question of 'Fucino a chi ha capitali sufficienti' comes an awareness in Berardo that things will not change, that he can stand up against common injustice, but he is one man in the face of many, and his voice is not heard (*Font.* p. 102). It is at this point that Berardo meets a young student, a dissenter who encourages the *Fontamarese* to revolt, an encounter which, as the author illustrates, will have far reaching consequences, but which for now passes unobserved.

Berardo is the unlikely and to some extent autobiographical hero of the novel. In his situation and in his actions we are able to see the life experience of the young Silone, as yet unsure of his reasons for revolt but nevertheless aware of the need for it and of the awakening moral conscience within. Berardo knows instinctively what actions to take, but is not truly aware of his reasons. In all situations, up to this point, he simply acts. The true focus of his actions can only be discerned upon his arrival in Rome, when he will find a purpose for his existence, but for the moment, he acts according to his intuition and conscience, unaware that he is doing so. What is important, however, is that he does act, unable to sit back and accept the inertia of the collective and simply comply. In fact, it is impossible for him not to act. His morality comes from within, driven by a powerful and invisible force. As Berardo grows and understands himself as an individual, then begins to see how he can become an assertive member of the community, his true code and purpose will become increasingly clear. Before attaining this clarity, however, he must confront the many obstacles which are in his path, and which he must overcome.

L'agire di Silone (e dei suoi personaggi), sia esso determinato da aspirazioni religiose o politiche, trova sempre un intimo e profondo sopporto nella moralità che lo determina. Il campo del giudizio si restringe così a una semplice alternativa: un'azione è morale o immorale.⁷

When Silone talked of corrupt authority and power, he was referring to any regime that limited personal freedom, and this was not restricted to the government. His experiences within the Communist Party were enough for him to recognise that any form of government or hierarchy that becomes a dictatorship, though professing socialist principles, is an anathema. The soul-searching that he himself endured after his break with the party and the experiences he had withstood within it resulted in his devotion to man, the condition of whom should always be improved. In *Uscita di sicurezza*, the urgency with which he sets man at the fore is intense. Only when man is at the centre of attention and of focal importance can society live up to the highest moral standards. Where personal views and sentiments are considered petty bourgeois and self-indulgent, thus redundant, man cannot be allowed to flourish. Hence Silone's dissent with the precepts of Communism. The novel *Fontamara* is the first of many in which the author illustrates how every revolutionary movement has the potential to become a tyranny. Man must always be ready to fight for what is right and just rather than remain within the bounds of an infrastructure that no longer supports the ideals upon which it was founded.⁸ Silone believed that the individual must be recognised and appreciated in personal terms, gathering awareness of his own worth, then applying this worth to the improvement of the community as a whole. Only then can true brotherhood be achieved. It is this message that he instilled in the lives of his protagonists. The principal hurdles that Silone and the characters of his novels have to overcome are those raised by the authority of the Church and the State, both of which have subjected the *cafoni* - and thus the common man - to hardship and injustice through the centuries and which seek to perpetuate these injustices. Whilst people live in ignorance

and fear, they can be easily manipulated. Silone's moral vision encompasses authority based on equality and respect, a flourishing community of individuals, each one aware of the self and of the importance of others. This is not the community we see in *Fontamara*, but by the end of the novel we are left with the hope that this is what it might become.

From the beginning of the novel the reader is witness to all manner of betrayal, the deviation of the stream being only the first instance. The governing bodies have no respect for the peasants, take advantage of every opportunity to ridicule them and when it comes to matters of serious consequence, they are silent. Indeed their lack of regard for the *cafoni* is the impetus for the ensuing events: the deviation of the stream and the underhand manner in which the peasant signatures are obtained. Grateful that it is not a tax matter and they will not be asked for more money, they are happy to lend their names, a classic example of how their own ignorance, in this case, not being able to read, is their undoing. Here, as so often, ignorance is one of the greatest enemies of these people: the women who march to town to complain are unaware that there has been a change in government and do not know the correct term of address for the new official; the farce of the Fucino land, when the priest condemns them for ridiculing the new accord between Church and State, thinking only of his new, comfortable lifestyle and not of those he is supposed to support; the rape of the townswomen by the Blackshirts.⁹ In all of these situations, the peasants are abandoned by those who are supposed to protect them, but most of all, they are helpless in the face of adversity because of their own ignorance. It is this ignorance that Silone sought to expose. The inability of the peasants to act as a collective body is their downfall. Their lack of education, a state perpetuated by the authorities, makes them unable to act as one, and ultimately makes them turn on each other. The women who go to appeal to the local government official are all suspicious and disdainful of each other, even when they are the

collective target of ridicule. They are unable to see through the wiles of don Circostanza, their supposed ally, who is so corrupt that he takes the names of the town dead from the electoral role and uses them for votes (*Font.* pp. 54 and 55). His solution to the water problem is so devious and cunning, fooling the women with invented terms and conditions, that the reader is compelled towards true pity for these ignorant people. All the while, the authorities remain silent: 'L'impresario non diceva nulla. Lasciava parlare gli altri, e sorrideva' (*Font.* p. 60). The men face a similar lack of education and support in their quest for land. They go along with whatever they are told, devoid of the ability to question, ridiculed for flying the parish flag instead of the Fascist standard, for singing a hymn instead of the Fascist anthem, and chastised by their priest for embarrassing him, for provocation, all the while unaware that they are mere pawns, never intended for the promised land (*Font.* pp. 95 - 106). Both Church and State have abandoned these people, and the situation did not appear to be changing. Against this, Silone made a stand. His rejection of both institutions was absolute.

ci presenta i due poteri, quello ecclesiastico e quello temporale, per quello che sono sempre stati per i *cafoni*: il papa non dà loro che pidocchi per grattarsi, le autorità non sono che i cani dei proprietari terrieri.¹⁰

Each of these authorities is opposed to Silone's vision of a brotherhood of men, of true community. Yet the author does not reject law or religion. As mentioned previously, having rejected the Church at an early age, Silone's relationship with faith and Christ was under continual evaluation and was never an easy one. He allowed himself to be guided by the words of don Orione and the knowledge that God was all around and not necessarily confined to the hallowed halls of the Church. Don Orione gave him the strength to look for God outside of himself, as will be illustrated in Chapter Three.¹¹

As shall be seen, through a growing familiarisation with his work, this faith in Christianity is ever present (and ever tenuous) and fundamental to an understanding of his writing. The moral tension that is so often present finds a balance of sorts in the fusion of Silone's beliefs in Socialism and Christianity, creating a perfect and natural syncretism. The connotations suggested by the recurring motif of Christ hanging on the wall beside a picture of Karl Marx are not subtle. In *Vino e pane* the Peasant League gathers under the image of Christ and Marx (*Vino*, p. 367); this is the same image as described in *Uscita di Sicurezza*, 'Affisso su una parete c'era un quadro che raffigurava Cristo Redentore, avvolto in un lungo camice rosso e sormontata dalla scritta *Beati gli assetati di giustizia*' (*Uscita*, p. 786); in *Il segreto di Luca* this same thirst is pronounced: 'Sopra la scansia dei macheroni pendevano due oleografie a colori: una rappresentava la grande testa di Carlo Marx con la sua fulva criniera leonina, e l'altra Nostro Signore, vestito d'un lungo camice rosso, in atto di pronunciare il Sermone della Montagna. "Beati gli assetati di giustizia" c'era scritto sotto.' (*Il segreto*, p.365) Politics and religion are not abstract notions, they are felt keenly by the peasants in these novels. They are living concepts, understood in the most fundamental way and the doctrine of each should engender that spirit of love and justice that the author exalts. Each extols the virtues and importance of our fellow man, indeed, demands them, willing every individual to join the greater community of men. They support the foundations for Silone's utopia. Those who do join Silone's ideal community do so with some risk to themselves and ultimately make themselves marginals: Pietro Spina, don Benedetto, Simone, Rocco, Lazzaro, and, of course, Celestino. All of these characters are revolutionary saints: indeed, as will be illustrated, Pietro and Rocco had very obvious religious vocations when they were children, and don Benedetto and Celestino represent the very highest order of the religious condition. These characters are more concerned with the actual condition of man on earth than they are with adhering to any one

party or institution. In them there is a fusion of the religious and the political, the result of which is a secular messianism that allows for the possibility that true Christian spirit might be attained even from a secular position: the fundamental ethos in Socialism and Christianity is love for fellow man. The thirst for justice bridges all divides, it must transcend the limits of political parties and religion because the author sees these institutions and communities as being self-destructive by nature. They have deviated from the original principles that defined them and have embraced power – nowhere is this illustrated more effectively than in *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* (and discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis). In his novels there is a progression away from Communism because he saw it as becoming like Fascism, or indeed any other organisation in which there was a power structure. The Church has used religion to maintain a status quo, to keep the *cafoni* in their place. The appeal of the Peasant League when it came to prominence in 1911-12 was that the *cafoni* had a means of being together, of sharing their burden, of being with others who understood their situation and could offer comfort. Essentially, it was the secular church. The response of the official Church was to resort to underhand tactics to ensure these meetings were disturbed and any refractory ideas were quashed.¹² The Abruzzo is traditionally a very spiritual region of Italy, yet in *Fontamara* the idea of Christianity most often understood by the *cafoni* is entirely subjective. The behaviour of the vast majority of the individuals is hardly in line with Christian doctrine: they have become selfish through an over abundance of poverty, concerned only with the obtaining of land, strangers to the very Christian precepts of hope and charity and governed primarily by their ignorance. Suspicion has replaced these virtues, though it is hardly surprising considering the injustices to which they have been subjected. Those to whom they should have looked for guidance have ignored them. Berardo seems to be unique in his rebellious nature and his desire to have a voice, but he too is guilty of the selfish determination to improve his lot.

Ironically, when the rest of the villagers begin to awaken to the crisis in hand and the collective consciousness is stirred, Berardo refuses to participate in the villagers' agitation and stands apart.¹³ As others contemplate some kind of revolt against the authorities, Berardo's vision becomes more egocentric, he now becomes like those he deplored, concerned only with looking after his own affairs. After the Fucino land episode, he concludes that having principles and voicing them will not afford him the land he needs to support Elvira, and he makes the decision to comply with the authorities. Of course, in doing so, he is denying his true nature. Elvira loved him for the man he was, the individual prepared to stand up and fight, and the Berardo who abstains from having an opinion is not the one she wishes to marry. After the rape of the women in the village and Teofilo's suicide, Berardo and the son of the narrators of the story depart for Rome, in search of work and a better means of existence.

The feeling that what every man does is guided by a naturally pre-determined order is prevalent in the village, and it is that sentiment that lends a flavour of inevitability to Berardo's actions. The reader cannot help but sense that a greater purpose is in store.

È certo però che Berardo ha lottato durante tutta la sua vita contro il destino, e sembrava che da nessuna disgrazia si lasciasse abbattere a lungo. Ma si può vincere contro il destino? (*Font. p. 71*)¹⁴

Whatever he does, particularly as regards the possession of land, Berardo never manages to accomplish his mission, mainly because of his fervent commitment to friendship. In this alone, he is the ideal character to represent Silone's community of men, built upon love. He lost his land through friendship, and according to his mother, in some bizarre predestined fashion, this will be his ruin.

Se veramente deve finire come il nonno, [...] se deve morire impiccato, non sarà certo per il denaro, ma per l'amicizia. (*Font.* p 72)

Berardo is unable to hang on to the one thing he most wants. When he meets the young Avezzanese student for the second time, this time in Rome, his true purpose is clarified, and it was never that of being a farmer. Silone's understanding of destiny is complicated. The ancient Greeks believed in a determining force, *moira*, against which humans had no defence; the Romans called it Fate. In the world into which Silone was born, the prevailing definition was of Christian predestination, the idea that God had a plan and human beings were powerless in the face of it. This was not a concept that Silone could entirely support; he was not ready to surrender all control to a purely Christian authority. He struggled with the role of destiny in life, the age-old theological argument was not going to be solved by him. However, there is a subtle change of position reflected in his novels. In *Fontamara*, destiny as a force contains elements of the tragic (Berardo cannot escape his inheritance or his death) and is the result of the omniscient will of God. Berardo's mother laments his fate, yet somehow it is his fate that sets him apart: 'Forse la salvezza di Berardo è stata di essere restituito al suo destino. La salvezza dei Viola non è stata mai della stessa specie degli altri cristiani.' (*Font.* p. 191) In *Vino e pane*, Pietro accepts that perhaps there is some guiding force in life but he is unwilling to surrender responsibility for his choices and admits that 'se non credessi nella libertà dell'uomo, o almeno nella possibilità della libertà dell'uomo, la vita mi farebbe paura.' (*Vino*, p.401) In *Il seme sotto la neve*, Silone continues trying to reconcile predestination with the concept of free will, though not necessarily in a Christian sense. While acknowledging that perhaps there is some prevailing force that guides man's fate, Silone allows for that force to be secular. The theological argument is continuous, Silone does not offer any definitive answers, and the question of whether or not human

beings have any choice at all in their destiny is one that he continually debates. Lazzaro's comment in *Una manciata di more* is perhaps one that best reflects the inconclusive findings of the author: '[...] che non sia tanto importante di saperlo con precisione. Anche chi non lo sa va ugualmente dove deve andare.' (*Una manciata*, p. 280)

It is in his second encounter with the Avezzanese student that Berardo's true self returns to the fore, no longer hindered by the materialistic concerns that plague the *cafoni*. Equally, it is in these final stages of the novel that all the essential thematic movements are reinforced. Imprisoned along with the student and one of the narrators, Berardo learns that the former is none other than the 'Solito Sconosciuto', the thorn in the side of the authorities, a dissenter, a rebel, one who encourages revolt rather than resignation. The authorities are desperate to capture him, to put an end to his political militancy and prevent him from causing further chaos amongst the peasant population: after all, if the *cafoni* are encouraged to stand up and think for themselves, if they are educated in any way, they may decide to take a stand against the status quo of injustice. Through his conversations with the stranger, Berardo is once again brought to a crucial awareness of himself and of his potential as a human being. The details of the conversations remain hidden, cleverly Silone does not report on them but rather conveys through the young narrator that they were of a profound and purposeful nature. The young boy slept intermittently during the night, but when he awoke, he found the Berardo of old beside him in the cell. Immediately there is a sense of impending danger, that this awakening of conscience can only be disastrous, that Berardo's true destiny is somehow about to emerge. The young narrator realises that there is a new awareness about Berardo, that he has found a need to be understood, that this new-found friendship has changed him:

Da molto tempo non l'avevo più visto ridere. E il suo riso era una cosa talmente straordinaria che mi fece paura. [...] e poiché sapevo che cosa potesse significare per Berardo l'amicizia, ebbi subito un'oscura impressione ch'egli fosse perduto. (*Font.* p. 181)

Indeed, Berardo confirms this with his admission that 'Abbiamo fin troppo dormito' and in his philosophical statement that 'Credevo che la vita non avesse ormai più senso per me. [...] Ma forse può ancora avere un senso.' (*Font.* p. 181). The idea of life suddenly taking on meaning, having purpose, is one that shall be seen repeatedly throughout the works of Silone. It is only now, in his finest hour, that Berardo is able to come close to understanding what his purpose is, and it is in making the ultimate sacrifice that he realises it. When Berardo decides to assume the identity of the 'Solito Sconosciuto', thus enabling the true one to carry on his work in freedom, he makes the conscious decision to sacrifice himself for the other villagers in *Fontamara*, indeed for *cafoni* everywhere, and in this redemptive act he himself becomes a symbol of defiance and liberty. 'E se io muoio? Sarò il primo cafone che non muore per sé, ma per gli altri.' (*Font.* p. 187) It should be noted that he is not entirely aware of the effect his death will have on his native village, but his heroism lies in his willingness to self-sacrifice. In his moments of weakness, following the news of Elvira's death, the battle between the desire for life and the dictates of conscience rages strongly in Berardo, but in the end it is his conscience that wins. He will not betray his intentions. In his death, he is reborn as the instinctive leader he was intended to be, he has given purpose to his life. News of his death affects the *cafoni* of *Fontamara* in the most profound way. With the help of the 'Solito Sconosciuto' they too awaken from their slumber, and realise that they can no longer be abject participants in the games of the authorities and that they must somehow follow Berardo's example. He has left them the desire to question, to ask as they do in their newspaper, 'Che fare?', and has set a benchmark for future revolt.¹⁵ The use of this particular title is of immense importance. The

inspiration behind it is political, literary and religious, combining all the component schools that define the author's morality. Lenin's political tract of 1902 was entitled *What is to be done?* and called for the establishment of a national newspaper. This newspaper would be directly responsible for national unity as it would be a fundamental means of communication. The newspaper that is founded at the end of *Fontamara* has a similar purpose; it is a very political call to all who have ears to listen. The value of such an instrument cannot be underestimated in a world where ignorance is the enemy. This tract was preceded by a similarly entitled piece by Tolstoy in 1886 in which the author argued in favour of brotherhood and the division of wealth. Equally in 1906 Tolstoy produced another essay entitled 'What is to be done?'. The biblical reference is Luke 3. 10,11.¹⁶ All of these works ask the same question, as does Silone, and the answer to this question, asked at the beginning of his work, is illustrated throughout, and answered in the last work published in his lifetime, from the mouth of a medieval Pope: 'vogliatevi bene.' (*L'avventura*, p. 656). *Fontamara* itself answers the question by virtue of its existence; the narrators were able to escape the eventual massacre and live to tell the tale. Their ability to tell the story is the true triumph of Berardo's sacrifice. This is the moral code that never wavers. Berardo's sacrifice has redeemed the minds of the *cafoni*, even if the initial questioning and defiance is confused and beset with problems, and has unified the community in revolt.

Così la lotta di uno solo [...] diventa la lotta corale di un popolo. La coscienza individuale, ribelle, finalmente si trasformava, quasi di colpo, in coscienza collettiva.¹⁷

The tension that is created through the opposition of individual and collective finds its balance, each resident of the village is stirred to action, and the paper is the result. The

attempt by the authorities to destroy the village, though successful in as much as they kill many of the *Fontamaresi*, fails to destroy the indignant spirit that has been born in them, as the survival and presence of the narrators demonstrates. The rebellion will continue.

In his conclusion to the story of *Fontamara*, Silone himself found a balance and meaning to his existence. Standing without the support of all that was once familiar to him, he was free to see the spiritual dimension to his life, to recognise the realities in life, and to use his power as a writer to express his concern and love for his fellow man.¹⁸ The Christian symbolism in his work is undeniable.¹⁹ Berardo's sacrifice is akin to that of Christ, who for Silone is forever agonising on the cross in some kind of interminable Good Friday.²⁰ He is a symbol for all men, for all who choose to stand up to the forces of oppression and refuse to accept limitations on liberty. The choice of title for the paper has evangelical roots, the people's question to John the Baptist being interpreted in a more secular and contemporary setting, but carrying the same weight, and the allusions to the political works of Lenin and Tolstoy are inescapable.²¹ In his sacrifice, Berardo dignifies his existence. In abandoning the constraints of the Church and the Party, Silone was able to free himself from all imposed beliefs and was thus able to start again, to examine his life and to live by the basic principles of love and brotherhood that were established in him in his youth. This could only be achieved when once removed from all that had become familiar and by standing alone. He was thus able to redeem his own existence by testifying on behalf of *cafoni* everywhere, to awaken awareness in a global context and to find meaning in his own life. With *Fontamara*, Silone's moral vision comes to life, and over the course of his literary career, it is challenged and expanded, though its essence remains unwavering: his concern is always for his fellow man in a community of brotherhood.

Vino e pane

The spark of rebellion ignited at the end of *Fontamara* finds its immediate continuation in Silone's second novel, *Pane e Vino*, published in exile in 1937, appearing in the revised form, *Vino e pane*, in 1955.²² With this novel Silone pursues the goals and themes first illustrated in the earlier work, continuing on his journey of self discovery and in his ambition to rouse the minds of others and awaken them to possibility. The redemptive act of Berardo and the spirit of freedom imparted by the 'Solito Sconosciuto' set the scene for the story of Pietro Spina, the unlikely hero of *Vino e pane*. Pietro will now be the one to question the very fabric of society, the one into which he was born and subsequently the one he went on to choose, in an effort to answer the question 'che fare?'. Central to any possible answer is man, his place within society and his importance. Silone was forever devoted to the theme of human renewal, to the idea that man was at the centre of society and that therefore his importance could not be greater. By the end of this novel Silone will have produced a work in which the revolutionary conscience is dissected and displayed, illustrating that what he considered important was not Party or dogma, but man, man in the community, respectful of his brothers and responsible for himself.

The central characters of these books could almost be the same man at different stages of his spiritual development – realizing the importance of action (*Fontamara*), rejecting one basis for it (*Pane e Vino*), finding another (*Il seme sotto la neve*), and acting by it (*Una manciata di more*).²³

Again, this is a very personal work, one born of suffering and solitude. As in so much of his writing the author's own experience colours those endured by his characters, with the publication of *Uscita di sicurezza* really bringing the autobiographical content to the fore.

Certainly the resemblance between Silone and Spina cannot be ignored, and it was one that the author felt with a degree of melancholy.²⁴

la difficoltà che Spina incontra (in *Pane e vino*) nel comunicare con altri uomini riflette in buona parte il mio stato d'animo. I rapporti con le altre persone non hanno il carattere semplice, naturale e diretto che amerei. Quest'insoddisfazione mi spinge talvolta verso la solitudine e il mutismo. Non è misantropia, ma il suo contrario, un amore degli uomini che resta insoddisfatto, un bisogno di amicizia che non arriva a trovare il suo oggetto. Questo finisce con l'irritarmi e stancarmi. Comincio di nuovo ad amare la solitudine come l'amavo a 17 anni: è una solitudine tutta particolare nella quale si scelgono e inventano gli amici, e si legge molto.²⁵

Pietro Spina emerges as one who has undergone torments – both internal and external – which bear a striking resemblance to the author's own.²⁶ Once again the scene is the Abruzzo heartland, the 'paese dell'anima' of which Silone can but dream from exile, the familiar land of his childhood and one well adapted for the portrayal of injustice. Silone, like his characters, was unable to escape his cultural inheritance. Continuing along the journey, Silone again fights for justice and freedom within the community, inextricably linked to the land and the people who shaped him. His search for moral dignity and the truth is endless, a truth that, as we shall see, can only truly be found where there is purity of love and friendship.

L'Abruzzo è per Silone la scoperta di una condizione umana, fatta di miseria, di arretratezza, d'ignoranza, di superstizione e di soprusi, e insieme della condizione umana nella realtà più spoglia, più nuda, (è l'esperienza di Pietro Spina nella stalla di Sciatap), con la sua fragilità e precarietà (suggerite dallo spettacolo consueto delle calamità naturali), con la sua sofferenza (di cui è simbolo il Cristo crocifisso in agonia), ma anche con la sua vitalità misteriosa (rappresentata dal piccolo seme indifeso che la terra fa germogliare).²⁷

In *Vino e pane* the reader is witness to this search, and to the extra degree of honesty with which Silone is determined to find or establish community and the moral resources that form the basis of such a community. The initial, historical impetus of the story is the

invasion of Ethiopia by Italian troops; in Silonian terms, this is perhaps the highest form of injustice and the most severe form of limiting personal freedoms. Pietro Spina is on his return from exile, still very much involved in Party politics – although it is important to mention that the name of the Party is never established, it is fair to assume it is the Communist one – and eager to convert all those he meets in his clandestine role to the thoughts and ways of the Party. Upon his return he is disappointed to be greeted by the same, stagnant selfishness and small-mindedness he left behind, and his mission at the beginning seems to be to arouse the *cafoni*, in a political sense. What we witness, then, is a reversal of roles, a genuine enlightenment, a spiritual rebirth: Spina, who becomes Spada, then returns to Spina, is transformed. He moves from the position of the staunch intellectual, to one who questions every thought and doctrine instilled in him by the party, who then rejects all preconditioned dogma and acts according to his conscience, equipped with a new awareness and a new mission: by the time the novel is finished, Spina will live by example and practice what he preaches. By the end of this book, Spina is convinced of the superiority of the feelings of brotherhood and community and will reject the rigid grip of unshakeable Party ideology. Independent thought is of maximum value, a fundamental precept of the freedom he craves.

A distraught revolutionist, Pietro Spina puts on the frock of a priest, Paolo Spada, as a disguise for his then underground activity (Peter Thorn makes himself into Paul Sword); but then the priest's frock becomes more than a disguise, almost as if he were in quest of a second or renewed being, not to replace his political self but simultaneously to reinforce and oppose it. [...] The priest's frock becomes emblematic of a hesitant and partial transformation of being.²⁸

It is the manner of his gradual conversion and the experiences he undergoes along the way that offer the most interesting aspect of the novel. At no point can the reader forget the highly autobiographical nature of the text, for the process undergone by Spina is indeed

representative of the very similar one endured by the author, this novel being written only five years after his expulsion from the Communist Party.²⁹

The first indication as to what manner of man Pietro is comes from his former school teacher, don Benedetto, who tells us that his attachment to friends and the general malaise he felt when companions were mistreated was both unusual and worthy, making him the teacher's favourite pupil. This behaviour, at an early age, predisposed Pietro to the life choices he would make, illustrating that his thirst for justice would prove unquenchable, even when faced with punishment.³⁰ Friendship ranked highly on Pietro's scale, and this is something that remained unchanged with age and experience.

Era uno dei lati del suo carattere. Egli amava molto, forse troppo, gli amici. (*Vino*, p. 227)

These words are enough in themselves to highlight the view of the governing authorities in this Fascist age. Friendship is not appreciated, it is frowned upon for fear it detract from the party propaganda. Silone shows that this was also the view of the Communists, whom Pietro serves. For the Communists, friendship is discouraged and is useful only in as much as one friend can turn informer on the other.³¹ This view, where only the party matters, is one that Pietro will question and come to reject through his conversations and experiences as Pietro, as don Paolo, then as Pietro once again. Ironically, this revolutionary, who has so steadfastly rejected the Church, will make his most startling discoveries about himself and about others whilst masquerading as a priest, a disguise he is initially unwilling to assume. At no time, however, should the reader be under the misguided impression that Pietro regains his faith in the Catholic Church or hints at a desire to be counted once again amongst her devoted brethren. Pietro, like Silone, remains on the margins of the

fundamental institutions of his cultural inheritance: Church and community. Rather, he creates new ones on the periphery, where the Christian beliefs in which he has so much faith - love, respect, tolerance, justice, and freedom - are of the greatest importance, but in a moral rather than religious context. Never totally renouncing his faith in Christian truths, or perhaps more accurately his desire to believe in them, Silone and his protagonists maintain a kind of secular-religious stance, inspired more by the precepts of what is morally correct and, really, socially desirable, instead of that which the organised Church considers acceptable. 'Si ha solo quello che si dona.' (*Vino*, p. 499) The theme of mutual respect is never far from the pages of this book, and man is always at the centre of the argument.

'Mi considero fuori dalla chiesa da parecchio tempo,' egli aggiunse. 'Tuttavia, travestirmi da prete mi ripugna, è un'irreverenza che non si confà al mio carattere.' (*Vino*, p. 256)

More and more, in his assumed role, he will perform the real duties of a priest, duties that at first he is loathe to accept; as confessor to the dying Bianchina, counsellor to the superstitious, moral interlocutor to Cristina, hearing confessions (*Vino*, pp. 268, 289, 301-303, 481-484).³² Eventually, he performs these duties so well and with such Christian charity that it becomes obvious to Bianchina that he cannot be a real priest (*Vino* p 380). This is a damning indictment indeed from the author. In disguise, he is able to free himself and ultimately return to life as himself, Pietro Spina, but a Pietro who has made a long journey from which he emerges a very different man. As in *Fontamara*, the author's focus is man, and man in his most natural state, stripped of all institutions and reduced to the essentials. This becomes Pietro's focus, his discovery will be the quality of man in his natural habitat, devoid of party thought and left, once again, to his conscience, for it is here that the true self is to be found, in the realisation and acceptance of man's own

insufficiency. It is this realisation that can lead to disappointment. Indeed, no man is an island, and the community of brotherhood is as essential to life as bread and wine are to the Christian sacrament.

Pietro's journey begins with his return to Marsica, an exile in hiding, no longer able to perform the duties of the Party from a safe distance, and feeling the need to return home and thus take a more active role in fomenting revolt and encouraging the *cafoni* to recognise and then verbalise their dissent.³⁵ From the conversation between don Benedetto, the reactionary priest, forced into retirement for his unorthodox beliefs – his general dissatisfaction with the selfish state of man under Fascism – and two of his former pupils, who are classmates of Pietro's, it is clear that from childhood Pietro has been an advocate of action rather than passive resignation.

Non vorrei vivere secondo le circostanze, l'ambiente e le convenzioni materiali, ma, senza curarmi delle conseguenze, vorrei vivere e lottare per quello che a me apparirà giusto e vero. (*Vino*, p. 227)

This desire to fight for justice and for what he believed to be right led the young Pietro to abandon the Church and eventually his home in favour of the party, which seemed to be the only alternative.

Egli ricordava la sua prima entrata in un circolo socialista. Abbandonò la Chiesa non perché si fosse ricreduto sulla validità dei suoi dogmi e l'efficacia dei sacramenti, ma perché gli parve che essa s'identificasse con la società corrotta, meschina e crudele che avrebbe dovuto invece combattere. (*Vino*, p. 304)

The reader should not forget that implicit in Silone's idea of the ideal Socialist there is the perfect Christian, for both should share the similar goal of establishing a true community on earth.³⁴ The increasing secularisation of the Church was a matter of great distress for the

author. He believed it to be moving further away from the original precepts it was supposed to uphold, and therefore he could not participate amongst her brethren. It is imperative to remember, as stated above, that Silone struggled with his Christianity, remaining forever hopeful of the kingdom of God being established on earth, that man could live together in harmony and in true brotherhood, always expectant of 'l'eredità cristiana' and mindful of the idea that 'Il cristianesimo infatti non è un modo di dire, ma un modo di vivere'.³⁵ This way of living is inherently Socialist, as don Paolo illustrates on numerous occasions, displaying an interest in the *cafoni* and a disgust for the authorities that strikes the peasants as unusual. They have rarely, if ever, heard a priest denounce injustice on their behalf, and as such they are inclined to conclude that he is mad. (*Vino*, p. 342) The old priest's admiration for Pietro in his militance is obvious, even if perhaps he does not share his views in their entirety. Even in Pietro's rejection of the Church, don Benedetto can see reason. After all, the Church of Rome has long since deviated from the example set by Christ, and no longer practices the virtues on which it was founded. Don Benedetto himself told certain members of his congregation that their pontiff was Pope Pontius XI, which was his way of explaining that the Church had washed her hands of those she was sworn to defend (*Vino*, pp. 451-452). Yet in their rejection of the institution that is the Church, both men respect and defend the devout, the faithful, those who guard their faith in Christ (*Vino*, p. 311). For this priest, Pietro's decision to reject the institution so he can pursue the principles of brotherhood and love was a conscious act, and as such, 'Il suo socialismo è il suo modo di servire Dio.' (*Vino*, p. 488). He shows no fear in the face of Concettino's Fascism, and he refuses to bless the Fascist standard, because 'sono anche un cristiano all'antica e non posso agire contro la mia coscienza,' and he does not tremble from threatening words: 'prendine nota, non ho paura delle parole.' (*Vino*, pp. 219 & 228) Conscience is the great leveller, and it is this conscience that will oversee Pietro's

conversion. In his conversation with Nunzio, Pietro condemns his old friend's abject acceptance of the state of affairs in the country. He displays a certain arrogance in considering himself above that kind of resigned mentality and urges Nunzio to reconsider his opinions, to open himself to new possibilities and to re-examine his accepted truths: 'Ah, com'è miserabile un'intelligenza che non serve che a fabbricare alibi per far tacere la coscienza.' (*Vino*, pp. 240-241) At this stage, Pietro is still fighting with his inner self, still true to the Party yet nursing the genesis of a more independent thought, not quite ready to forgo blind political action in favour of more mature and patient thought. This is the genesis of the change he will undergo at the end of the novel, when he will sacrifice his political ideology in favour of the ideals of companionship and community. How is it possible, Pietro asks, that two who were so similar and such good friends in their youth, could now have such very different views? Most importantly, Pietro urges Nunzio to consider the concept of freedom and all that it entails. Although an outlaw, living in hiding, Pietro feels that he is free, for his mind is his own, and he is really living. He questions whether Nunzio can honestly say the same. Pietro's words, at this juncture, set the scene for his future conversion and for the new awareness that he will gradually attain, and are thus worth quoting in full.

Non bisogna aspettare. [...] Bisogna agire. Bisogna dire: Basta, da oggi.

[...]

Si può vivere anche in paese di dittatura ed essere libero, a una semplice condizione, basta lottare contro la dittatura. L'uomo che pensa con la propria testa e conserva il suo cuore incorrotto, è libero. L'uomo che lotta per ciò che egli ritiene giusto, è libero.

[...]

La libertà bisogna prendersela, ognuno la porzione che può. (*Vino*, p. 242)

Interestingly, at this point Pietro is still preaching Party doctrine, to which he has adhered in his time with the Communists, and while essentially a Socialist and Christian

position, it is still very much learned behaviour, and as such not really his own. The true significance of freedom, of brotherhood, and of love is only to emerge when Pietro is able to withdraw from the relative protection of his learned behaviour and begin to question his own intellectual stance. It is only then, as he flees for his life on the harsh mountain, that he really experiences the kind of freedom he has been preaching. In doing so, he discovers many discrepancies in his thought, in his Party, and in his beliefs. Where once his conversation was full of moral condemnation and righteousness, it is now in his letter to Nunzio that he begins to examine his own choices in life and to see where the errors lie.

A rifletterci bene, forse l'origine delle mie angosce è in questa infrazione all'antica Legge, nella mia abitudine di vivere tra i caffè, le biblioteche e gli alberghi, nell'aver rotto la catena che per secoli aveva legato i miei antenati alla terra. (*Vino*, p. 290)

A return to the land, to what is real and natural, to what is familiar, is what is needed for Pietro to discover himself. The initial picture, then, is one of a man sure of his cause and his rebellion, one who has returned to instil in the peasants the Party line, to rouse them to activity, to awaken them to the injustices committed and perpetuated by the two principle bodies of power, Church and State, and a man who advocates action over resignation. He was the Party intellectual. Now, as don Paolo, it becomes clear how this attitude changes, how Pietro becomes more introspective and questioning, how he acquires an awareness of himself and his fellow man that has been hitherto hidden under the blanket of Communism, and eventually how he emerges from his experiences with a far more lucid vision of his role as an individual, and as an individual within a truly free community.

Pietro Spina [...] vi compie una sorte di odissea, che è per lui stesso una capitale esperienza formativa che lo riconduce alle origini della sua vocazione e gli permette di scoprire nella stessa passione vitale che ha fatto di lui un 'déraciné', e un ribelle, la radice stessa della sua qualità d'uomo.³⁶

Pietro Spina is engaged at all times in a battle against political, social and moral inertia, the fight for liberty knows no cease-fire, hence his adhesion to action, 'bisogna agire', to the struggle. His conversation with Nunzio is the first of many dialogues in which he tries to convert those who are resigned to their lot. The initial dialogue is governed by the Party, by all he has learned from them, and from their policies, yet in his conversion to a simpler way of life, Pietro does not shed all that he has learned, he does not come to deny all the principles instilled in him from years within a political group. Rather, he enhances these principles, removes them from the realms of theoretical rhetoric, and places them in a reality founded on experience. His participation in the lives of the *cafoni*, in the guise of the priest, affords him an opportunity to witness life as it is, to see first hand the injustices they endure and to try to find more practical and real solutions to their situation, solutions that lie outside the parameters of political or religious institutions. 'Nel nostro tempo sono molti i modi di servire Dio.' (*Vino*, p. 488) It is not in preaching the Party doctrine that Pietro will be able to change things, if indeed that is at all possible, but in living his beliefs. In his advice to Cristina, when she contemplates entering the convent, is the counsel which he himself should heed.

Non crede che ogni creatura dovrebbe vivere e lottare tra le altre creature, piuttosto che rinchiudersi in una torre d'avorio.? (*Vino*, p. 302)

For too long the party has been his own 'ivory tower', within which he could live by all the principles and guidelines set forth by the hierarchy, without ever testing their actual validity. There ensues a period of questioning, of reflection, when in trying to live by his principles, or the Party principles, Pietro is able to see the ineffective nature of theory and the necessity for practicality. He discovers that it is not his principles that he must reject,

but rather his interpretation of them, and thus convert theory into action. As don Paolo, inspired by his conversations with Cristina and the sheer honesty she portrays, Pietro begins to feel guilty of his life-style, he is shamed into an examination of his conscience, and the awareness of self that this shame produces is contained within his journal. This introspection leads him into a moral dilemma: should he now abandon the Party as he had already abandoned the Church? Has the Party itself become like any other institution? Can he continue to be a member of a group in which he has no longer any faith?

È possibile partecipare alla vita politica, mettersi al servizio di un partito e rimanere sincero? La verità non è diventata, per me, una verità di partito? La giustizia, una giustizia di partito? L'interesse dell'organizzazione non ha finito col soverchiare, anche in me, tutti i valori morali, disprezzati come pregiudizi piccolo-borghesi, e non è diventato esso il valore supremo? (*Vino*, p. 305)

The questions now burning in his mind are an echo of those so familiar to his author, and represent the real beginning of his rebirth. As was the case for Silone himself, the great discovery for Spina is that this conversion comes from a fusion of all his beliefs, Christian and Socialist, finding fruition through the dictates of conscience, something that the party seems to have forgotten.³⁷

La coscienza, dunque, è stata per lui la possibilità di salvaguardare quei principi che il partito, come affermerà nel romanzo *Una manciata di more*, aveva finito con l'abrogare.³⁸

For Spina, as for Spada (and as for Silone), the essential moment of illumination comes from the idea that 'Per salvarsi bisogna rischiare.' (*Vino*, p. 499) Herein is contained the idea of salvation emanating from risk that pervades the novel, the notion that it is in questioning all that has been learned and accepted as fact that the individual comes to discover that which is important, that in putting faith on the line and by examining

conscience that individual is then rendered open to the truth. Interestingly, at this stage this thought is written in the secret diary he keeps for Cristina and not actually spoken aloud to any companions, indicating that although Spina is moving towards living by his newly developed principles of brotherhood and community, rejecting the Party etc., there is some lingering reticence and it is this that will be fully dispelled in the subsequent novel.

In ogni tempo e in qualunque società l'atto supremo dall'anima è di darsi, di perdersi per trovarsi. Si ha solo quello che si dona. (*Vino*, p. 499)

Vino e pane impinges upon this idea. In his initial rejection of the Church, then in his rejection of the Party, Spina is able to see that being nominally within the institutional framework is not enough, that he can better serve his ideals by being true to the dictates of his conscience rather than belonging to an official body. This realisation finds clarity after his visit to the Party hierarchy in Rome, during which he reassumes his true identity. All his attempts to rouse the *cafoni* to action have been frustrated, to the point that this instigator of revolt now begins to wonder, 'Forse essi hanno ragione.' (*Vino*, p. 354) After all, nothing ever seems to change for these people, the eternal downtrodden, and rhetoric seems out of place in their everyday struggle to have enough to eat and drink, to survive. What good is politics to them? The truths that have been so familiar for so long now sound hollow, and the attitude of the Party will serve to confirm this. Instead of supporting action in the immediate area, they want to send Pietro abroad again. His refusal is adamant, his purpose must be to act as an example, to stay and fight on the literal battlefield and not return to clandestine exile. 'Ormai sono stufo di aspettare.' (*Vino*, p. 405) The threat of expulsion holds no weight, for Spina's discovery is that the idea will outlive the institution.

'Rompere col partito' disse 'significa abbandonare l'idea.'
'È un ragionamento sbagliato' disse Pietro. 'Sarebbe come mettere la Chiesa prima di Cristo.' (*Vino*, p. 406)³⁹

The rejection of all that is familiar is never an easy option, and rarely occurs without firstly being preceded by moral dilemma, a situation with which the author was intimately familiar.⁴⁰ Everything that Spina has witnessed in the Abruzzo has made it impossible for him to remain a Party man, but his leaving is prolonged by his youthful exuberance for all that once was. Uliva, once a militant activist in the Party, recognises this exuberance in Pietro Spina, and feels pity for him. He too once shared his illusions, but they have been crushed under the weight of reality, replaced by resignation and despair. Pietro may refuse to give in to the despair of the older man, but he cannot avoid the wisdom of his words, that the Party, if ever in power, would become like any other government and perpetuate its own share of misery, a conviction that Silone was forever expanding. The idea that power corrupts is not restricted to the political sphere. Silone is talking of all kinds of power when it is wielded in an irresponsible manner, usually in an attempt to limit freedom. Disillusionment cannot be allowed to lead to despair and resignation, for these latter emotions are devoid of hope, and play into the hands of the enemy. Without hope for man Pietro can see no reason to fight.⁴¹

se non credessi nella libertà dell'uomo, o almeno nella possibilità della libertà dell'uomo, la vita mi farebbe paura. (*Vino*, p. 401)

It is Pietro's unswerving devotion to man that instils faith and hope in those he encounters, most especially in don Benedetto, who looks upon society and life under the Fascist regime with increasing despair.⁴²

Intanto, quando mi sento più avvilito, io mi ripeto: tu non servi a nulla, tu sei un fallito, ma c'è Pietro, vi sono i suoi amici, vi sono anche gli sconosciuti dei gruppi clandestini. Te lo confesso: non ho altra consolazione. (*Vino*, p. 463)

The sense that Pietro is somehow a redemptive figure is constantly in the reader's mind. From his childhood aspiration of wishing to be a saint – that is, an active one – Pietro becomes likened to one at several moments in the novel, most especially by don Benedetto, 'Non sarebbe la prima volta che il Padre Eterno è costretto a nascondersi e assumere pseudonimi' (*Vino*, p. 459), and in his unselfish devotion to the people and his determination to live amongst them, the Christ-like imagery is all too apparent.⁴³ This is an imagery that will be discussed further in *Il seme sotto la neve*, and indeed in all the following works, in which Silone illustrates the Christ-like nature of all of his protagonists and their devotion to the cause of love. Luigi Murica embodies all that Silone has discussed through Pietro Spina, and it is his sacrifice that ultimately inspires Pietro to reject the Party and live by his conscience.

The mental turmoil which followed, when he became aware of the wrong he was thus doing his former comrades was actually condoned by the authorities and would go unpunished, was one of the factors which led Spina to reject the party code as a basis for moral judgements. The party code would change according to the party in power, but morality should be based on something more stable.⁴⁴

A one-time member of the Party, then informant for them, Luigi realised the horror and injustice of his actions and fled. In his desire to right the wrongs of his past and make amends for the damage inflicted upon friends, Luigi risks alienation and ultimately his life. He was determined to find a more moral way of life, but in the end his life is lost. In Luigi's example Pietro then finds the courage to continue in his pursuit for freedom and justice, and the courage to seek this community as himself, no longer in disguise. The Christian rite of

sharing bread and wine at Luigi's funeral is obvious in itself, but represents more than the religious ritual and faith (*Vino*, pp. 503-507). It is symbolic of a greater idea, in Silonian terms, in that the political sacrifice made by Luigi is sanctioned in religious terms.⁴⁵ His sacrifice is redemptive not only of himself, but extends to those around him, particularly Pietro, who is now compelled to follow his example. The fusion of the Christian and the political is now complete.⁴⁶

'Se noi vivremo come lui' disse don Paolo 'sarà come se lui non fosse morto. Dovremo stare assieme e non aver paura.' (*Vino*, p. 503)

Assuming the risk of alienation and death, Pietro reveals his true identity, but that identity is somewhat changed within itself. The experience of being don Paolo has left its mark on the protagonist, and as such he moves forward in a more determined way: no longer seeking to act in an arbitrary manner, we shall see that Pietro's urge to action will henceforth be tempered by the contemplative spirit attained during his experiences as don Paolo, his rebellious nature now accompanied by a more reflective instinct. This journey has been necessary in order to reach the moral clarity sought by both the protagonist and his author, to highlight the need for action and to reinforce Silone's determination to act on behalf of man against the machine. The journey leads Pietro back to man. In Pietro's sacrifice, we are able to understand Berardo's, and to realise that each sacrifice is inspired by an offended conscience and the desire not to betray fellow man. Although the novel ends on a note of despair, with Pietro's flight to the hills and Cristina's sacrificial death, the character who emerges in *Il seme sotto la neve* is the result of these developments, one who is no longer afraid to act according to his conscience and who stands outwith any organised group, and one who is finally able to accomplish true community through the lessons and

experiences of *Vino e pane*. With freedom comes great responsibility, and it is with this in mind that Spina is able to develop and live by his chosen ways in the following novel: once again, he answers the question of what to do with the simple establishment of a community based on love and friendship. Only now is he really ready to risk all.

Il seme sotto la neve

With *Il seme sotto la neve*, a more mature Pietro Spina, and thus Silone, continues on his journey towards his own idea of utopia, the 'paese dell'anima'; "un paese" egli dice infine "non sono le case le strade le botteghe, ma le persone che vi abitano. Il paese più bello è dove risiedono i migliori amici, là è la vera patria." (*Il seme*, p. 921). Given that this is the third novel produced whilst in exile, Silone is certainly qualified to write of the search for home and for 'patria'.⁴⁷ This utopia for which he searches always seems so far away, so unattainable, yet even for the reader it becomes symbolic of the good of which man is capable. As D'Eramo illustrates, Silone infers that this style of living should at least be attempted, however improbable it might seem, and that living in the company of true friends is a goal to which all might aspire. The imaginary utopia of which Silone speaks is idealistic, certainly, but that does not necessarily make it impossible to achieve.⁴⁸ Pietro Spina is once again the autobiographical protagonist, though no longer is he the desperate and confused outlaw who fled to the hills at the end of the earlier novel. Pietro is now a more resolute and defined character, eager to embrace the new philosophy and who, wittingly or not, is the catalytic force in reshaping the thoughts, deeds, and indeed the very characters of those with whom he now comes into contact. After the rather disconsolate air that prevailed at the end of *Vino e pane*, this novel brings the protagonist to a more content

philosophy and way of life, one in which political field is of little importance when compared to the moral one. Ultimately Pietro seeks to establish a community of friendship and brotherhood built upon the unswerving principles of truth, justice, and liberty, all of which constitute his moral code. Here the hero is able to return to basics, to reinvent himself by metaphorically returning to seed, stripping off the layers of learned behaviour and doctrine, and allowing the bare self to be vulnerable and influenced by all that now surrounds him. This is the kind of liberty for which Pietro has been searching, the simplicity which emerges from a comprehensive understanding of the words he once wrote to Cristina: all a man really has is the amount of himself he is prepared to offer. Now Pietro can truly give of himself.

A quel mondo [Italy] Pietro ne contrappone un altro, ben più disinvolto, molto meno legato ai lacci dell'individualismo e dell'egoismo, ma molto più impegnato e responsabilizzante. Un mondo fondato su una onestà indifferente alla preoccupazione del 'che dirà la gente?', dove gli atti generosi saranno gratuiti, non legati alla minaccia d'un castigo o all'idea d'un premio, nemmeno nell'altro mondo; dove la solidarietà non sarà quella del pollaio⁴⁹

Following the example of Luigi Murica, Pietro no longer tries to preach Socialism to the unconverted - the reader must not forget that he is still an outlaw in the eyes of the government and a traitor in the eyes of the Party - but seeks instead to live by the maxims of his creed, really established in its definitive form (and followed by the author for the duration of his life) and thus, to lead by example. This is a more reflective period in Silone's writing, the sense of urgency that was so present in the previous novels is missing in this work, replaced by a more mature desire for action governed by contemplation. With this novel Silone allows his protagonist to live freely and by the dictates of conscience, the dictates that were emphasised through his relationship with Luigi.

Qui Pietro non è più alla ricerca della verità (scoperta in *Vino e pane*), ma di altri uomini che han tagliato i ponti con la morale comune della società e si sono buttati allo sbaraglio, liberi di compromettersi agli occhi di chi non approva la loro condotta. Egli non è più teso alla scoperta della verità nel dialogo con gli altri personaggi, in quel dare e ricevere attraverso cui doveva procedere la sua sofferta ricerca, ma in un nuovo dialogo si danno e si ricevono conferme tra uomini veri che si incontrano per affinità elettive, per i quali Pietro costituisce una luce, una forza, un lievito vivificante, che spinge a proseguire nella nuova via, in una serenità nuova che si comunica inevitabilmente.⁵⁰

Pietro Spina remains an outlaw, living with his grandmother after having spent an unspecified period of time in Sciatap's stable. Initially, this is all the direct information given by the author, though Pietro's physical condition (he is still suffering from the problems that ailed him in the earlier novel) and mental unease lead to the assumption that Sciatap's stable was less than comfortable. Physically, Pietro has never been strong, but in *Il seme sotto la neve* it is his mental state that is of greater interest and which undergoes the most change. Hidden in his grandmother's house, Pietro is able to concentrate on the moral maxims that now control his thoughts and to focus on the ways in which to achieve his goals; his period as an outlaw has afforded him ample time to reflect upon what is important, beyond the demands of the Party or political doctrine, and it is in this work that he begins to live by his beliefs rather than preaching them. What indeed are these beliefs? Pietro's credo - and that of the author - remains unaltered, that man must live a morally correct life in which the prevailing attitude is one of respect for and towards each other. For Silone, morally correct meant living according to the guidelines of his cultural inheritance, the lessons learnt as a child, derived from both Franciscan and Marxist influences. This is the underlying principle in Silone's Christian Socialism, the almost simplistic belief that no-one should live in fear or ignorance, that material wealth should not constitute moral superiority, and that every man is entitled to live a free and honest life. The ability to do so comes from a genuine desire to live in a selfless manner: 'Forse la vera libertà consiste in un'assoluta fedeltà a noi stessi' (*Il seme*, p. 880). There is a perfect synthesis between the

author's Socialist and Christian education, each represented by his vibrant sensitivity and commitment towards society and her people. Certainly, these may be considered naive and utopian ideals, but Silone never doubted their worth. Each individual is responsible for his own behaviour in his interaction with his neighbour and is answerable to his own conscience.⁵¹ Indeed, it is upon the fundamental principles of love, justice, and the search for honesty that the novel hinges, the human community needs these if it is to survive.⁵² Silone's morality is regulated by love, with the main focus of that emotion being man himself. Every individual has a choice as to the company he keeps. It is with these considerations in mind that it is casier to understand why Pietro is unable to reconcile himself to living with his grandmother, why he refuses the pardon for which she fights, and ultimately why he takes to living in poverty in the company of Simone and Infante.

From the very beginning, the picture of donna Maria Vincenza is that of a strong and proud woman for whom the tradition of family is all-important. She cannot turn her back on Pietro, whatever she may think of his politics, for he is a Spina, part of her flesh and blood. Where Bastiano refuses to show interest for fear of political and financial repercussions, she will stop at nothing, whatever the risk, in her bid to have her grandson pardoned.

Se tu vuoi dire che la sua adesione al partito degli operai fu una follia, ti do senz'altro ragione. Se intendi che quel suo girare per paese con carte false è stata una stravaganza pericolosa, sono d'accordo. Lo vedi, Bastia, ti do ragione in tutto. Ma neanche tu, figlio mio, puoi darmi torto se aggiungo che, malgrado questo, egli è sempre uno dei nostri. Nessuna legge di governo può cambiargli il sangue. Noi siamo legati nelle osse, nelle arterie, nelle viscere, l'uno con l'altro. Siamo rami dello stesso albero. L'albero esisteva già, figlio mio, quando il governo non esisteva ancora. Noi possiamo rifiutare, certo, di spartire le colpe di quel ragazzo; ma non il dolore. (*Il seme*, p. 532)

Although she may come from the 'old school' of landed gentry, she will not let social opinion hinder her in protecting her bloodline; she is first and foremost a mother.⁵³ Their two worlds will never converge, but where there is intelligence of mind and mutual respect, there can be harmony.⁵⁴ Her reasons for wanting a pardon for Pietro are selfish, as she wants to be able to live with him openly. Her efforts to convince Pietro are emotional and heartfelt, but for Pietro are based on a flawed premise: even as he accepts that the burden of this lifestyle was an active choice on his part, his real dilemma comes in the form of the questions he then asks his grandmother: 'Credi nonna, che sia giusto per un uomo di liberarsi da quella che tu chiami la sua croce?' (*Il seme*, p. 643) This way of living has become more than a lifestyle, it has become the reason behind his existence. The more she hears from him, the more Maria Vincenza realises she will not obtain her wish. Her methods for obtaining the pardon - through the use of don Coriolano - are those against which Pietro fights, the use of 'who you know', since his ultimate goal is a community of equals. He cannot accept a pardon on these grounds without sacrificing his beliefs, political and social, and that would be contrary to his conscience. In the note she writes to don Coriolano to refuse the pardon, donna Maria will reflect these sentiments; 'Non posso firmare perché sarebbe un atto contrario alla mia coscienza' (*Il seme*, p. 669). As Pietro tells her more and more of his time in Sciatap's stable he reveals more clearly his new attitude towards life in society, and in doing so weakens the convictions that she once held so steadfastly.⁵⁵

La sua lotta interiore, però, non rimane chiusa in sé stessa; coinvolge anche la nonna. Essa, a mano a mano che la frequentazione con il nipote si fa più lunga e i dialoghi diventano più serrati, percepisce che le si affievolisce la sicurezza di una volta: l'incalzare delle argomentazioni di Pietro, unito alla fatica fisica conseguente all'età, inclinano la granitica fiducia nei principi su cui ella si era sorretta fino a quel momento...Perché si produce questo sconvolgimento psicologico in donna Maria Vincenza? Perché, di fronte alla tensione morale di Pietro nell'affrontare i problemi sociali, di fronte alle concrete

argomentazioni e alla scietà del suo impegno nel volerli risolvere, le coscienze rettamente coltivate finiscono per piegarsi e aderirvi.⁵⁶

At this point the obvious question must be what exactly did Pietro discover in Sciatap's stable, what changes did he undergo and in what condition did he emerge. It is Pietro himself who explains the transformation of his mental state; 'in quella stalla, fin dal primo momento, io perdei ogni senso del tempo [...] non ho mai conosciuto la noia.' (*Il seme*, p. 557) He found himself alone with his thoughts until the arrival of Infante, the deaf-mute who appeared in *Vino e pane*. Together, in the presence of the animals, they realised the true meaning of company - being at peace with yourself and those around you, in silence or otherwise. From this realisation stems Pietro's need to find true companionship with those he encounters, a companionship based on mutual respect and understanding.

ma tra me e gli altri corpi, gli altri oggetti, di quella caverna (Infante l'asino i sorei la mangiatoia la paglia il basto dell'asino una lanterna rotta) esisteva un'affinità una comunità una fraternità la cui scoperta m'inondò l'animo d'un sentimento nuovo, che forse, dovrei chiamare pace. (*Il seme*, pp. 725-726)

It is this peace for which he has been searching. All the symbolism of the novel lies in his nurturing of the tiny seed found beneath the snow. Initially Pietro believes that there is no hope for the seed, its fragility threatened by the suffocating mass surrounding it, but with due care and attention the seed may flourish once more. Not only is the seed a metaphor for Pietro's regeneration, but it is also representative of the possibilities for man in general, for society to recreate itself through love and hope. It is imperative to remember that Silone was writing during a particularly turbulent and brutal period of European history, a period during which there seemed to be very little hope for the redemption of man. At a time when nihilism threatened to dominate the literary and indeed political scene the author sought to

compensate for this, to fight against the tide of an essential lack of good faith.⁵⁷ This is reflected in Pietro in *Il seme sotto la neve*, one of the minority who is willing to fight this disease, where instead of working for Socialism (the party of choice that determines man's goodness by his ability to revolutionise change in society) he devotes himself to the restoration of the essential human values of loyalty, generosity and friendship. His choice to live among the peasants and to shun political theory is Pietro's way of practicing this new friendship. This is his effort, and the effort of the small community he helps to build, to fight mass conditioning and the power of the governing body. Thus the seed beneath the snow is conceived of in very human terms, it is the nourishment of the original precepts of good, which are age-old and which must exist before social or political theory can be allowed to flourish. The central metaphor impinges, therefore, in quite blatant terms, upon the very Christian principle of love, that man should love his neighbour as himself that he should nurture and protect instead of seeking to destroy and vanquish. Silone is asking what kind of man constitutes society, and he then offers an alternative: for every Bastiano, there is a Pietro; for every pedantic Marcantonio, there is an Infante. In other words, there is always hope.

Non avevo mai pensato che una zolla di terra, osservata da presso, potesse essere una realtà così viva, così ricca, così immensa, un vero cosmo, un insieme inestricabile di montagne valli paludi gallerie, con ignoti e in massima parte sconosciuti abitatori....in principio temei che *Il seme* fosse già morto; ma dopo aver spostato, per mezzo d'una festuca di paglia, con lentissime precauzioni, il terriccio che l'attornia, scoprii una linguetta viva, tenerissima, della forma e grandezza d'un minuscolo filo d'erba. Ah, tutto il mio essere, tutta la mia anima, nonna, si raccolse d'un tratto attorno a quel piccolo seme[...] E sentivo la mia esistenza così labile, così esposta, così in pericolo, come quella del piccolo seme abbandonato sotto la neve; e, nello stesso tempo, come la sua, la sentivo così naturale, così vivente, così importante, anzi la sentivo come la vita stessa. (*Il seme*, pp. 728-730)

This is the moment in which Pietro becomes aware of the possibilities available to him.

La metafora poetica del *seme sotto la neve* si allarga fino a diventare, simbolicamente, il nucleo da cui si sprigiona l'irradiarsi della luce spirituale di Pietro il cui raggio è rappresentato dai cerchi che si allargano per la inesauribile spinta ricevuta al momento di rivelazione che ha agito come la pietra gettata in uno specchio d'acqua.⁵⁸

Herein is contained one of Silone's most central messages, that great things are always possible when the individual is prepared to make a difference.

Silone's concern is with the moment at which they become aware of their potentialities as human beings, with how this awareness can be brought about, and with the difference it will make to their attitudes and actions.⁵⁹

It is with these thoughts in mind that Pietro is ready for his encounter with Simone and his continued relationship with Infante. United they can make a stand against that 'new eloquence' which now governs Italy, a body that thrives on spoiled politics and selfish intent, in which 'ogni cittadino, non dimenticarlo, è sospetto.' (*Il seme*, p 865) With Infante, Simone, don Severino, and Faustina, Pietro aims to create a new community, a model of peaceful living, an example of true friendship; 'Una famiglia è una comunità di vita più che di sangue.' (*Il seme*, p. 600) At a time when friendship was not encouraged by the Party, and positively discouraged by the new government Pietro's attitude is revolutionary.⁶⁰

The two greatest figures with whom Pietro comes into contact are Simone and don Severino, both of whom are rebels in their own way and who seem only too willing to adhere to Pietro's new philosophy of friendship and community. It is as though he is exactly what they have been waiting for.⁶¹

Il suo esempio li fa sentire degni e orgogliosi della loro integrità mentre prima di conoscere Pietro si sentivano piuttosto come morsi dall'ira e dalla rabbia di non essere comprese e di vedersi irrisi e condannati dalla maggioranza dei loro compaesani.⁶²

After leaving donna Maria Vincenza, Pietro returns to living in poverty in the company of Infante and Simone with the hope of re-establishing the peace found in Sciatap's stable. This band of brothers then decide to go out on a quasi-evangelical mission to discover true friends, not political followers, those who share their feelings of brotherhood. Here the obvious religious imagery of Pietro as a Christ-like figure with his friends being disciples should be noted. Yet Silone is not so much trying to attribute divine qualities to Pietro but rather to send the message that goodness and moral courage are terrestrial assets, and ones that are available to all men, regardless of position. As Silone struggled with his Christianity, so do the characters here, and the recurring motif of Christ in pursuit of the individual is present: 'Delle volte però ho l'impressione che Lui mi corre dietro.' (*Il seme*, p. 814)⁶³ Their excursions in the area remind man that religion should not be an abstract concept but rather a living practice. These secular evangelists remind the alleged devout of the true message of the Christian faith.

L'insistenza martellante di Ignazio Silone sul 'Cristo non è ancora morto ma agonizzante sulla croce' suonava quale scandalosa denuncia verso un modo profano, irriverente, fuorviante e blasfemo di interpretare il messaggio evangelico. Era la dichiarazione di un severo giustizio morale sulla perfidia degli uomini, non esclusa la stessa gerarchia ecclesiastica, per l'interessata predicazione del Cristo, usata spesso a puntello economico e sociale delle classi privilegiate e contro gli sfruttati.⁶⁴

Solidarity and generosity are the virtues with which Pietro and his band go about bringing love to the communities and villages of the region. It is in the religious imagery that Pietro's Christian Socialism is best illustrated.

L'atmosfera generale sa di effusione religiosa e fin troppo chiari appaiono i riferimenti a scenari di radice evangelica [...] i confronti tra i canoni di comportamento socialmente in uso fuori della stalla e dentro la stalla diventano sempre più frequenti e sempre meglio emerge la validità del messaggio educativo che la piccola comunità sta maturando.⁶⁵

Simone is a recognised troublemaker and a drunk in the eyes of the authorities, unafraid to speak his mind and uncaring of the offence he might cause to the town gentry: 'L'epoca dei signori è passata', and he is undaunted by their opinions: 'D'altronde, Simone non è un cafone [...] egli è un refrattario'.⁶⁶ He is seen as a threat by virtue of having his own opinions and by his lack of conformity. He is an acute example of how the lack of any formal education does not inhibit the *cafoni* from intelligent thought and should not prevent them from expressing their views. With the arrival of Pietro, Simone is able to realise his potential as one of those who can actively change the situation; he even reduces the amount of drinking.⁶⁷ He is a creature on the margins of society, as are don Severino, Faustina, Infante and Pietro himself. These are people considered 'pazzo' or 'allo sbaraglio', but then, as don Severino points out, so was Christ.⁶⁸ It is this small group of marginals who constitute Pietro's new community and who, in their own way, go in search of others to join them, each desirous to live in a better, more honest world.⁶⁹ Instead of preaching politics, Pietro is advocating simple friendship and pride in oneself.⁷⁰ He preaches love.

Il nuovo mondo così immaginato, egli vuole costruirlo non da solo, ma assieme a tutti gli uomini di buona volontà, ai quali egli si rivolge e con i quali incomincia ad interessere rapporti di solidarietà [...] Perché il nuovo mondo possa emergere con contorni sempre più netti, così che tutti lo individuino e lo conoscano, egli impegna la sua esistenza nei luoghi in cui lo sconforto della solitudine e dell'isolamento si accompagna alla speranza della compresenza attiva della moltitudine pervenuta a maturazione civile. Confortato dagli elementi positivi presenti in codesti suoi sentimenti, egli procederà spedito per la sua strada, esercitando la sua missione educativa secondo gli insegnamenti che gli provenivano dal più puro socialismo o dalle spinte morali del vangelo.⁷¹

Friendship emerges as one of the fundamental themes of this novel. From the outset we are aware of the different attitudes towards the notion of friendship: Bastiano declaring that 'Gli amici. I cosiddetti amici. È una vera lotta al coltello'; donna Maria Vincenza expressing that 'non ci si può fidare di nessuno' and the heavy, sad words of don Severino: 'Questa è

la vera rivoluzione della nostra epoca, cara Maria Vincenza, la scomparsa dell'amicizia.' (*Il seme*, pp. 528, 596, 646). It is perhaps these words that best surmise Pietro's refusal to accept the status quo of society and his desire to enlighten others. The problems arise when this group of friends try to put their philosophy into practice. People are suspicious of them and their simple message, one going so far as to declare that friendship can be the ruin of a man.⁷² The greatest obstacle to the message of brotherhood is selfishness and fear, the many years of turning one's back on the problems of others.⁷³ Pietro and his group of marginals are opposed to all self-serving doctrine:

Ma vi sono anche uomini ai quali personalmente non manca affatto da mangiare eppure non possono sopportare che altri soffrano la fame; uomini che si vergognano di star bene poiché i più stanno male; e non possono rassegnarsi all'oppressione alle sofferenze all'umiliazione d'altri uomini. (*Il seme*, p. 836)

It is don Severino's anguish in the face of such selfishness that singles him out and predestines him to become part of Pietro's group. He is unable to remain a silent accomplice and realises that he must make a stand:

A chiunque ci chiede, donna Palmira, non di morire per la verità, che sarebbe troppo, ma un piccolo sacrificio a favore di essa, una timida testimonianza, un qualche atto di coraggio, un piccolo gesto di dignità e di fierezza, la nostra timorata prudente casalinga moralità cristiana ci fa invariabilmente rispondere: chi me lo fa fare? Non sono mica pazzo. Qui possono succedere i soprusi più inauditi e all'infuori del flebile lamento delle vittime, nessuno protesta; ogni buon cristiano si dice: Chi me lo farebbe fare? Non sono mica pazzo. (*Il seme*, p. 701)⁷⁴

Don Severino's insubordination cannot remain unnoticed for very long.

Ogni protagonista di Silone dice in vari modi che ci vuole perseveranza, non ci si deve arrendere, bisogna continuare, anche se non possiamo sapere dove arriveremo, sin dove ci porterà la nostra stretta esistenza. Per Silone, attuare 'il regno dei cieli' in terra è un fine che travalica il limite d'una vita umana. Noi mortali possiamo proporci questo fine, ma non prefigurarne i risultati.⁷⁵

The quiet, somewhat mysterious character of Faustina is one eminently suitable for Pietro's group; 'veramente, ella aggiunge per spiegare la situazione, da molto tempo io non faccio più parte di questa gente. Sono rimasta qui, ma al bando.' (*Il seme*, p. 878) Ignored by the so-called polite society for sharing a house with don Severino - her alleged crime being that she was a temptress in the house of Spina - she has long been a marginal character. In her conversation with Simone she admits that Pietro was her one true love, and since he is dead she no longer harbours any hope of shedding her life of solitude or finding comfort in worldly affairs; 'Non v'è solitudine più chiusa di quella creata dalla impossibilità di esprimere i propri sentimenti' aggiunge Faustina. 'La rottura col mondo esterno diventa un'abisso; non esiste conforto o distrazione' (*Il seme*, p. 890).⁷⁶ There is a huge autobiographical presence in this statement. Love, of any kind, is just one sentiment that is oppressed and destroyed under a tyrannical regime, and in essence this novel is a book of love, brotherhood, and friendship.

Valga per tutti l'intelligente dialogo tra Simone e Faustina, dove chiari appaiono alcuni ritornanti passaggi centrali del pensiero di Ignazio Silone, quali; l'importanza della scelta e della conseguente fedeltà all'impegno; la difficoltà di individuare se ciò avvenga per atto spontaneo e deliberato, o per comando eterodiretto; il dovere di ogni uomo alla salvezza, vista come imperativo etico, a prescindere dalla modalità di attuazione; l'intreccio costante tra salvezza e 'perdizione', quando quella avviene in circostanze che lasciano pochi margini alla speranza; il richiamo alla responsabilità personale; l'identificazione tra pazzia e fuga della società, subordinato alla tradizione, imballatrice delle libertà civili e sociali.⁷⁷

Faustina has many admirable qualities. The fact that she never publicly denied donna Maria Vincenza's accusations - for fear of compromising the latter's status - is certainly to her credit. She is an independent and intelligent woman, one who is more than capable of seeing the hypocrisy of the society in which she lives.⁷⁸ Finally, in her conversations with Pietro, she is able to express her concerns, somehow freed from her shrouded silence.

“Tutta la vita” insiste Faustina “tutta la vita ho atteso di poter parlare con te di queste cose [...] Ah, mio Dio, se prima di morire mi fosse concesso uscire dalla rappresentazione, dal fittizio, dall’incubo, oltrepassare la soglia, vivere, andare di là.” (*Il seme*, p. 926)

Pietro acts as a liberating force upon her mind, explaining his concept of family and brotherhood, emphasising once again that you do not need a great many people in the community, that the true ‘paese dell’anima’ is based on moral quality rather than numbers.⁷⁹ More than that, being together physically is less important than loving each other:

L’importante, egli dice, vedi, Faustina, l’importante non è neppure di vivere assieme. Benche sarebbe meraviglioso di vivere assieme; ma l’importante, l’essenziale, sia vicini che separati, vedi, Faustina, e di volerci bene. (*Il seme*, p. 934)

In this statement Silone encapsulates the ethos of his maxims for living in a Christian socialist world. Man must be free:

L’attualità di Silone rimane inalterata. Il senso e il significato del suo richiamo ai valori costitutivi dell’essere umano, la sua forza morale, la sua proposta non ideologica rimane tuttora valida anche dopo la caduta del Muro di Berlino. Il suo è un richiamo ai valori della coscienza che attraversa il novecento, dal comunismo, al fascismo, al superamento delle ideologie come ‘gabbie’ per l’uomo. È un messaggio che riguarda tutti.⁸⁰

Pietro’s relationship with Infante is completely different to any other in the novel and one that has been allowed more time to develop. Infante was Pietro’s innocent companion in Sciatap’s stable, and after having been rescued from the hands of the police, becomes a member of the new community of Simone’s barn.⁸¹ From birth, Infante has been ignored, treated as stupid, yet his innocence has not been shattered.⁸² His love of Pietro, who has always treated him with respect, reaches to the point of worship. After the way in which he has been treated by the villagers of Pietrasecca it is of little surprise that he should

come to admire one who tries to communicate with him.⁸³ Equally, it is of little surprise that the first word he learns from Pietro is 'compagnia'.⁸⁴ In Infante, willingly or not, Pietro has found the perfect medium for his new philosophy. Taking the innocence and eagerness of Infante, he creates in him his sense of right and wrong, his sense of morality, his sense of justice.⁸⁵ This will be Pietro's downfall. Ultimately, that which he has created will weigh him down, the responsibility he must accept for Infante becomes an exhausting burden.

ma la cosa la più geniale del romanzo non è nemmeno lo stravagante affascinante sodalizio tra Pietro Simone e Infante con i due animali, quanto il fatto che alla lunga Infante finisce col pesare a Pietro. Non sa dove metterlo. Gli complica tutto. Non impara abbastanza in fretta. Che gli ci vorrebbe ad esempio a pulirsi il naso col fazzoletto? Non lo fa [...] Non c'è nessuna retorica nel rapporto di Pietro col sordomuto, ma la tragica parabola dei sentimenti umani. Prima c'è in Pietro la commozione per la scoperta che, sotto strati di ottusità e abbruttimento, vive un'anima, selvatica, offesa e deficiente, ma ugualmente un'anima, una tensione di tutto quel povero essere verso la ragione e l'amore. Allora Pietro s'impegna nel compito socratico di aiutarlo a tirar fuori da sé il meglio che vi è sepolto, e lo fa con metodo e dedizione. Ma a poco a poco l'intera situazione gli si configura come problema.⁸⁶

When Infante's father suddenly returns, Pietro's first thought is of how he will behave towards his somewhat wild son - will Infante return to his prior position of society's slave? Even when don Severino points out that, since Infante now has a new home, Pietro is free to be with Faustina, Pietro is unable to distance himself from his friend.⁸⁷ He must ensure Infante's safety, he is always responsible for him. However, in spite of his carefully chosen words to Giustino - 'Più che padre, dovrai essergli amico' (*Il seme*, p. 1002) - ultimate responsibility will fall to Pietro. He is compelled to answer to the charges of murder in Infante's stead, thereby renouncing his freedom, Faustina, and his friends. He has no other option. He created Infante's sense of justice, he instilled in him the need for respect and the belief that all men are equal.⁸⁸ Infante, in his innocence, has acted on these maxims by rejecting, in a most final way, his father's ill-treatment. This gesture, this enormous sacrifice of personal freedom in order to maintain the strength and integrity of the little

group of friends, is what makes Pietro Spina seem entirely more human. The horror of his impending fate in a Fascist prison is not enough to override the power of the convictions which have taken root in his soul: 'Tu sai bene che, qualunque cosa succeda, essi non mi avranno mai, non potranno mai avermi. Anche se mi prendono e mi mettono dentro [...] non potranno avermi.' (*Il seme*, p. 847) To continue to lead by example, Pietro must take the blame.

in qualche modo subconscio, pagare per Infante è poter saldare in una volta sola il gravoso debito che s'è assunto verso di lui [...] Insomma, è una via d'uscita. Non c'è in lui né abnegazione per amore di Dio né speranza di salvezza eterna. In breve non c'è nulla di mistico nel suo sacrificio, ma un sentimento inciso di necessità: e lui ad aver dato il gusto della libertà, della ragione e dell'amicizia al sordomuto, un tempo vittima passiva di chiunque, dunque è sua la responsabilità della rivolta d'Infante alle prepotenze del padre.⁸⁹

In *Il seme sotto la neve*, Pietro Spina offers a new philosophy. Where once he believed that the answers to his questions lay in political unity, now we see him pursuing the more social concerns of friendship and brotherhood. He is no longer preaching, though his charismatic character remains an inspirational and liberating force for those who are willing to listen to his message; principally Simone, Don Severino, Faustina, Infante, and donna Maria Vincenza. His simple message of love, hope, honesty, and friendship will gather support amongst those who are ready for a morally superior world. In this novel he divests himself of the last vestiges of Communism and accepts friendship as the basis for any healthy and enduring community. The reader is left with the sense of hope that, even in his absence, this message will be carried forth by his earnest disciples.

Il 'capire per esprimere' che in *Fontamara* metteva capo al 'che fare?' è diventato il 'capire per fare' di *Vino e pane*, che ha suscitato il nuovo problema: 'lottare (fare) assieme a chi?'. La 'scelta dei compagni' ha una grande importanza nell'opera di Silone. Da essa muove a parer nostro, *Il seme sotto la neve*.⁹⁰

The seed beneath the snow, however small and neglected, needs only one pair of loving hands to rekindle its life.⁹¹ In a relatively short period of time Pietro has inspired several fellow minds to follow his example in breaking through the barriers of social constraint and hypocrisy, leaving behind a legacy of love and compassion. Pietro's message is, of course, Silone's message, one that he would continue to convey undeterred in the years following his return to Italy when the very suspicion and insincerity against which he had fought so hard were to make of him *un caso*.

La ragione più vera, per cui Silone è un grande scrittore, al di fuori del 'mito' creatosi intorno a lui, è ch'egli non scrive mai invano [...] scrive quando e perché ha qualche cosa di vitale da dire e da comunicare al prossimo.⁹²

Notes

¹Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, ed. by Lamberto Mercurio (Roma: Lerici, 1979), pp. 9-10. Silone gives an account of his state of health, both mental and physical, at the time of his break with the Party.

²Greater detail regarding Silone's personal life will be discussed in Chapter Three.

³Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 819.

⁴Elio Guerriero, *L'inquietudine e l'utopia. Il racconto umano e cristiano di Ignazio Silone* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1979), p. 56: 'Silone dunque scrive del mondo contadino perché questa è la realtà con la quale egli è venuto a contatto, che egli ha vissuto [...]; egli supera il distacco scolare tra scrittore e contadino e introduce per la prima volta i *cafoni* come protagonisti. Il tema stesso dei contadini non è nuovo nella letteratura italiana, ma è nuovo il modo di trattarlo.'

⁵Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 92A: 'Questa è la realtà che meglio conosco, la porto, per così dire, in me stesso, e in esso la condizione umana del nostro tempo mi appare più spoglia, quasi a nudo.'

⁶Francesco Atzeni, *Ignazio Silone. Vocazione educativa e messaggio politico e sociale* (Poggibonsi: Lalli, 1991), p. 79: 'Era, dunque, un cafone come gli altri sotto l'aspetto economico, sociale e civile; ma un cafone ribelle alle ingiustizie, alle umiliazioni, alle sopraffazioni. E sotto questo aspetto la differenza fra lui e i suoi compaesani era abissale.'

⁷Sebastiano Martelli and Salvatore di Pasqua, *Guida alla lettura di Silone* (Milano: Mondadori, 1988), p. 118.

⁸Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 891. To illustrate his point Silone refers to Simone Weil: 'bisogna "essere sempre pronti a mutare di parte come la giustizia, questa fuggiasca dal campo dei vincitori".'

⁹Ignazio Silone, *Fontamara*. See pp. 24-25, 37-41, 59-64, 95, 96 and 114 for these examples.

¹⁰Piero Aragno, *Il romanzo di Silone* (Ravenna: Longo, 1975), p. 23.

¹¹Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 779.

¹²*Ibid.* Refer to p. 790: 'Lazzaro era quello che si dice un buon cristiano. Durante molti anni egli era stato priore della confraternità di San Francesco; ma non aveva più messo piede in chiesa dal tempo che i parroci della nostra contrada diedero ordine di suonare le campane per disturbare i comizi pubblici dei contadini.'

¹³Jean Whyte, 'The evolution of Silone's central theme', *Italian Studies*, 25 (1970), p. 52. 'For the people of Fontamara the crucial point came with the denial of their basic need - land, for them the means of existence. This clash with the authorities then ruling the land ignited the tiny spark remaining in them of that quality which separates man from the brutes, marking the beginning of a new consciousness of their ability to fight against the wrongs being done to them.'

¹⁴Ferdinando Alfonsi, *Silone o la ricerca del permanente* (Catanzaro: Antonio Carello Editore, 1991), pp. 17-18: 'Nelle opere di Silone si avverte la presenza di questa forza chiamata "destino" e concepito come qualcosa che preordina la vita di un uomo, contro cui non esiste assolutamente difesa o riparo.'

¹⁵Luce D'Eramo, *op. cit.*, p. 49: 'se osserviamo ora la dinamica di Fontamara, assistiamo a un rovesciamento delle posizioni: la parola, da arma dei padroni, diventa infine l'arma dei *cafoni*.'

¹⁶Judy Rawson, in the introduction to *Fontamara* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1977), pp. 5-6: See also Judy Rawson, "'Che fare?": Silone and the Russian "Chto delat'?" tradition', *Modern Languages Review*, 76 (1981), pp. 556-565.

¹⁷Francesco Atzeni, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁸G. B. Angioletti, 'La stagione più meditata d'uno scrittore autentico', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 4 March, 1956: 'Costretto a scegliere fra i sentimenti personali e certi imperativi ideologici, egli vide con sicuro intuito che l'arte soltanto gli avrebbe consentito di esprimersi con assoluta libertà. Diventò narratore.'

¹⁹Sebastiano Martelli and S. di Pasqua. *op. cit.*, p. 124: 'Silone, attraverso la sua opera, sceglie di essere testimone della sofferenza umana, del dolore delle "creature più umiliate e sfortunate" e dei *cafoni* che non hanno voce. La sua dunque, è un'opzione fondamentalmente cristiana e, di fatto, in molte pagine dei suoi testi traspare una concezione religiosa della vita.'

²⁰Ignazio Silone, *Ed egli si nascose* (Milano: Le Edizioni Mondiali, 1966), p. 10.

²¹Judy Rawson, "'Che fare?': Silone and the Russian 'Chto delat'?' tradition', op.cit., pp. 556-565. See also Maria Paynter, *Ignazio Silone. Beyond the tragic vision* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 94-95.

²²Luce D'Eramo, op. cit. Refer to pp. 133-136 for further details.

²³Jean Whyte, op.cit., p. 50.

²⁴The autobiographical nature of Silone's work really has prominence in Chapter Three.

²⁵Luce D'Eramo, 'Il mio amico Silone', in AA. VV., *Ignazio Silone clandestino nel novecento* (Rimini: Editori Rimesi Associati, 1996), 13-18 (pp. 16-17).

²⁶Ferdinando Viridia, *Ignazio Silone* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1979), p. 71: 'Pietro Spina, che in queste pagine lo scrittore chiama soltanto col nome assunto nel suo travestimento, don Paolo, è qui ancora una volta un vero e proprio alter ego di Silone, che ripercorre, trasponendole appena quel tanto ch'è necessario per la verità del personaggio, le strade della sua esperienza di rivoluzionario.'

²⁷Giuliana Rigobello, *Ignazio Silone* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1977), p. 155.

²⁸Ignazio Silone, *Bread and wine*, trans. by E. Mosbacher with an introduction by Irving Howe, (New York: Penguin Books USA, 1986), p. vii,4.

²⁹Ibid. p. 70. 'L'interesse del romanzo è innanzi tutto autobiografico. Pietro Spina è l'alter ego di Silone, il quale di fatto non lasciò l'esilio in terra straniera se non alla caduta del fascismo, ma immagina di ritornare nel Marsica per sollevare i *cafoni*, per organizzare una "seconda rivoluzione" che rovesci la dittatura e instauri un regime "a immagine dell'uomo".'

³⁰Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 36. 'È stato questo suo sentimento di solidarietà umana a spingere Pietro Spina alla politica e all'esilio.'

³¹Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*. Further reference will be made to this in Chapter Three, with particular regard to the position of Rocco and Stella within the party.

³²Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*. For further examples, refer to pp. 291, 344, 488.

³³ibid. Although essentially there to urge the peasants to action, it should be recognised that Pietro is himself from a formerly middle-class background. Refer to p. 228.

³⁴Ferdinando Viridia, op. cit., p. 110: '[...] il socialismo di Silone si fonda su un'esigenza cristiana di riscatto dell'uomo [...] Questo anche se il suo cristianesimo - appunto per questo socialista - non soltanto rifiuta ogni dogma, ma rifiuta altresì ogni chiesa, forse per la consapevolezza dello scrittore che ogni chiesa comporta in se stessa l'esigenza di una gerarchia e di una disciplina, l'anatema per l'eretico e per l'eresia, e con esso la persecuzione per l'uno o per l'altra.'

³⁵Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, p. 633. Further reference and expansion of this concept of Christianity will be illustrated in Chapter Three.

³⁶Ferdinando Viridia, op. cit., p. 76.

³⁷Ferdinando Viridia, 'Silone senza Abruzzo', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 31 July, 1960, p. 5: 'Caduta l'ideologia rimaneva tuttavia la pietà, la protesta, il sentimento di qualcosa da fare, l'assillo morale di una denuncia. Silone è tra i pochissimi scrittori, che pur avendo rifiutato una certa ideologia, non si sono trovati nella necessità di rifiutare la loro precedente produzione, segno questo che essa nasceva da una vera ispirazione, dal sangue del suo sangue.'

³⁸Giuseppe Leone, *Ignazio Silone, scrittore dell'intelligenza* (Firenze: Firenze Atheneum, 1996), p. 35.

³⁹Ignazio Silone, 'Promiscuità e comunità' in *L'Avvenire dei lavoratori*, (Zurich), n. 5, 15 March, 1944 and cited here from Paolo Bagnoli, 'Socialismo ed Europa' in AA. VV., *Per Ignazio Silone* (Firenze: Edizione Polistampa, 2002), 83-86 (p. 86): 'La comunità vale più del comunismo. La socialità vale più del socialismo. Cristo vale più, infinitamente più, del cristianesimo.'

⁴⁰Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, op. cit., p. x: 'ero appena uscito dal partito comunista al quale avevo sacrificato la mia gioventù, i miei studi e ogni interesse personale, ero gravemente ammalato [...] in una parola ero sull'orlo del suicidio. Attraversai in quell'epoca una crisi atroce, ma salvatrice.'

⁴¹Riccardo Aragno, 'Rebel in torment', *The Sunday Times*, 27 July, 1969. 'Resignation is the Christian virtue that keeps one out of immediate danger. But it makes people addicted to poverty and servitude. Revolution is the great hope that puts one in danger of persecution.'

⁴²Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 103: 'L'azione politica di Pietro Spina si svilupperà secondo una ininterrotta linea di coerenza morale, motivata e sostanziata dalla massima attenzione per la persona.'

⁴³Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*. For further details, refer to pp. 279, 291, 330-331, 344, 503-507.

⁴⁴Jean Whyte, op. cit., p. 55. (In reference to this letter, Biocca and Canali have argued that Luigi Murica is representative of the author and his position as a Fascist informant).

⁴⁵Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., p. 16: 'Il socialismo di Silone è dunque sorretto da una satta coscienza morale e sostanziato di religiosità cristiana. Il suo ideale socialista, infatti, si identifica con l'esigenza di estendere alla sfera pubblica i principi che presiedono (o presiedevano) nella contrada nativa alla morale familiare, limpida e onesta. Di conseguenza, l'attività politica è sentita e vissuta dallo scrittore come doverosa partecipazione alla realtà sociale al fine di migliorarla, di combatterne i soprusi, di rendere operante in essa il principio cristiano della fraternità.'

⁴⁶I. Howe in the Introduction to Ignazio Silone, *Bread and wine*. Trans. by E Mosbacher, op. cit., p. ix. 'Spina must edge a little into Spada while remaining Spina. And here, I think, we reach the intellectual or thematic strength of *Bread and Wine*: that what I have called Silone's two encompassing visions, Socialism and Christianity, are brought into a tense connection, not as abstract or inert intellectual systems but as elements of vibrant experience.'

⁴⁷Luce D'Eramo, op. cit., pp. 200 - 202. *Il seme sotto la neve* was first published in German in 1941, in Italian in 1945, followed by the revised editions in 1950 and 1961.

⁴⁸ibid. p. 208.

⁴⁹Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 161.

⁵⁰Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 58.

⁵¹ibid. p. 73: 'Tutta l'opera siloniana, almeno fino al presente romanzo, si spiega e si giustifica artisticamente proprio partendo di questa poetica del 'rendersi conto' non già a sfondo intellettuale ma più immediata, non esclusivamente occupata a svelare la crisi del singolo che si tortura nella sofferta ricerca del vero, ma soprattutto tesa a mostrarci, attraverso il dialogo tra uomo e uomo, lo stabilirsi di un legame di comune umanità. Questo aprirsi agli altri nel capire se stessi sta alla base della poetica siloniana: solo l'uomo nel suo rapporto quotidiano con il suo prossimo lo interessa.'

⁵²Francesco Grisi, 'La libertà non è merce di scambio', *Il Borghese*, 3 September, 1978. 'Per Silone e i suoi personaggi, la verità è anche naturale matrice della libertà.'

⁵³Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*. For further examples of Maria Vincenza's attachment to family, refer to pp. 567 and 596, respectively: 'l'anima è agganciata non alla carne, ma allo scheletro, e se questo è fatto di buone ossa, allora è difficile separare l'anima dal corpo [...] nelle tue ossa han resistito con te i tuoi antenati.' and 'La prudenza il decoro il casato la situazione sociale l'opinione pubblica, Venanzio, sono certamente belle cose. Ma, se una madre ha un figlio in pericolo, lui viene prima delle cose ora nominate.'

⁵⁴Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 149: 'Del primo nucleo concettuale, donna Maria Vincenza e Pietro rappresentano più che due modi d'intendere e vivere la società e i rapporti intercorrenti al suo interno, due mondi in lotta con nessuna speranza di conciliazione: il passato, ormai incapace di dare risposte alle esigenze del presente, imbrigliato in mille contraddizioni sociali e politiche; il futuro, smanioso di espandersi e indocile al freno di istituzioni palesemente ingiuste e punitive di una larghissima fascia sociale a favore di una minorità arrogante e beffarda.'

⁵⁵Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 59: 'Gli intimi colloqui con la nonna servono non soltanto alla scoperta della loro affinità, ma anche a rivelare l'episodio in cui si è iniziata la nuova avventura spirituale di Pietro Spina e l'azione di questo romanzo. Nella stalla di Sciatap [...] Pietro aveva avuto una rivelazione nuova e una singolare conferma della sua nuova vocazione.'

⁵⁶Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., pp. 154-155.

⁵⁷Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, pp. 877-879. See also Chapter Three of this thesis, p. 142.

⁵⁸Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 74.

⁵⁹Jean Whyte, op. cit., p. 52.

⁶⁰Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, p. 817: 'A dir la verità, anzi, nel partito l'amicizia è addirittura malvista, direi quasi sospetta.' This quotation refers to the position of the Communists, the PCI. For the position of the Fascists, see p. 553: 'Della democrazia, sia ben chiaro, noi dobbiamo combattere senza compromessi certe sue degenerazioni, come la libertà di stampa le elezioni le assemblee e i congressi e le altre diavolerie inventate dagli inglesi, offensive per la nostra dignità latina; ma oltre a ciò, non si può negarlo, essa ha anche vantaggiosi lati. In una parola, noi realizziamo la vera democrazia. Si capisce, in senso mistico.'

⁶¹ibid. p. 995: Pietro encourages don Severino to reveal a side of himself which has been long hidden, and which leads him to an almost mystical conclusion; 'È meraviglioso, [...] la mia vita sta per acquistare un senso.'; p. 814: for Simone, friendship replaces the emptiness of religion in the aftermath of the earthquake; 'In mancanze di altre certezze, credo nell'amicizia.' and p. 812: 'Non credo che sia stato il caso, Pietro, a farci incontrare [...] Forse è stato il destino, o forse Dio. Non so, di certe cose non m'intendo. Se tu non fossi arrivato, la mia vita non avrebbe avuto senso.'

⁶²Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 72.

⁶³In *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 870, discussed here in Chapter Three, Silone says of Pietro Spina: 'ho l'impressione che Pietro Spina non cerchi Dio, ma sia da lui inseguito, come uno può esserlo dalla propria ombra o da qualcosa che porta in sé.'

⁶⁴Atzeni Francesco, op. cit., p. 192.

⁶⁵ibid. p. 167.

⁶⁶Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, Refer to pp. 543, 789, 790, 892.

⁶⁷Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 163: 'Dalla condotta di Simone trapela la felicità di chi ha scoperto una verità a lungo inseguita e che intende ora comunicarla a tutti, irresistibilmente. Ma la sua nuova condizione sociale, la sua convivenza con Pietro e Infante, suscitano anche altre manifestazioni di entusiasmo: la vivacità della memoria espressa con la spontanea e agile rievocazione di amici e compagni di gioventù da tempo estranei alla sua esistenza; la freschezza di ricordi creduti per sempre sepolti, di nomi di persone, di circostanze e di località. Era l'effetto del carisma che Pietro diffondeva intorno a sé;' see also Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve* op. cit., p. 799.

⁶⁸ibid. Refer to pp. 604, 639, 700-701, 878 and 947 for examples. See also p. 655: 'e se Gesù invece vi fosse mostrato tra due sbirri, come un povero Cristo qualsiasi, come un profugo un fuori-legge un senza-patria un senza-carte qualsiasi?'

⁶⁹Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 70: 'La società a cui aspira Pietro è la stessa a cui aspirerebbe Silone se non fosse tanto realista da negarsela persino come possibile conclusione della sua 'parabola' poetica nel presente romanzo. "Agli amici che ritroviamo non dobbiamo portare delle teorie, ma l'amicizia".'

⁷⁰Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, pp. 965 - 966.

⁷¹Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 162.

⁷²Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, p. 974: 'Gli amici sono stati la sua rovina.'

⁷³ibid. p. 783: 'Noi dobbiamo badare ai fatti nostri, quest'è la verità.'

⁷⁴ibid. Refer also to pp. 706-707: 'non credo che voi riuscirete mai a sradicare interamente quella orgogliosa pianta ribelle. E seppure vi riuscirete, non credo che voi potrete distruggere i nuovi semi di essa che qua e là [...] già maturano sotto terra. Vi saranno sempre strane creature, le quali, oltre al bisogno degli alimenti, avranno fame d'altro, e per sopportare questa triste vita avranno bisogno di un po' di stima di sé stessi.'

⁷⁵Luce D'Eramo, *Ignazio Silone* (Rimini: Editori Riminesi Associati, 1994), p. 52.

⁷⁶Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, p. 890: 'Egli è stato la grande fiamma della mia vita. Cominciò che avevo appena quindici anni. Prima ancora di sapere cosa fosse l'amore, ne fui totalmente presa per lui. L'avessi amato di meno, forse avrei potuto manifestarlo; ma era troppo forte e assoluto. Non mi riusciva di pensare ad altro, ne potevo confidarmi con chicchessia. Fu quello l'inizio della mia lunga solitudine.'

⁷⁷Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

⁷⁸Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, p. 918; it is worth noting Faustina's indignation when Pietro takes it upon himself to speak in her stead.

⁷⁹ibid. p. 922: 'Volevo dire che, con te e Simone, potrei senza difficoltà risiedere anche all'inferno.'

⁸⁰AA. VV., *Ignazio Silone, clandestino nel novecento* op. cit., p. 8. The author of this text is not specified.

⁸¹Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*. Refer to chapter Twelve in the text.

⁸²ibid. pp. 711-712; 'Lo chiamano Infante [...] Perché sordo dalla nascita, ma in realtà è mezzo sordo, e non ha imparato a parlare soltanto perché nessuno s'è mai occupato di lui [...] Certo egli poteva denunziarmi, tradirmi, in qualche modo vendermi; e data la sua miseria, in un certo senso, sarebbe stato perfino suo diritto. Egli invece mi fu di aiuto.'

⁸³ibid. p. 725.

⁸⁴ibid. p. 726: 'Compagnia fu anche la prima nuova parola che Infante imparò da me.'

⁸⁵Francesco Atzeni, op. cit., p. 160; '(Infante) [...] segna lo spartiacque ideale dal quale due versanti opposti si fronteggiano; quello del mondo dei *cafoni* e dei rassegnati, di cui donna Maria e Nunzio [...] sono i lucidi rappresentanti, e quello dell'umanità futura, affrancata e libera, per cui si batte Pietro Spina.'

⁸⁶Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 127.

⁸⁷Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, pp. 998-999.

⁸⁸Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., p. 85: 'Nell'amicizia di Pietro e Infante si ripropone in nuova forma, impegnandolo in una prova assai ardua, il rapporto tra l'intellettuale socialista e cristiano e gli umili, che il primo vuole educare e istruire'.

⁸⁹Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 128.

⁹⁰ibid. p. 125.

⁹¹Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 72: 'Le cure che Pietro aveva prestato ad Infante e al seme nascente (alitando sopra perché non morisse di freddo) vengono infatti simbolicamente estese alla creazione del cenacolo degli "Spiniani", bisognosi della stessa amorevole attenzione per non essere soffocati e spiritualmente distrutti dall'ipocrisia e dal conformismo della società che li circonda.'

⁹²Guido Piovene, 'Egli non scrive mai invano', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 11 April, 1954.

Chapter Two

The Novels of Return

In October 1944, after more than two decades spent in exile, Silone once again touched Italian soil. Upon landing at Naples airport, he bent to kiss the ground, expressing his delight and relief to have finally come home.¹ Over the following years, this delight and relief would gradually evolve into the frustrated knowledge that, whilst his geographical exile may have ended in 1944, he remained, nonetheless, an exile in his own country, misunderstood and rejected by political and literary circles, and condemned to face a solitude with which he was all too familiar.² The political machinations and in-party fighting which ravaged Italy in the post-war years were to ensure Silone's complete detachment from party politics. In the period leading up to 1949, both the Socialist and Communist parties - and all their various sub-divisions - were gripped by the interminable struggle for power, on the one hand claiming to want political fusion, yet on the other, determined to remain individually strong and independent of each other. Having already rejected the communist ethos in 1930, Silone was not prepared to collaborate on any project which would see a union of the two left-wing groups. In spite of having considerable support amongst some prominent Socialists, and being elected as a representative of the Abruzzo in 1946, his refusal to commit to fusionist politics and his consternation at the continuous bickering of the party leaders led to his decision to abandon political life altogether in 1950. This political fighting and the various states of unity in the Socialist Party will be discussed at length in Chapter Three. Fascism as the imposed hierarchy might have fallen, but its legacy was still a potent force: the selfish struggle for power was not restricted to any one political party. From the time of writing *Fontamara*, Silone

maintained the position that the actual name and manifesto of those in power was irrelevant if the governing party allowed itself to become a tyranny like any other, and therein lay the tragedy of modern politics. The realities of living in Italy under a post-Fascist regime didn't seem to differ that greatly from the previous regime; in-fighting and the struggle to be in control was as fierce as before. Acceptance of this was impossible for the man who had spent the last years of his life writing against the abuse of power and the inevitable injustice which ensues. In this chapter, that intolerance of totalitarian control and passive resignation is highlighted even further; it is a continuous theme. With his ultimate rejection of active politics, it was again to literature that he turned, determined as always to testify on behalf of those who suffer at the hands of corrupt power and to express his profound love and respect for his fellow man. The reader is reminded of the words written much earlier, while imprisoned in Switzerland:

Io non sono, io non voglio essere un uomo politico, nel senso che a questa parola si dà ordinariamente. Io sono, io voglio rimanere uno scrittore, e nessun'altra disciplina legata all'infuori di quella che il pensiero e la coscienza in se stessi possiedono. (*Memoriale*, p. 29)

As a writer Silone sought to expose the flaws within any given society, most especially those who would seek to limit personal freedom through adept exploitation of the populace. Silone had seen the power of propaganda and witnessed the manipulative weight of authority in his years as a fugitive and most especially in his final visits to Moscow. He was aware of the might of education, that when a people are kept in ignorance of the facts and fed on a diet of lies and half truths, it is much easier for the authorities to control their thoughts and deeds, and thus to keep them in line.

Una manciata di more

Eight years after his return from exile, Silone produced a work which would not only reiterate and embellish all the themes and ideas of the earlier novels, but which would also tell the story of his ultimate disillusionment with politics in the most profound and personal way. This work is the result of the political intrigue and political wranglings to which he had been a witness in the years following his return and an attempt by the author to answer the familiar question: 'che fare?'

con il romanzo *Una manciata di more* dopo aver chiarito la sua personale ideologia, fondata sulla coscienza, può finalmente, senza alcuna difficoltà, capire e far capire i motivi per cui è uscito dal Partito Comunista. 'Era un partito di perseguitati [...] ora lo è di persecutori.'⁵

Una manciata di more is the first of Silone's works to have been published in Italy, and is equally the first which truly depicts 'la storia della sua crisi ideologica.'⁴ The novel, set against this historical background, is one in which Silone continues his exploration of man's struggle for survival, his search for truth and justice, and his desire for companionship, founded upon the basic Christian principle of love. In this sense, the themes are already familiar, being those that were expounded in his earlier works and here discussed in Chapter One. Yet in this, the first of the post-exile novels, there is something new, something more mature in the author's perspective, a clarity and introspection born of his experiences, his political disillusionment and the realisation that, in the years since his first '*Uscita di sicurezza*' and the publication of *Fontamara*, nothing has really changed. It is with this wisdom, the fruit of experience, that Silone excels as the author of *Una manciata di more*.⁵ This is not a novel devoid of hope. With disillusionment comes the strength to fight, to resist, to reinforce his belief in man and in the power of the individual

when left to his own conscience. More so than in the earlier works, the characters of the novel - including the minor ones - are developed to a much greater extent, each having a part to play in the community and each representing either the negative or positive forces of human nature. Rocco, the principal character and certainly the one most indicative of the author's presence, reflects both forces, and his transition from party man to free thinking individual is one of the most interesting aspects of the work. In his transition we can fully appreciate the strength of Silone's argument that moral values, when founded upon a solid, ethical code, are enduring, as opposed to the transitory and shaky beliefs held by those who seek to lead a quiet life, never questioning and always agreeable to the authorities. Of the latter, there are many examples: Alfredo Esposito, Oscar, Ruggero. However, again in contrast to the earlier novel, these characters are largely outnumbered by those who, like Rocco, desire to live a more honest life in the company of friends and in a community of love. Friendship is the cornerstone of the work, and the supremacy of love is proclaimed at every stage. As Lewis illustrates, the personal is always more important than the political to Silone, which is why friendship is allowed to flourish between some very unlikely characters: in the novels discussed in the previous chapter, Berardo and the Solito Sconosciuto, Pietro and Infante, Pietro and Simone; in this novel, Rocco and Lazzaro, Rocco and Don Nicola, Rocco and the Fascist policeman who helps search for Stella; in the later works, to be discussed presently, Luca and Andrea, (potentially) Daniele and Cefalù, Fra Pietro and monks of a different order.⁶ More often than not, what all of these characters have in common is a mutual respect and a common desire to live as free and responsible men, displaying a total lack of regard for distinctions of class and political or religious allegiance. This is entirely reflective of the author's own position, highlighting that there is a difference between a structure and the people within it. He encouraged the individual to

try and see beyond the label and to try to understand the tragedy of those caught in the machine:

Judgement of Fascism is different from judgement of a Fascist. I haven't modified my opinion about Fascism as a system, but when I look at a Fascist I must, of course, see him as a human being and see him with pity and compassion.⁷

Silone remained forever faithful to the idea that man's condition in the world was of immense importance, especially that of the poor and the weak. Here, although the abject poverty which was presented so starkly in the earlier novels is no longer as obvious, the struggle to defend the basic rights of the poor is always present. There is, however, a reversal of roles: the aggressors, where once they were Fascists, are Communists, but equally insidious. This is a recurring motif. A prevalent theme in this author's work is that eventually, through failure to exercise anything but arbitrary rule, all hierarchies turn into tyrannies in some shape or form. As he illustrates here and in all his work, true freedom is allowed to flourish when independent thought and expression are encouraged. This was post-war Italy, and the political fighting and upheaval to which Silone was witness flavours the thematic development, imbuing the work with personal insight (this particular period and the political situation in Italy will be discussed at length in Chapter Three). Silone's disgust at the authorities' power struggle, and their deliberate attempt to ignore the possibilities available to a country now freed from Fascism, is expressed in Rocco's increasing disgust for the party line and his disrespect for those who are willing to be led without thought and regard for consequence.

To lose one's life is a little thing [...] But to see our sense of this life dissipated, to see our reason for existence disappear: that is what is insupportable.⁸

As the reader turns his attention to the pages of *Una manciata di more*, familiar themes are once again to be found: the search for justice and equality, truth and freedom, the importance of love and friendship, the fundamental power of conscience, the need for a strict moral code, the idea that one must accept the risk of living on the margins if one is to find satisfaction, and that it is only in discovering and then expanding upon the strength of each individual that a balanced and caring community becomes a real possibility. As a participant in Silone's social drama, the reader must ask several questions: what is the underlying message of the novel?; what lesson, if any, can be learned from it?; to what extent is the presence of the author felt?; and in what way, if at all, does this novel differ from those written in exile?

The autobiographical elements in this novel are clear and numerous.⁹ When considering the historical background, Silone's departure from the Communist and the Socialist ranks, his rejection by those whom he had once called friend and the solitude he endured for remaining faithful to his ideals, and the parallels between the author and Rocco De Donatis are obvious. Friendship is of such enormous importance primarily because Silone had spent so much of his life devoid of it and of the possibility of finding it: in exile, hunted, never sure of his next destination, none of these conditions offered the ideal environment for lasting friendship. Friendship is what ultimately saves man from a tragic and lonely end. Suffering is endemic to the human condition, but throughout his writing Silone sought to illustrate that suffering was reduced when endured in the company of friends. His years in exile, the clandestine existence and transient sense of home, then his departure from the Communist Party, confirmed his knowledge of what it meant to be alone. The effects of leaving a body that, for a substantial period, has been the closest thing to family, cannot be underestimated. Silone's account of his own experience is poignant -

the pages of *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero* echo a profound sense of loss; they illustrate the largeness of the void faced by one who has stepped outwith the bounds of the Party and portray absolute despair, the kind of despair that leads to thoughts of death. It is with an equal degree of uncertainty that Rocco finds himself upon his departure from the Party ranks. Silone illustrates Rocco's journey, his genesis as a hardline Party enforcer, then his gradual conversion. His unhappiness sets in slowly at first: "Le ultime volte che mi sforzai di parlare in pubblico' egli confessò, 'soffrìi d'uno strano malessere. [...] mentre parlavo, percepivo la mia voce come quella d'un altro.'" (*Una manciata*, p. 111) This sense of unease increases rapidly, it becomes an urgent need to re-evaluate his affiliations and his life, until finally he realises that he is no longer an effective devotee of the Party:

Ma il Partito d'oggi non è quella d'una volta. Era un Partito di perseguitati, ora lo è di persecutori. Era una raccolta d'uomini liberi giovani spregiudicati; è diventato una caserma, una questura. Nei suoi aspetti meno odiosi, è un'amministrazione. (*Una manciata*, p. 132)

At the outset of *Una manciata di more*, Silone presents Rocco as being very much the Party man, possessed of that quasi-evangelical fervour typical of those consumed by Party doctrine. His belief in the Party is obstinate. One of the communist faithful, he is sent to instruct the small group who have formed the 'casale' - a soviet in the Marsica, led by Zaccaria - on how they have acted independently of the Party. The immediate perception of Rocco is a singular one:

audace [...] crudele [...] Ma l'espressione del viso di Rocco non si lasciava paragonare ad altre. Era d'una freddezza avvilita. I suoi occhi erano spaventosi: sembravano di vetro. Il suo colorito era cadaverico, di gesso...Era come se l'aria si fosse rapidamente saturata di gas. (*Una manciata*, pp. 36-37)

He has come to the village to chastise the workers, insisting that in spite of living well within the parameters of Party beliefs, they have actually acted against it:

‘Le nostre intenzioni non contano?’ domandò Zaccaria sorpreso.
‘Né le vostre, né le mie’ ribatté Rocco. ‘Le intenzioni non contano mai.’
‘Se le intenzioni non contano’ rispose Zaccaria alzando la voce ‘non basta che questi miei amici qui presenti, e i nostri che sono sulla montagna, siano tutti poveri braccianti, uomini con poca terra o senza terra? [...] noi, contrariamente alle camicie nere e ai carabinieri, non vogliamo osservare ma distruggere la vecchia legge? Questo per il Partito non ha importanza? [...] Non significa neppure nulla [...] la nostra lotta contro i grandi proprietari? Il loro odio, la loro paura di noi? [...] Non significa nulla [...] se cerchiamo d’attuare il programma sociale del Partito?’ (*Una manciata*, pp. 38-39)

It is of no importance to the Party that these peasants are living by the maxims for which they declared support; what is important is that they are doing so without direct confirmation from headquarters. The entire conversation between Rocco and these peasants is ludicrous, and as is so often the case, the author’s voice is unmistakable. At this stage, Rocco is still an effective mouthpiece:

‘Ascoltatevi bene’ disse Rocco ad alta voce. ‘Fate bene attenzione a quello che ora vi dirò.’ Egli fece una pausa per sottolineare l’importanza di quello che stava per dichiarare, e aggiunse: ‘Quanto più un’azione somiglia a quella che potrebbe intraprendere il Partito, tanto più essa è perfida ed esecrabile, se viene attuata all’insaputa e contro la volontà del Partito.’ (*Una manciata*, p. 39)

Instantly the reader is reminded of Silone’s decision to leave a party which had become more bureaucratic than faithful to its ideals, the ridiculous nature of that bureaucracy being embodied succinctly in Rocco’s final words to these peasants;

Il Partito è superiore al suo programma. Volete sapere quale sarebbe il massimo di tutti i tradimenti? Realizzare il programma del Partito senza il Partito. (*Una manciata*, p. 39)¹⁰

It is perhaps these words, and the obvious derision behind them, which incited the interest of the critics, most especially the communist critics, for it was indeed true that the novel 'suscitò un certo disagio.'¹¹ As shall be seen from following Rocco's journey through the book, the concepts of brotherhood and community do not walk comfortably with Party politics.

The idea of a community formed of a brotherhood of men is of course not new to *Una manciata di more*. It is a familiar theme, one of Silone's central themes, and one that has been gathering momentum since *Fontamara*. Reviewing a new edition of *Fontamara*, the critic I. Quigley commented:

Yes, Signor Silone's themes are the same as they were thirty years ago, when he wrote what was the most exact satire on the dictatorships of the day, *Fontamara*. Because now, as they were then, they are still the main themes of human life - man's destiny, man's self-respect and dignity, his feelings for others, his aspirations - always expressed in the plainest and least pretentious characters, in the plainest and least pretentious form; modestly, undidactically. 'Can any man possess the truth?' Pietro asks in *The seed beneath the snow*.¹²

It is in the search for this community and through his relationships with certain specific characters that Rocco becomes a changed man. He undergoes a shift of allegiance, rejecting the Party, and he must seek out friendship in an entirely new manner, without the political backdrop.¹³ At this point, it should be noted that the community in which he moves is no longer a specifically Christian one, as in the early works. Here one of the prime relationships formed is between a Christian and a Jew. Such an unprejudiced spirit is representative of the religious tolerance and pluralism that Silone has always embraced, and it accentuates his desire to cross any political or religious divide. Given that this particular period in European history was one of the most brutal (the horrors of the concentration camps and the Stalinist purges were fresh in the author's mind), it is not surprising that he

chose to advocate this understanding and pluralism in his first post-war novel. It is arguable as to whether his political beliefs change; after all, the basic Communist ideal - and the Christian one - are the aspiration to social equality. However, when the Party becomes like any other organised tyranny, Rocco is forced to resign his affiliation.

Il Partito era una grande cosa nella clandestinità [...] Fravamo allora un partito di perseguitati, adesso stiamo diventando, a nostro volta, persecutori. (*Una manciata*, p. 126)¹⁴

Rocco comes to realise that it is impossible for him to remain within a party which leaves no room for individual thought or freedom and which openly frowns on the notion of friendship. 'Il motore della rivoluzione [...] non è l'amicizia' are the less than comforting words from Oscar, the Party inquisitor, to which Rocco can only reply 'Ma forse dal prossimo cataclisma si salveranno solo quelli che avranno degli amici.' (*Una manciata*, p. 109) There is the implicit sense that friendship is not a concept that Rocco has to cultivate, it is innate, felt in his core. Here he can only follow the dictates of what he knows to be right, in accordance with his conscience.

Love, friendship, and brotherhood walk hand in hand in this novel. From his own experience, Silone was familiar with exactly how important these attributes were. They constitute the over-riding moral force that breathes life into the friends and their community. It is because of the friends that he finds and the experience of standing alone, outwith the Party, that Rocco is able to realise his self-worth and fulfill his ambitions.

Più che il partito, è cambiato Rocco. Nello slancio della sua passione civile aveva finito con l'identificarsi con qualcosa al di fuori di sé, cioè col meccanismo della lotta che alla lunga l'aveva alienato da se stesso, finché a poco a poco la coscienza personale gli risbuca dall'altra parte.¹⁵

Rocco's most important friendships are those he enjoys with Martino, Lazzaro, don Nicola and Stella, though by no means are others less worthy. It is, however, fair to say that it is the aforementioned who are directly responsible for encouraging his self-awareness. Having spent some time in the *casale* with Zaccaria and Giuditta, Rocco begins to reflect, almost unconsciously, on his future: 'Correva voce che egli fosse afflitto da strane inquietudini, da problemi, da dubbi.' (*Una manciata*, p. 42) He is predisposed to change, and at that point the reader learns, somewhat conveniently perhaps, that Martino has returned. Initially the figure of Martino is shrouded in mystery, but gradually more and more is divulged about him and the tremendous defiance which earned him his exile.¹⁶ The son of an impoverished coal merchant, Martino spent his youth living in the forest which used to surround the village, the 'selva' that was stolen from the villagers by the wealthy Tarocchi landowners, a theft which has remained unpunished. The importance of the forest can not be underestimated, it represents a scale on which social injustice can be measured. By illegal accord, the Tarocchi family were able to restrict peasant access to the forest, in some cases denying the right to a living, and because of their wealth they were immune from punishment. A court case was taken up against them, which 'durò una trentina d' anni. Esso terminò come di solito, in quei tempi, i processi dei poveri contro i ricchi.' (*Una manciata*, p. 58)¹⁷ As a result of this theft, Martino lost his home and playground. At this point Silone introduces the 'tromba' that, with the 'selva', is central to the literary and social landscape of the novel. This instrument was commonly used to call the peasants together in times of need, albeit frequently for innocent purposes, and as such was seen as a threat to the governing body. The authorities dissolved the Peasant League but their real intention was to recover the 'tromba', to confiscate the instrument and thus quash symbolically the menace of a peasant uprising. 'Non si sentiva però sicuri, finché rimaneva la tromba' disse Giuditta. 'L'importante non era la lega, ma la tromba.' (*Una manciata*, p.

59) No-one could or would tell them where the trumpet was hidden. When it came to Zaccaria's turn to answer the authorities, Martino interrupted in defiance: 'Non siamo tenuti a rispondervi [...] Anche se lo sapessi [...] non ve lo direi.' (*Una manciata*, p. 61) Exile was his punishment for such arrogance. Zaccaria was thus saved from having to answer the authorities and as a result feels his debt to Martino is great:

Era un ragazzo in gamba; questo si vedeva. Era un ragazzo che non sapeva cosa fosse la paura. Era magnifico vederlo in quell'atto di sfida, con le mandibole ferme, lo sguardo sereno [...] Da quella sera non avevo più visto Martino [...] Ma ho pensato molte volte a lui e me lo sono sempre raffigurato come quella volta, un bel ragazzo in alto di sfida. Il figlio del carbonaio m'aveva dato una lezione che non potevo dimenticare. (*Una manciata*, pp. 61-62)

Certainly Martino presents a tremendous figure, and from his youthful impetuosity to the man of wisdom we find in the latter stages of the novel, he remains a strong revolutionary presence, one with whom Rocco will increasingly identify.¹⁸ Although banished from his home, Martino's mind was never far from the forest:

Ma la selva nella quale io continuavo mentalmente a vivere, in realtà era stata già distrutta. Essa viveva soltanto in me. La mia montagna era stata ridotta così come puoi vederla, brulla e sordomuta [...] Non so se qualcuno sia mai rimasto così addolorato davanti alle macerie della casa natale. Pensa un po', passai qui tutta la mia infanzia e adolescenza. Ero qui la maggior parte del tempo. La selva era la mia casa, la mia scuola, la mia palestra [...] Non che disdegnassi la compagnia degli altri ragazzi. Ma la miseria mi teneva lontano. Il mio vestito era un insieme di stracci, andavo scalzo. (*Una manciata*, p. 85)

Thus the forest becomes more than a feature of the geographical landscape, it is an obvious metaphor for a state of being, and a lonely one, in which Martino has lived in a type of parallel exile. It is impossible not to see a link between the forest and what the Communist Party had represented for Silone as a young man. In *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, Silone explained that it was a party to which he had sacrificed his youth, and in *Uscita di*

sicurezza, as shall be illustrated, Silone wrote that the Party, once you had embraced it, replaced everything that was familiar about hearth and home.¹⁹ For Rocco, Martino's example of courage in the face of adversity is one to be imitated, he too must take a stand. 'Appena oggi ti ho visto, ho subito avuto la sensazione d' una naturale complicità [...] qualunque cosa tu decida, resterò al tuo fianco.' (*Una manciata*, p. 89) Rocco's friendship with Martino displeases the Party, they have no control over the old rebel and as such they fear him. It is a universal truism that we fear what we cannot understand. Oscar warns Rocco that he should not associate with Martino anymore, to which Rocco replies; 'Il Partito oltrepassa da molto i suoi poteri.' (*Una manciata*, p. 108) For Rocco it is inconceivable that the Party, any party, should seek to impose restrictions on friendship, it is absurd and it is dangerous. Freedom of choice and thought is paramount to Silone. Rocco must be able to choose, and it is in his choice that the element of risk is contained. This is the most basic and fundamental component of liberty, and hugely important to Rocco's development.²⁰

Il simbolo più completo, forse, di tutta l'opera di Silone lo troviamo nella figura primitiva e potente, con una spiccata tendenza escatologica, di Lazzaro con la sua tromba. Egli è, per così dire, la personificazione della tradizione cristiana.²¹

Lazzaro does not make an appearance until the second part of the novel, but his character is introduced to us alongside Martino, the 'selva' and the 'tromba', thus casting a light of mystery upon him.²²

Lazzaro è dapprima solo un nome, poi una voce, la voce della sua tromba, la voce che si cerca di soffocare; poi una specie di fantasma evocato nella notte del 25 luglio, infine una presenza pericolosa in paese.²³

He disappeared from the village at the same time as Martino, and his personal history is linked to that of the 'selva'. Indeed, his father died in prison after having killed a policeman who had tried to prevent him from taking some wood from his own section of the forest. For the wealthy this would have been seen as an act of self-defence in the wake of injustice, in this case it was murder, and the circumstances of the crime were unimportant: 'Naturalmente, tutti sapevano ch'egli aveva ragione. Anche i giudici, soprattutto i giudici, lo sapevano. Ma era la ragione d'un povero. Una ragione che non contava.' (*Una manciata*, p. 58) The forest is again inextricably linked to injustice and the 'tromba', once belonging to Lazzaro's father - now to Lazzaro - is continually bound to the search for justice.

La tromba, difatti, è l'unico mezzo di difesa dei cafoni, l'unica voce di protesta contro le ingiustizie degli oppressori [...] Essa è una eredità che appartiene a tutti i cafoni che in essa ritrovano la loro solidarietà [...] ci sarà sempre qualcuno per suonarla [...] E, infine, sarà l'angelo a suonare la tromba per l'ultima volta, segnando la fine definitiva delle ingiustizie [...] Lazzaro e la sua tromba contengono tutto il messaggio sioniano [...] lotta per loro e insieme con loro [...] speranza in una rinascita, in un avvenire migliore [...] un profeta che sferza la Chiesa e la società e suona la sua tromba in difesa dei poveri e degli oppressi. Egli è la voce della speranza [...] Egli è il segno e il simbolo del Regno che deve venire, del Regno in cui non ci saranno più né sbirri, né leggi, ma solo l'amicizia e l'amore.²⁴

It is important to note that the trumpet is not only representative of justice but also of the other themes of love, friendship, and brotherhood.²⁵ Lazzaro is perhaps Silone's greatest character achievement in this novel, from his introduction until the end he represents a wisdom born of suffering and determination to continue in the fight. 'Ho fiducia nell'uomo che accetta il dolore e lo trasforma in verità e in coraggio morale' are Silone's own words.²⁶ Lazzaro and his trumpet pose a constant threat to the authority of the Communist Party, one they wish to eliminate, firstly by trying to prevent a friendship between him and Rocco, then by attempting to manipulate Lazzaro into using the instrument to the Party's advantage - as a symbol of their unity.²⁷

L'uso della tromba o del tamburro per riunire il popolo è di pretta origine feudale o schiavista, e non si potrebbe concepire simbolo più plastico dell'antiprogresso, dell'oscurantismo. A meno che [...] la tromba non passi al servizio del Partito. Allora sarebbe evidentemente un altro paio di maniche. Sarebbe anzi un colpo formidabile. Un fatto nuovo, originalissimo. Porteremmo Lazzaro alla tribuna del prossimo congresso del Partito. Gli faremmo suonare la tromba dal balcone del Campidoglio, a Roma. Lo faremmo ritrarre in un documento per il cinema. (*Una manciata*, p. 117)

However, Lazzaro shows no interest in their politics and the threat remains. The Party is uneasy at the possibility of Rocco's desertion: 'La probabile diserzione di Rocco minacciava di creare nell'organizzazione un vuoto spiacevole e uno scandolo pericoloso.' (*Una manciata*, p. 115), but they are impotent. He has seen the Party in action, specifically in their treatment of a young Polish girl whose story influenced him greatly, and feels a new sense of individuality that is not permitted within their confines.²⁸ After making the decision to leave, in the face of uncertainty and Stella's appeals, it is Lazzaro who offers the advice: 'Vedrai, uscirai dal vicolo cieco senza essere costretto a tornare indietro.' (*Una manciata*, p. 130). and indeed shortly after Rocco can testify to this: 'In mia assenza qualcuno ha creato un varco [...] Adesso si può andare avanti.' (*Una manciata*, p. 136)

To Rocco and to his companions, Lazzaro and his trumpet represent hope, the idea that although situations do not seem to change for the *cafoni* in an earthly manner, a better life is to be discovered if there exists the desire to find it.²⁹ However simplistic and idealistic this message might be, it represents that trust in hope which the author continues to display.

In questa maniera la figura di Lazzaro acquista un valore decisamente simbolico. Egli è il cafone buono, il difensore degli indifesi [...] Egli è costretto a fuggire, a lasciare la sua terra, ma nel ritornare al paese che per tanto tempo era stato in una condizione di morte, indica che la vita può essere rinnovata [...] Egli è il portatore di un linguaggio nuovo, di un linguaggio di pace e di amicizia: 'Vogliamo andare da Lazzaro? - È un po' tardi, ma da lui gli amici possono andare a qualsiasi ora.' Come Pietro e più di Pietro egli è un imitatore di Cristo, un suo diretto seguace: 'Lazzaro è un uomo buono, un uomo di rispetto. Nessuno

può dirne male. Se fosse vissuto ai tempi di nostro Signore quasi certamente sarebbe stato chiamato tra gli apostoli e non sarebbe stato il tredicesimo'.³⁰

In his association with Martino and Lazzaro, Rocco prepares the way for a new community to which he can belong, far from the restraints of Party life, a community in which the emphasis is on honest friendship.³¹ Community was once merely a noun of quality, from *communis*, meaning fellowship; in Silone it comes to mean so much more, now embodying the idea of a community of relationships and/or feelings. Rocco's struggle (and of course, the author's) can continue without any Party or specific label, for the struggle is the eternal one between good and evil, with the aim of crushing the enemies of freedom whenever possible.

[...] Rocco de Donatis, another surrogate [...] for his author, retraces the long and painful path from an essentially religious youthful impulse, through the association with the oppressed *cafoni*, to the political effort to assist them, and thence through the slow withdrawal from communism and to the discovering supremacy of love and friendship and integrity [...] the most powerful weapon they possess is the fact of their friendship. Friendship, by making them human, has made them alive. 'Amo ergo sum' says Rocco.³²

Don Nicola, Rocco's childhood friend, has an important role to play for what he tells us about the young Rocco and his religious vocation, for his part in exemplifying the Church in the novel and for how he displays the change in his own character through friendship with Rocco. In Silonian terms, don Nicola is a positive character, '[...] uomo pio, ma franco generoso impulsivo. Nelle sue prediche degli ultimi tempi egli si era lasciato spesso andare a parole minacciose contro i ricchi e i potenti, duri di cuore.' (p. 29) In the argument over the forest, don Nicola was very much against the action of the Tarocchi family, and to the chagrin of his sister, has made that much obvious.

'In questo caso non condanno affatto la proprietà, ma il furto' diceva e ripeteva don Nicola. 'La selva, nessuno lo nega, era proprietà demaniale. I Tarocchi l'hanno rubata [...] Io rappresento un'autorità che è superiore ai re e ai governi' diceva e ripeteva don Nicola. 'Non è in mio potere restituire la selva al popolo, ma posso rifiutare un invito a pranzo se mi viene da una famiglia di ladri.' (*Una manciata*, p. 77)³³

When Rocco begins to experience his inner turmoil it is to don Nicola that he turns; ironically, it seems the communist's closest ally is a catholic priest. The reader learns of Rocco's youthful intention to join the Church, although '[...] fu invece preso dalla politica, all'improvviso e di nascosto, come da una violenta malattia.' (*Una manciata*, p. 71)³⁴ In this, of course, he is an evolved Pietro Spina, and reflects Silone's attempts to placate his religious and political tendencies. In his defence of Rocco's relationship with Stella, a young Jewish girl, don Nicola reminds his sister that 'Il miglior catechismo cristiano è voler bene' (*Una manciata*, p. 164) and that is not restricted to those of a similar faith. Stella and her family were persecuted by so-called Christians, and as such 'un cristiano, un uomo fornito di senso di carità e di pudore, in presenza di quella derelitta creaturina, non può che vergognarsi e tacere.' (*Una manciata*, pp. 164-165)³⁵ The moral strength of this priest is clear and reminiscent of don Benedetto and don Orione. Don Nicola insists on Rocco's conviction and commitment to his fellow man:

Rocco nacque con un'evidente vocazione per la vita religiosa [...] Ma, pur astenendosi dall'obbedire alla sua vocazione, egli ha preteso dalla vita secolare l'assoluto che solo il convento poteva dargli. Per questo egli si trova in una situazione tragica, assurda, molto più difficile a risolvere di qualsiasi eventuale concubinato. Come potrei abbandonarlo? (*Una manciata*, p. 79)

These comments present a solid picture of Rocco's social conscience.

Non si fa più prete perché la Chiesa non nutre più le sue pecore del cibo di cui hanno bisogno e, pensando che quanto manca ormai alla Chiesa, cioè la passione e la cura per i poveri, lo possa avere invece un sistema idealista secolare, entra nel Partito al fine d'esercitarvi le 'funzioni sacerdotali' con più efficacia.³⁶

The friendship between these two characters is a long and enduring one, and is integral to the plot of the novel (in that it illustrates that friendship stretches beyond the political and religious divide) and to a better understanding of the emphasis the author placed upon friendship. As illustrated above, many of Silone's characters form unlikely alliances by virtue of mutual respect (Pietro Spina and Nunzio, Pietro and Faustina, Pietro and his grandmother; Rocco and don Nicola, Rocco and Lazzaro; in the novels which follow, Andrea and Luca, and to a certain extent Daniele and Cefalù, though in this case the respect is achieved post-mortem). They share a common desire for truth and justice for all men, and they each serve this goal in their individual ways.

L'ispirazione politico-sociale è anche in questo romanzo strettamente legata, anzi fusa con il sentimento morale e religiosa: la passione civile s'identifica con la dedizione alla causa dell'uomo, e questa richiede in chi l'abbraccia coerenza, chiarezza e coraggio; la religiosità palese nell'iniziale inclinazione di Rocco al sacerdozio è implicita nella sua costante fedeltà ai valori cristiani, viene in primo piano nei colloqui del protagonista con il parroco amico e con Martino, e nel dialogo finale tra Stella e Lazzaro, che s'apre alla fede nella Provvidenza.³⁷

Don Nicola lends full support to Rocco's decision to leave the Party:

Egli è arrivato al punto in cui può fare qualcosa che dia al suo passato un senso piuttosto che un altro [...] Non so dirti fino a che punto mi sento preoccupato per lui. Che razzo d'amico sarei se non gli facessi sapere che, occorrendo, può contare su di me? (*Una manciata*, p. 158)³⁸

In response to his sister's fear that he may be capable of following Rocco to hell, to those unfamiliar with Silone's priests, some surprising words are uttered: 'spiegami un po', un paradiso senza gli amici, che razza di paradiso sarebbe?' (*Una manciata*, p. 159) The judgemental nature of don Nicola's sister is a common one, prevalent amongst those who

live in paranoia, those who are still perhaps frightened by the power the authorities hold over them and thus is a result of their paranoia. It is ultimately in the company of Rocco that don Nicola finds himself most at ease:

Egli si sentiva legato a Rocco da una complicità assai più forte dei ricordi di gioventù. In compagnia di lui, di Martino, di Lazzaro, egli dimenticava le preoccupazioni ordinarie, si sentiva in un cerchio più intimo della vita. Era arrivato a scrivere di non sentirsi mai così 'vero' e 'integro' come assieme ad essi. (*Una manciata*, p. 267)³⁹

In the final analysis it is love that will save man, and the obvious love between don Nicola and Rocco is, in this writer's opinion, one of the purest examples of friendship and brotherhood presented to us by Silone. True friendship knows no boundaries and crosses all divides if it is nurtured with the spirit of tolerance, mutual respect, and understanding. Here it would seem that Silone is highlighting the Communists' inability to understand these concepts; they frown on friendship and prefer to live under fear of Stalinist retribution and totalitarianism.

From her arrival in the *casale*, to which no other children are permitted, Stella is treated as special.⁴⁰ She is encouraged to read and learn rather than joining the others in the fields. It is this period of study which permits her to learn about the Communist Party and therefore directly shapes her future:

Stella apprendeva avidamente le rivelazioni della nuova fede. Ne fu scossa ed esaltata al punto che in cuor suo decise di consacrarsi interamente, per tutto il resto della vita, al Partito. (*Una manciata*, p. 34)

She is sent to party headquarters on behalf of the *casale*, and there her destiny is decided, for she meets Rocco. Initially their alliance seems an unlikely one, for as Stella grows more

faithful to the Party and their beliefs, Rocco becomes less fervent and becomes increasingly uncertain of his future.⁴¹ When Rocco finally makes the decision to leave the Party, Stella remains a member and tries in vain to make him reconsider:

Ti trovi nel Partito da tanti anni [...] Non vuoi mica concludere che tutta la vita hai camminato su una strada falsa? [...] Fuori del Partito è il nulla. (*Una manciata*, pp. 128-129)

Stella has innocence on her side. She has not seen the travesties of justice witnessed by Rocco and is still unable to conceive of life without her new faith.⁴² Her concern is for Rocco, for how he will survive without the party he helped to create. For Rocco, however, there is no other choice. As with his concept of friendship, his perception of right and wrong is a potent force in helping him realise there is actually no decision to make, for his choice is clear. Suddenly there is a dilemma: Stella is missing for no apparent reason, has left the Party and does not wish to be found. Gradually her story is revealed, her physical and mental anguish derive from the knowledge that she has unwittingly betrayed Rocco. It is in this betrayal that her naïveté is displayed to its full extent. The Party has been able to use her to its advantage while relying on her faith and innocence, on her love; in providing them with details on Rocco, producing certain documents, believing she was helping him, she has sealed both their fates. This betrayal by the Party has rendered her indifferent to life: 'Mi sento vuota. Come una valigia vuota, come una casa deserta. Non volontà di vivere, neanche volontà di non vivere.' (*Una manciata*, p. 168) It is to don Nicola that Stella reveals the truth, of how she was so intent on steering Rocco back to the right course that she was deluded by Oscar, believing they shared a similar agenda: 'Ne rimase meravigliata e contenta, considerandolo ormai un proprio complice nel tentativo di recuperare l'anima smarrita di Rocco.' (*Una manciata*, p. 186)⁴³ In this episode it is Silone

who demonstrates the insidious nature of the Party, how they will turn brother against brother to preserve unity at all cost, or destroy them. This is no longer the Party to which he, or Rocco, adhered; it has become as tyrannical as any dictatorship, regardless of official policy.

To Silone the fascist - antifascist struggle is one of attitude, a matter of morality, of the heart and soul: and these remain, even since the war dissolved official Fascism. The search for honesty, truth, loyalty, and all the plain - above all, the truthful - virtues, is not, after all, confined to a decade or two.⁴⁴

Convinced that she is demonstrating her loyalty to the Party, Stella permits Oscar and Ruggero to enter her home, to go through Rocco's papers and eventually condemn him as a traitor. The lengthy discussions between Stella and Ruggero, particularly when trying to discredit Rocco's reports on forced labour camps in Russia, serve to illustrate the corrupt nature of the Party.⁴⁵ Clearly this entire section prefigures condemnations which will be fully expounded in *Uscita di sicurezza* and which are obviously heartfelt. When opinion, discernment and discussion are no longer permitted, there can be no freedom. The concept of truth has been distorted:

'se un documento è falso o autentico, non lo decido io, ma il Partito. Il criterio infallibile del Partito ti è noto: tutto ciò che nuoce alla Russia è falso.'

'Quei documenti potrebbero dunque essere falsi anche se per caso, dico per dire, fossero autentici?'

'Si capisce. Soprattutto se fossero autentici.' (*Una manciata*, p. 197)

This is a savage indictment from the author, indeed the novel as a whole was his most vociferous attack to date on the obdurate and repressive nature of the Communist Party and one which, as shall be seen, inspired some severe censure from the Communist critics. Finally, realisation dawns on Stella, and she too is able to see just what the Party has become.

L'imprevisto incidente lasciò nel suo animo un oscuro senso di pericolo. Da quel momento non si sentì più sicura. Quell' uomo in cui aveva avuto fiducia e al quale aveva affidato le chiavi di casa, si era rivelato un essere senza scrupoli. (*Una manciata*, p. 202)

Thus Stella and Rocco are able to move forward, both disillusioned yet still together, united in their adherence to the original values - brotherhood, friendship, love and justice - without belonging to, or being manipulated by, the machine.⁴⁶ It must be noticed that the process of moving beyond what was once familiar is not an easy one:

A parer nostro, l'originalità del romanzo rispetto alle opere precedenti sta nel aver rappresentato non solo l'irriducibilità d'un vero rivoluzionario, ma anche l'esigenza totalitaria del militante attraverso lo sconvolgimento che la rottura col partito gli provoca.⁴⁷

And so it is in the latter stages of the novel, when the group of friends is firmly established, that one returns to the theme of the 'selva' and to the situation of the *cafoni*. Although no longer a member of the Party, Rocco remains committed to his principles which, throughout, have remained unchanged, mirroring exactly the stance taken by Silone.

Ignazio Silone, pur avendo rotto i vincoli col Partito Comunista, non intese mai rifugiarsi in una 'torre d'avorio', mai ritirarsi in una splendida solitudine: i problemi dell'uomo e della società restarono sempre i suoi problemi, nella convinzione che un totale disimpegno politico equivallesse sostanzialmente ad un disimpegno morale.⁴⁸

He can fight for social justice, always on the side of the oppressed, and with the support of his true friends.⁴⁹ The landowners in the area are anxious at the prospect of a peasant uprising, *cafoni* who want to occupy and work the uncultivated land. To ease the situation, the Tarocchi offered land to certain members of the Party, but the poorest and neediest peasants would not benefit from the deal, and so Rocco and Martino arouse the *cafoni* into non-acceptance. Rocco has become more than a nuisance, the Party are jealous of the

popularity which he and Martino enjoy amongst the farm workers and know that he is responsible for the failure of the land deal: “Senza di lui e Martino” dice Zaccaria “il Partito avrebbe già concluso un compromesso con don Vincenzo.” (*Una manciata*, p. 217) Silone is insistent upon the fact that ‘Il Partito, ne abbiamo avuto degli esempi, non perdona,’ and, as such, plans are made to discredit Rocco. (*Una manciata*, p. 226) Failing to trap him behaving indecently with Stella, they let it be known that it was Rocco who was responsible for the death of Bonifazio, the young soldier who was shot by the partisans. The effect of this news is great: Stella and Rocco consider emigrating because ‘Il Partito non ci dà tregua.’ (*Una manciata*, p. 246)⁵⁰; the farm workers refuse to drink with Rocco, thus tearing at the fragments of the newly found solidarity and causing Rocco great distress (*Una manciata*, p. 253). Again, the reader is reminded of the author’s own experience and the loss of his friends at his expulsion from the Party. The Party does not forgive, as the reader is most forcefully reminded by Martino in his conversations with Stella:

Chi esce dal Partito si mette a repentaglio la violenza delle aggressioni che dovrà subire, dipenderà unicamente dalla pericolosità che il Partito gli attribuisce. Il passato, la fedeltà ideale, la lealtà verso gli ex compagni, credi a me, non hanno il minimo peso; la precedente amicizia, nessuna importanza [...] Il Partito è in guerra [...] Chi abbandona il Partito è un disertore [...] Il Partito può trattare, discutere, stringere accordi con gli avversari, ma non con i propri disertori [...] Ma dove il Partito non è ancora in grado di deportare e fucilare, esso tenta di uccidere i suoi disertori almeno moralmente. (*Una manciata*, pp. 248-249)

All of the characters in the book have known hard times, and with the increasing realisation that his future may not be a happy one, Rocco allows himself a moment of despair: ‘Purtroppo, quello che ci aspetta, sarà peggio del già noto [...] Le persecuzioni dei compagni sono le più tristi.’ (*Una manciata*, p. 254) However, ‘La scelta dei poveri come compagni rimane l’atto più importante della mia vita.’ (*Una manciata*, p. 254). These words are certainly straight from the mouth of the author.

'what defined our rebellion was the choice of companions. Outside the church there were the cafoni.' The definition is crucial. There was a point in Silone's rebellion (as he himself has remarked) at which hate and love coincided: hatred of injustice, and love not merely of justice but of people. Love was the stronger emotion; and it may be said in advance that Silone survived the earthquake of his political experience exactly because he went into it primarily out of love rather than hatred. And since it was a love inseparable from the sheer fact of human existence, it was invulnerable to disappointment. All of that is implicit in the statement that what defined Silone's rebellion was the choice of companions.⁵¹

The novel does not end on a happy note, for there is a feeling of having gone full circle and of having accomplished very little. Martino is falsely accused of killing the Tarocchi's factor; Lazzaro and his 'tromba' are held responsible for the peasant unrest; justice is not found. 'L'innocenza, disse Rocco, è senza speranza.' (*Una manciata*, p. 270) Yet the overwhelming and lingering impression is not one totally devoid of hope:

Vi sarà sempre qualcuno che non venderà la sua anima per un pugno di fave e un pezzo di pecorino [...] quando i vermi crederanno di avere partita vinta, apparirà l'angelo. Egli toglierà la tromba dal suo nascondiglio e la suonerà a pieni polmoni e sveglierà anche i morti. (*Una manciata*, p. 277)

There will always be those who lack courage and honour, those who will fall in the battle against corruption, but equally there will remain those who will strive together to bring down the pillars of oppression in the fight for the truth, even when they are unaware of their capabilities. 'Forse le formiche non sanno niente di niente. Hanno una testa così piccola [...] Ma vanno dove devono andare.' (*Una manciata*, p. 280) One thing remains constant, the author's absolute need to reflect, question and understand. This was a lifelong endeavour for Silone, the constant re-evaluation of a life lived and the assertion at all times of the superiority of love and freedom over any dogma or ideology. It is perhaps one of the reasons he found it necessary to revise the earlier novels, in a bid to better understand his past and to give it perspective. Ultimately we are responsible for ourselves, left to our own reason and sense of right and wrong.

Silone's first novel to be published in Italy met with a fairly cool reception.

Una manciata di more, per essere il primo romanzo composto e pubblicato direttamente in Italia, è importante nella storia dei rapporti tra lo scrittore e la critica italiana.⁵²

The most severe criticism came from the Communist papers, hardly surprising in itself as they considered Silone a traitor whose purpose was to discredit the Party at all costs. Scathing attacks were launched, some of which seem to be more interested in insulting the author rather than criticising the work, particularly the following, which are worth quoting in full.

in questo libro si fa vedere che il partito comunista è (risum teneatis) un partito di delinquenti tenebroso, di opportunisti cretini; che l'unione sovietica è un campo di concentramento, ecc [...] Ipse dixit: lo ha detto i bollettini dell'Azione Cattolica, le documentazioni dei servizi americani, per giornali e riviste agli ordini e il giornale 'Candido'. Il tutto è esposto nel corso di un racconto a singhiozzo, con quello stile da traduzione malfatta che è del Silone e che impedisce ai suoi libri di essere, in Italia, e cioè prima che ci abbia messo mano un ritraduttore, considerati qualcosa.

Nonostante ciò, e visto quel contenuto che abbiamo detto, bisognerà dire che l'arte di questo romanzo è una grande arte libera e l'autore un modello di libero scrittore, libero dal buon senso, dallo stile italiano, dalla capacità di costruire un racconto.⁵³

There followed a more venomous criticism for Carlo Salinari, appearing in *L'unità*, 2 August, 1952:

sarà un comunista - dicevo tra me - sarà un antifascista, ma certamente non è uno scrittore [...] Mi dava fastidio tutto in lui: la incapacità a costruire la vicenda di un romanzo, il tono falso dei suoi personaggi, quel suo periodare ora smidollato e spiacciato ora gonfio e retorico nel tentativo di darsi una spina dorsale [...] Le stesse impressioni [...] ho ricevuto leggendo questo suo ultimo romanzo [...] divertente è constatare come in esso Silone abbia condensato i suoi sogni proibiti, le sue velleità mai realizzate [...] Ma la caratteristica fondamentale di Silone scrittore è l'impotenza. Egli è incapace, attraverso la parola, di creare un sentimento, un personaggio, un ambiente. C'è sempre qualcosa di falso, di calcolato, d'insincero che gli impedisce d'abbandonarsi all'onda del racconto [...] Tuttavia questa impotenza di Silone scrittore non può essere attribuita solo alle sue esigenze stilistiche, al suo gusto grossolano e provinciale. Si riflette, nello scrittore, l'impotenza di tutta la sua personalità. Silone non è che un velleitario che trasferisce nel sogno ciò che gli è impossibile ottenere nella realtà e nel sogno si appaga [...] Egli ha fallito in ogni momento della sua vita [...] A Roma, quando, durante una partita di calcio, un giocatore manifesta chiaramente di non saper giocare, il pubblico gli rivolge un consiglio, insieme scherzoso e fraterno: di cambiare mestiere. Forse è sconveniente, ma ci è venuta irresistibile la

tentazione di rivolgere a Silone lo stesso invito, affinché non insista a voler fare lo scrittore. Ma poi ci è sorto un dubbio. Politico? No. Scrittore? No: E che gli facciamo fare, pover' uomo?⁵⁴

It would be fair to suggest that Silone was touching a raw nerve. Giuseppe Petronio, in *L'avanti*, was scarcely more flattering;

L'uomo che ci è stato presentato come il più grande romanziere italiano dopo il Manzoni e il Verga, ci parve uno stanco epigono del Verga, un verista in ritardo che, come era accaduto anche ad altri in quei decenni, ripeteva per altre regioni italiane l'esperienza siciliano del Verga, ma in ritardo ormai, senza un rapporto stretto con la società e con la cultura del suo tempo, senza, soprattutto, uno stile e un linguaggio [...] *Una manciata di more* [...] il libro ci pare, tutto sommato, un fallimento, una brutta azione politica e una inutile azione artistica [...] in gran parte esso è un libello politico, in cui si ritrovano tutti i luoghi comuni dell'anticomunismo corrente; e come un libello politico va giudicato. Ma il fatto si è che questo anticomunismo non riesce nemmeno esso a farsi arte, a costruire uomini vivi [...] il guaio si è che nel romanzo di Silone il dramma non c'è [...] Così, in questo romanzo di libertà non si capisce cosa sia la libertà per la quale si lotta; in questo libro pieno di 'cafoni' i cafoni non ci sono, né coi loro problemi né coi loro spiriti; in questo libro di comunisti in crisi, i comunisti non ci sono, e tante volte, leggendo, il pensiero ricorre a Guareschi e ai suoi comunisti, con la differenza che Guareschi, almeno, vorrebbe essere un umorista.⁵⁵

The Socialist Nicola Chiaromonte did not offer much praise, nor did Emilio Cecchi or Indro Montanelli, the latter of whom declared Silone owed his fame to Fascism and was 'mediocre e falso'.⁵⁶ Positive criticism, however, was forthcoming, if a little hesitant. Giancarlo Vigorelli claimed that *Una manciata di more* was Silone's finest work, as did Charles Poore in the New York Times, with other favourable judgements coming from Irving Howe, Isabel Quigley, Angus Wilson, William Mueller, and Paolo Milano.⁵⁷ Perhaps extra attention should be given to Milano's prophetic insight:

Sono avvenute non poche cose nella letteratura e nella storia. In Italia sono apparsi parecchi scrittori [...] i quali hanno potuto camminare su un terreno nuovo, perché Silone per primo aveva spianato la strada. Egli fu il primo ad inoltrarsi al di là di Eboli [...] Silone può aspettare. Se i suoi connazionali sono lenti ad accordargli un pieno riconoscimento, il tempo è dalla sua parte.⁵⁸

The most positive opinions were expressed by Guglielmo Petroni and Eugenio Montale:

Una manciata di more dovrebbe essere per la letteratura italiana il più valido preteso che mai si sia presentato, nel nostro tempo, per porre una volta per tutte e con libertà la nostra coscienza letteraria dinanzi alla sua questione umana, quella che nella maggior parte dell'Europa è ormai in pieno dibattito e si presenta indubbiamente come l'unica soluzione vitale di fronte alla crisi del nostro tempo. *Una manciata di more* può essere il primo libro da cui muovere per un superamento di tanti residui arcadici che ci confondono, e lo può essere perché, oltretutto, è un libro scritto con quella piena chiarezza coraggiosa di fronte all'oggetto ed al sentimento, di fronte al nome delle cose quali ci attorniano mentre noi sembra che abbiamo paura di guardarle ad occhio nudo, la quale è stile e padronanza d'artista di fronte alla propria materia.⁵⁹

and

Il libro procede a sbalzi, senza che quest'andatura sembri un passo deliberato. Per timore di non spiegarsi bene Silone può ripetersi; per paura di indulgere all'arte pura ha fin troppo l'aria di infischarsi delle sottigliezze tecniche dei nuovissimi narratori. Malgrado questi dubbi il libro ribadisce l'impressione che altri libri di Silone ci hanno lasciato: che questo autore, ricco di una pietà per gli uomini che sembra sconfinare, ma in realtà si esprime nella favola e nella leggenda, anche quando sembra muovere da motivi sociali di origine veristica, è uno dei pochissimi narratori nostri che abbiano qualcosa da dire e sappiano dirlo con mezzi propri.⁶⁰

It is fitting to end this small section on criticism with an article published after the author's death, one in which the value of Silone the man and Silone the writer is underlined:

Non ricorderemo forse [...] Silone per le sue storie e i suoi personaggi, ma soprattutto per una globale immagine di uomo e di scrittore che si alza moralmente sul panorama circostante.⁶¹

Una manciata di more is not, perhaps for some, Silone's greatest work, yet in itself it is a continuation of all the books written prior to it and embryonic of what is to follow.

ogni libro di Silone è un momento autonomo di un più ampio discorso critico che coinvolge ogni forma di potere più o meno istituzionalizzato, così come i protagonisti delle sue opere non sono che successive e più ricche incarnazioni del suo ideale di uomo, 'santo' e 'ribelle' per scelta, teso fino al sacrificio estremo alla realizzazione del messaggio evangelico, che, ridotto alla sua pura essenza, è anche quello realmente socialista.⁶²

What Silone sets out to do is to testify on man's behalf, to bear witness to the challenges and struggles in life, to stand on the side of that which is right and to be able to do so with a clear conscience. His need to speak out comes from a wealth of experience and a familiarity with pain and loneliness:

Io non credo che i miei libri abbiano un valore letterario molto grande; io stesso conosco bene i loro difetti formali. Il loro valore è essenzialmente quello di una testimonianza umana; vi sono pagine in quei libri che sono state scritte col sangue.⁶³

The message is clear: man must live a morally correct life, seek out others who have the courage to do the same, live in a community of love and friendship, lead by example. Only then can he be truly free. As Silone left the Party and faced the void, so must Rocco. The journey from being a founding member of the Party to being considered an outcast by former friends and colleagues, brothers-in-arms, is a long and lonely one, yet it seems to contain a certain inevitability:

Vedo la tua stanchezza, figlio mio, la tua delusione [...] Hai la tristezza di chi partì per andare molto lontano e alla fine si ritrova al luogo di partenza. A scuola non t'avevano spiegato che il mondo è rotondo? (*Una manciata*, p. 54)

It is the only one to undertake in order to find self-esteem, self-knowledge and the truth.

Silone è un uomo che ama la verità, uomo d'oggi e scrittore del nostro tempo, dunque; ma la sua realtà non è il realismo della cronaca, è piuttosto la verità condotta rigorosamente dall'impronta di una visione morale della condizione umana.⁶⁴

Thus for Rocco and the others who together form a band of true friends in the novel, the sense of life does indeed dissipate and the reason for existence does seem unclear for a while, but from their suffering a new sense is born. Life is a struggle, but it is a struggle to

be faced with courage and endurance.⁶⁵ As the characters in this novel gradually awaken to the truth around them and within themselves, we see a part of the author in each of them. It is in their togetherness that they can give meaning to existence, outwith the confines of any ideology, by simply being friends. Thus the message first extended in *Fontamara* continues to resound in this later work. Silone could not believe that existence was futile:

Il problema della sopravvivenza invece, anche se razionalmente può sembrare insolubile, mi interessa, mi inquieta continuamente. Oggi mi accorgo che non solo l'uscita dal partito comunista verso le regioni e le ragioni della libertà fu un'uscita di sicurezza, ma che anche il mio primo impegno comunista fu anch'esso un'uscita di sicurezza da questi problemi che sono i soli che interessino radicalmente, totalmente, gli uomini [...] Ecco, questa può essere una mia risposta provvisoria, interlocutoria: ho una certezza irrazionale, quasi magica, un sentimento se vuol chiamarlo così: che la vita serva, debba servire a qualcosa.⁶⁶

The 1950s heralded a time of definitive rupture for Ignazio Silone, in as much as he withdrew completely from Party affiliations, but his politics remained constant, he remained a socialist. It was a decade of fecund literary activity, particularly in his role as deputy director of *Tempo Presente*, and one in which he produced two of his shortest and perhaps less appreciated works, *Il segreto di Luca*, published in 1956, and *La volpe e le camemie*, published in 1960. Both of these novels seem better situated in the category of short stories, yet they should not be regarded as mere stepping stones on the road to greater achievement for each, in their own way, has much to offer the reader: on a literary, political and social level, what do they tell us about the man Silone? How do they reflect the themes and styles of the earlier novels? In what way, if in any, do they endorse and strengthen Silone's position as a serious writer?

The first aspect to be noted in both the novels is a familiar central theme; respect for fellow man. Silone continues on his quest for the ideals which are fundamental, or at least should

be, to a decent, honourable and egalitarian way of life: honesty, justice, moral integrity, friendship and love. All roads pass through love. More often than not, to remain faithful to these ideals requires great personal sacrifice and suffering, both of which are omnipresent in the two novels in discussion, and indeed in the entire Silonian opera.

L'amore, la carità è il palpito della poesia siloniana; esso assume per lo più la forma specifica dell'amicizia.

[...]

Berardo, Lazzaro, Martino, Massimiliano, Simone, Agostino, Daniele, Franz: tutti uomini d'amicizia, gente pronto a dare la vita per l'amico in difficoltà.⁶⁷

Il segreto di Luca

Writing has never been a simple 'godimento' for Silone.⁶⁸ His aim has always been to try to understand and make others understand, his goal being to offer a serious moral code of ethics by which to live. Andrea's obstinate search for understanding and truth forms the backbone of *Il segreto di Luca*. This is pitched against those who are content to live a seemingly respectable life in the hope of preserving the status quo - not for them the risk of understanding. Conscience comes from within and must be nurtured by society. Where society fails to support this growth is when problems arise, and to confront this, change too must come from within. Man must become aware of his own potentialities before he is able to change the attitudes of the greater community.⁶⁹ As is so often the case in Silone this is the reality - and hence the risk element - which the protagonists must face and which invariably leads to sacrifice. The individual against the 'quieto vivere' of society is a familiar theme and one with which the author was well-acquainted:

È la legge del silenzio che la grande provincia meridionale italiana, così diversa dalla sua immagine esteriore, impone ai nati nel suo seno.⁷⁰

In so much of his writing, Silone's personal experiences lend an autobiographical flavour, they are the result of his own, long journey. His protagonists, in their faults as in their successes, reflect the moral ethos of the author.

Per Henry James il contenuto morale di un'opera d'arte non è se non il senso della vita che lo scrittore ha e vi ha percepito. La narrativa di Silone corrisponde a questa concezione dell'arte; il suo senso è quello di scoprire nella vita vissuta nuove basi per fuggire dalle rovine un'immagine dell'uomo più umana, più positiva.⁷¹

Silone always aimed to lead by example, and in both *Il segreto di Luca* and *La volpe e le camelie* he continued to do so, reaffirming his constant moral code.

It is a mark of Silone's moral seriousness and skill as a teller of stories that his simple and familiar ideas become, in his novels, an enormously stirring force.⁷²

Il segreto di Luca is essentially a love story, but it is not only that. Love, in Silonian terms, is multi-faceted, encompassing many ideals and themes; love of oneself and one another, love of truth and integrity, love of and respect for justice. Every aspect of love is represented in this novel accompanied by a thirst for justice, the driving force behind Andrea Cipriani's investigation into the wrongful imprisonment of Luca Sabatini.

il romanzo è ispirato da un'esigenza di giustizia, che non ha, come altre opere di Silone, uno sfondo politico, anche se il suo protagonista Andrea Cipriani è come Pietro Spina e Rocco De Donatis un deluso della politica e nello stesso tempo sin dall'origine un 'vocato' ad un'opera di ridenzione civile e umana.⁷³

Andrea's return to his native Abruzzo village coincides with that of Luca, and an immediate empathy and friendship develops. Andrea is unable to understand Luca's silence on the miscarriage of justice, he knows that the truth has been veiled for many years and is determined to reveal it.

Il silenzio di Luca crea nell'anima di Andrea l'assillo di scoprire la verità, una verità che l'uomo semplice, segnato dal destino, ha tenuto chiuso in sé per tanto tempo e che nemmeno ora rivela [...] Ma Andrea deve sapere: la stessa sete di giustizia che lo ha portato a militare in un partito della sinistra rivoluzionaria, ora lo spinge a far luce sull'antico e dimenticato (se il ritorno di Luca non lo avesse riportato alla luce) dramma, per se stesso, prima che per gli altri.⁷⁴

It is this insatiable appetite for justice which colours the relationships developed between the main protagonist and the other characters and which leads, eventually, to revelation.

Don Serafino was the parish priest at the time of Luca's trial, and upon the ex-prisoner's return he is the only one of his generation willing to welcome him. From the outset don Serafino is presented as one of Silone's 'good priests', in the tradition of don Benedetto:

Per dirvela in due parole, quel vecchio prete, non solo predica la fede di Dio alle donne e ai bambini, come la sua professione richiede, ma egli stesso ci crede [...] Lui stesso me l'ha personalmente assicurato, egli crede ancora nell'esistenza di Dio [...] (*Il segreto* p. 293)

It is impossible not to notice the irony in Silone's social comment, that the authorities find it amusing for a priest to uphold his faith. Yet don Serafino himself is not without some trepidation at the prospect of facing Luca. In conversation with a neighbour, he too a former friend of Luca, the priest's worry is evident:

anche il viso magro e severo di don Serafino esprimeva quel giorno un'isolita preoccupazione. [...] 'Uno di questi giorni egli tornerà' aggiunse il prete 'noi non possiamo

rifiutarci di accoglierlo, di aiutarlo. [...] Anche per me, t'assicuro, non sarà mica facile' insistette don Serafino. 'Ma sono passati tanti anni, ormai anche lui sarà vecchio.' (*Il segreto*, pp. 294-295)

Immediately the intrigue intensifies, it seems as though everyone was involved in Luca's imprisonment. As the story unfolds, the legacy of silence surrounding the night of the murder will be revealed. Even now, after Luca's exoneration, the villagers refuse to discuss the trial, they are afraid, guilty of complicity.⁷⁵ Once again, the theme of the 'quieto vivere' as opposed to action is at the fore.

La forza dell'onestà e della verità viene messa a confronto con il quieto vivere, e il tremendo potere rivoluzionario che sprigiona dai pazzi innocenti per la loro sola presenza in una comunità, giustifica e spiega la loro pericolosità e la loro predisposizione al martirio, alla condanna che li toglie dalla scena, dagli occhi di chi si sentirebbe sempre in colpa se dovesse continuamente vederseli davanti.⁷⁶

Andrea strives to uncover the truth, one which will not reveal itself easily. Not only is don Serafino loathe to offer any information, Luca himself refuses to discuss the trial with Andrea, at least initially. When Andrea asks why he refused to defend himself at the trial, Luca's answer shrouds the situation in mystery:

'Mi dispiace' disse. 'Ti prego di credermi, Andrea, mi dispiace proprio assai, specialmente dopo tutto quello che mi hai raccontato poco fa. Ma ti prego di non insistere nella tua domanda.' (*Il segreto*, p. 323)

Great patience is required and Andrea, in the tradition of Silone's heroes, must rise to the challenge. He has spent time in prison for his beliefs, thus proving his determination to take and maintain a stand against injustice, and revealing a certain similarity between himself and Luca.⁷⁷ As a young boy it was Andrea who wrote to Luca in prison on behalf of an illiterate mother, and through those letters began a close relationship with the prisoner.⁷⁸

The parallels with the author's own experience are unmistakable. At an early age Andrea gained an insight into injustice and was initiated into man's suffering.

Permetti, Luca, che io te lo dica subito, quello rimane uno dei grandi avvenimenti della mia vita. Forse, senza esagerare, il decisivo. Fu, per me, la rottura precoce con l'infanzia; il primo incontro con i dolori dell'esistenza. (*Il segreto*, p. 317)⁷⁹

Luca's mother always believed in her son's innocence, and through her conviction and his correspondence with Luca, Andrea's social conscience was awakened. Finally meeting Luca has given new meaning to his life:

In quanto a me, mentre ti parlo, è come se finalmente la mia vita prende un senso più chiaro [...]
Fu per me la prima scoperta del doppiofondo dell'esistenza umana. Da lì, certamente, m'è rimasta la mania, direi l'ossessione, di scoprire quello che c'è dietro ogni cosa [...] il segreto ingrandiva a dismisura tutto quello che nascondeva [...] E scoprii la tristezza della peggiore solitudine [...] (*Il segreto*, p. 321)

Andrea is a largely autobiographical character, the embodiment of the young Silone after his disillusionment with the Communist Party.

Andrea è personaggio autobiografico: ripete l'esperienza politica dell'autore nella fase post-bellica, soprattutto ne incarna la coscienza morale e sociale, ha in comune con lui la concezione dell'uomo politico, che è del tutto opposta all'ordinaria: L'uomo politico, io penso, deve studiare e risolvere problemi collettivi e non procacciare favori personali [...] Se non mi sarà possibile rimanere fermo alle mie intenzioni [...] abbandonerò ogni idea di carriera politica.⁸⁰

Andrea's thirst for justice is as intense as the author's. Through a series of encounters he will break the shroud of silence surrounding the night in question - when Luca was arrested - and eventually have the entire secret revealed by Luca himself. The fact remains that Luca was innocent of the murder, the true culprit having confessed, yet society still refuses to

accept the truth.⁸¹ The judge who presided over the trial refuses to accept that he was wrong, disregarding the inescapable facts that have now come to light. When Andrea hints that perhaps Luca's refusal to defend himself with an alibi, the obvious course of action, was based on a sense of honour, that perhaps he was protecting someone, the judge finds the suggestion ridiculous. How could a *cafone* have the nobility of mind to behave in such a fashion?

Vorreste forse attribuire a un villano di quella fatta spirito cavalleresco? [...] Un cafone capace di preferire il carcere a vita alla rivelazione di un segreto? Ah, ah, ah. Un cafone cavaliere al modo degli antichi? Ah, ah, ah, [...] Ma la sofferenza d'amore, Vergine benedetta, la passione infelice che, nell'assenza dell'oggetto amato, si nutre del pensiero di esso, non è né da cafoni e nemmeno da borghesi. Era un privilegio d'animo aristocratico [...] quando c'era ancora un'aristocrazia. (*Il segreto*, pp. 335-336)

It is here that the reader comes to the crux of the matter and the most central questions to be asked: Was Luca with someone on the night of the crime? Was this meeting of such personal importance that he would refuse to reveal its nature? Why did he not defend himself? Why, even in light of the truth, will society not accept Luca's innocence?

The silence surrounding Luca's secret is one of the most difficult impediments Andrea must face. In refusing to accept his error of judgement, for all the wrong reasons, the judge does offer a familiar piece of reason:

Non sento rimorsi per la sua condanna [...] la colpa non fu certo della magistratura, ma dell'omertà dei vostri compaesani. (*Il segreto*, p. 339)

Silone never wavers in his condemnation of the 'quieto vivere'. Even don Serafino seems to want to prevent Andrea from the truth because he thinks it would be better left alone.

Andrea's reaction is scathing: 'Meglio per chi? Per il tuo quieto vivere?' (*Il segreto*, p. 345) He will not be persuaded to abandon his quest, 'voglio solo capire' (*Il segreto*, p. 347) and is determined to find the truth, 'la verità, nient'altro.' (*Il segreto*, p. 347) He considers himself Luca's friend, bringing to that word all the importance of Silone's personal interpretation, and will not settle for anything less than vindication.

Luca è troppo buono. Egli può aver perdonato; ma io sono suo amico e non perdonerò mai chi gli fece quel male irreparabile. (*Il segreto*, p. 347)

There is the suggestion that there was someone who could have testified on his behalf, but Luca refused this help. Indeed it is revealed in the following chapter that there were witnesses to Luca's whereabouts on the night of the murder, so why were they not permitted to speak? It is at this juncture that the facts surrounding the case begin to come to light. Ludovico reveals that both he and his wife saw Luca that evening, that they and everyone else, including the jurors at the trial, knew he was innocent, but Luca would not let them testify.⁸² Thus Luca sealed his own fate. According to Ludovico,

Qualcuno dovevano condannare. Un uomo era stato ucciso, Luca era l'imputato [...] Se fosse stato a casa sua non l'avrebbero imputato. (*Il segreto*, p. 355)

Essentially, then, Luca condemned himself. This being the case, why is everyone still afraid of him now?

Nessuno dei suoi coetanei aveva dato il bentornato all'innocente liberato dal carcere a vita. Innocente? A quella parola i vecchi arricciavano il naso. Innocente di che? Dell'omicidio? Forse, ma per il resto [...] (*Il segreto*, p. 342)

Andrea must discover what is meant by 'il resto' as both he and the reader are drawn into the mystery of an intense passion and innocent love.

Before going to prison Luca had been engaged to a young, local girl, Lairetta, but on the same night as the murder he had called off their wedding. Luca learns the circumstances of how the couple had met from Lairetta's sister. They were introduced to each other by the local, wealthy landowner, don Silvio, and his wife, Ortensia. From her story Andrea begins to build a picture of the relationship that existed between Luca and Ortensia, and seeks out confirmation.⁸³ It appears that there was a strong bond between them which even her marriage could not eradicate.⁸⁴ Yet it was she who suggested the marriage of Luca and Lairetta. Driven by so many questions, Andrea once again turns to don Serafino for an explanation. Under the determined barrage of questions, don Serafino begins to reveal certain truths.⁸⁵ When asked if Ortensia could have been Luca's alibi, he replies:

Che bisogno, ti domando, avrebbe avuto di farsi condannare all'ergastolo un uomo in condizione di passare la notte con la propria amante? (*Il segreto*, p. 389)

The love that was so obviously there between Luca and Ortensia never ventured into the adulterous.

Se Ortensia e Luca fossero stati amorosi da adulterio, mettiti questo in testa, non avremmo avuto una tragedia, ma una commedia. (*Il segreto*, p. 389)

Even after her wedding, Luca's love never faltered. No-one could have imagined that he, a *cafone* after all, was capable of such depths of emotion:

Lei non aveva previsto, nessuno di noi aveva previsto, che Luca fosse capace di un sentimento d'amore così eccezionale [...] (*Il segreto*, pp. 389-390)

Their love was pure and innocent, but could not remain so for long in a society governed by hypocrisy and gossip:

Questo non è un paese, dovrete saperlo, ma una grossa tribù. Siamo tutti più o meno parenti; qui non esistono affari privati. I pettegolezzi i più inverosimili sulle relazioni tra quei due erano diventati il tema principale delle conversazioni familiari. (*Il segreto*, p. 392)

Luca planned to emigrate as some kind of escape, but Ortensia wanted him to marry and hopefully find happiness. It was an impossible situation, rendered more so by the shortcomings and blindness of a society determined to soil the purity of the relationship with gossip and speculation. The acceptance of prison for a crime he did not commit seemed an escape for Luca.⁸⁶

La scelta di Luca nasce da un fatto sentimentale - l'amore per Ortensia [...] - intorno al quale si incrostanto i pregiudizi e le ipocrisie di una società provinciale legata in una rete di omertà e tutta protesa, infine, a perpetrare un'ingiustizia. Rispetto ai precedenti romanzi lo schiacciamento dell'uomo ha perduto colore politico per acquistare un significato soltanto umano, quasi a prova definitiva che l'umanità, da sempre, è inclinata al male.⁸⁷

This is ultimately why he would not let anyone testify on his behalf, he needed to escape. On the night in question he had met with Ortensia, but his sense of honour would not permit him to mention her name at the trial.⁸⁸ He will not sully her honour now any more than the community already has. His sacrifice for love is immeasurable, though he sees it as the only way to save his own moral integrity.

Svelato il 'segreto', a prima vista o, se vogliamo, letteralmente, ci troviamo davanti ad un amore eccezionale che accetta il più grande dei sacrifici, quello della libertà, per salvarne l'onore e restargli fedele.⁸⁹

Personal sacrifice in any of Silone's novels is always of the highest order, it involves dignity of spirit and involves choices which, more often than not, are at the expense of the protagonist.

L'assoluta fedeltà alla propria coscienza costa enormemente e, in questa lotta titanica, si è soli, com'è solo Luca nonostante il suo legame amoroso. Solo la propria fede deve generare la forza necessaria per portare la lotta fino all'ultimo. Non c'è posto per il compromesso nel mondo siloniano. Contro il cancro della società non c'è che il rifiuto completo di continuare a vivere dentro.⁹⁰

Luca's crime, in the eyes of the community, was never that of murder, but that of being in love, and in their opinion, that love could not have remained innocent. The fact that he dares to love outwith his social standing (the order of which is listed so cleverly at the beginning of *Fontamara*) serves to intensify their scorn. As is a familiar case in Silone, society is the enemy.

L'inchiesta porta Andrea a chiarire i fatti [...] e quindi a penetrare nella sua umanità [...] Un amore come questo non può essere facilmente capito, specialmente nella società in cui vivono i due protagonisti. Qui è proprio la loro tragedia. [...] Questo è il delitto di cui i concittadini ritengono colpevole Luca, non dell'altro, l'omicidio, di cui è stato accusato e che in fondo giudicano meno grave, e continuano ad odiarlo, anche quando è stato rimesso in libertà.⁹¹

The concept of self-sacrifice is not limited to Luca, it extends to Ortensia. The knowledge that Luca has accepted life imprisonment in order to save her honour led her to leave her marriage and retire to a convent for the rest of her years. Both sacrifices are made for love.

Dal momento che lui ha accettato volontariamente l'ergastolo per amor mio, non posso più vivere in questa casa [...] Ormai non potrò più vivere senza pensare a lui. Si racconta di uomini che hanno accettato la morte per il proprio amore; ma Luca per me ha fatto assai di più. L'ergastolo è più della morte. La morte dura un attimo e richiede un coraggio momentaneo; l'ergastolo è un'esistenza. Non credere [...] che io mi senta infelice a causa del sacrificio che sto per fare. Al contrario, finalmente ho trovato qualcuno in cui credere. Ora credo in lui. (*Il segreto*, pp. 150-151)

Indeed, she lived out her days with love and hope in her heart, to which her diary is testament. Her complete refusal to dwell in a society which forbids her love echoes Luca's refusal to dignify the gossips and thus dishonour his lady. As is usual in Silone, compromise is a foreign word. Upon reading her diary, Luca feels fulfilled.

Questo è stato il momento più felice della mia vita. (*Il segreto*, p. 409)

Her sacrifice gave meaning to his, and confirmed their love.

L'accettazione passiva e rassegnata del carcere come compimento del suo destino [...] si trasforma presto in Luca in sublimazione quando, saputa la decisione d'Ortensia di rompere il legame contro natura che la legava al marito e di ritirarsi in convento per essere fedele all'amore spirituale del suo amato, si avvera, nella solitudine della cella, il momento d'illuminazione che tutto chiarisce, dissipando il dolore del continuo domandarsi la ragione della propria sofferenza. È Luca stesso che ce lo descrive:

'[...] La distanza era una sofferenza, ma una sofferenza d'amore. Non potevo dunque odiare l'ergastolo perché la sua accettazione, da parte mia, aveva rivelato a Ortensia la forza e la qualità del mio sentimento e aveva ottenuto l'effetto di rompere il legame contro natura che l'univa al marito.'⁹²

The final revelation of the secret comes from Luca himself in the latter stages of the novel. He tells Andrea the true story of that night, when he had spoken to Ortensia and she had declared her love for him, how he could not then face a marriage to Laretta, and of how suicide seemed the only option. When he arrived at Laretta's to break off their engagement Luca was so overcome by guilt that its manifestation was both physical and emotional:

Il pavimento e le pareti della stanza tremavano violentamente sotto i miei piedi come in un continuo terremoto. Una stanchezza mortale s'impadronì di ogni giuntura del mio corpo. Il cuore mi era diventato pesante come un macigno. Capii che il destino si era beffato di me. Ero come un sorcio in una trappola. Ogni parola affettuosa di Lauretta aggravava il mio senso di smarrimento e di colpevolezza. So che la disperazione mi fece dire parole sconnesse. Per il giudice sarebbero state la prova di un rimorso anticipato dell'omicidio ancora da perpetuare. Quando lasciai Perticara, ero sicuro che non sarei arrivato all'indomani. (*Il segreto*, p. 417)

Such was his moral force that being arrested for murder was almost a relief, he felt 'un senso di sollievo'. It was, indeed, a 'via d'uscita'. A point for interest in the examination of the following novel is exactly how one of the principal characters, Cefalù, deals with a similar crisis. Both reflect a position, a state in which the author found himself in Switzerland and reflect how close he came to suicide.

Degli abissi di orrore e disperazione da cui ero uscito incolume, m'era rimasta solo una stanchezza totale. Mi facevano ridere, quelli che mi interrogavano, con la loro minaccia dell'ergastolo. Neppure l'inferno m'avrebbe fatto paura [...] L'arresto era stata una scappatoia fortunata, al posto del suicidio. Che potevo fare contro il destino, se non lasciare che si compisse. (*Il segreto*, p. 421)

This is a novel which encompasses all the themes of Silone's prior works, one in which love dominates, not only between Luca and Ortensia, but between Luca and Andrea. The love of justice and truth is at the centre of the action, and what emerges is a story of such deep integrity and honour that the reader cannot fail to be moved by the plight of the noble *cafone*. To the end Luca remains a dignified and gracious character, sure of never having wavered. Because of that certainty he is able to live quietly at the end of his years and feels no rancour towards those who have helped prolong the mystery. It is this very Christian compassion which disturbs the rest of the village, as they live out their lives in hypocrisy and suspicion.

'Che io non fosse assassino' disse Luca, 'credo che qui lo sapessero tutti, a eccezione, s'intende, dei carabinieri. Come si spiegherebbe altrimenti il rancore che i vecchi ancora oggi mi portano? Devi sapere che, all'epoca dell'ultimo brigantaggio [...] anche un paio di uomini di qui si diedero alla macchia e commisero grassazioni e omicidi: ebbene, la maggioranza della popolazione simpatizzava con essi. Ma il mio delitto, agli occhi dei paesani, era d'altro genere, assai peggiore.' (*Il segreto*, p. 425)⁹³

Luca's life and love have been guided by a strong moral code which could not be destroyed, even under the most testing of circumstances, and it is in this knowledge that he finally finds peace. In the figure of Luca, Silone reaffirms the values which made Pietro Spina the prototype of the new and decent man; as Rocco came to understand that the meaning of his life was to be found in the knowledge 'amo ergo sum', so too does Luca.

Nel romanzo Luca è un santo laico che ha rifiutato di lasciarsi contaminare e piegare dal mondo. La sua acquista serenità finale è il suo premio; sapere di essere stato fedele al suo sentimento, perdonando agli altri la condanna che gli hanno imposto. [...] il mantenimento della propria integrità e onestà interiore, il rifiuto della libertà fisica, per mantenere intatta quella spirituale, è la conseguenza logica e la sola moralmente accettabile.⁹⁴

La volpe e le camelie

In *La volpe e le camelie* Silone returns to a political forum that was absent in *Il segreto di Luca*.⁹⁵ The story is the further development of a tale written in 1934, *La volpe*, which was set in a time of Fascist activity in Europe.⁹⁶ This is essentially a novel, the action takes place around one central event. Into the old sphere Silone now adds a degree of novelty. The scene is no longer the Abruzzo, the Silone heartland and backdrop to his other novels, but the Ticino Canton in Switzerland, a land in which Silone spent his years of exile and with which he was very familiar. Perhaps it is not so surprising that he abandons his native *contrada* here to describe events and situations in the 1930s. The area was familiar to

him and of course personal experience is a fruitful source, it is a return to the 'paese dell'anima', a continuation of his search for utopia. It is, however, important to note that this is purely a geographical shift. Silone remains the moralist, concerned with all the problems and politics of his time, still very much the author of *Fontamara*. The main characters are no longer the struggling, long-suffering *cafoni*, here replaced by a comfortable farming family. Gone is the largely choral background, the community is not nearly as pertinent to the unfolding of events - though it is not invisible, most often representing the antithesis of what Daniele stands for - and the individual has gained importance.⁹⁷

La novità di questo romanzo di Silone, è nell'abbandono da parte dello scrittore della sua vena aneddotica, corale, e di quella aperta regionalità che per alcuni suoi aspetti suggerisce a taluni critici - del resto non sempre a torto - un'ipotesi naturalista come elemento essenziale della narrativa di Silone. In *La volpe e le camelie* non vi sono *cafoni* sfruttati e *villipesi*, proprietari tirannici e gerarchi prevaricatori. Lo sfondo è una società democraticamente evoluta.⁹⁸

As expected, there is a continuation of Silone's habitual themes, with the emphasis here being on the lonely nature of self-sacrifice, the struggle for moral integrity, the superiority of love and the endless search for the 'uomo onesto'. Daniele is very much the central character and the axis of the novel. Returning to the family farm after his father's death he abandons city life in order to make a success of the family business. He is not an uncomplicated figure. Unbeknown to his family and neighbours - it would not be fair to say friends, of whom he has few - he leads a double life: that of the family man, and that of the clandestine antifascist, organising a political opposition to the regime in Italy.⁹⁹ The main action of the novel is centered on this activity and the problems which arrive when its secret nature is threatened. This is pre-war Switzerland, and the Fascist ideology in Italy was threatening to envelope her neighbours.

Anche nella società meno tirannica, chi nutre amore per la libertà, chi ha a cuore l'integrità della propria coscienza, chi vuol vivere secondo un codice morale di dignità, chi sente solidarietà fattiva per l'uomo al di qua o là delle frontiere del proprio paese, deve essere disposto a pagarne il prezzo, che non è molto da meno di quello che si esige nelle società dominate dalla dittatura.¹⁰⁰

Silone reminds the reader that oppression is everywhere, even in the most neutral of places, and that everywhere it must be opposed. Again the reader is reminded of Silone's insistence that the name of the Party in power is of minimal importance, what matters is the sense of right and wrong that it imparts to the people, and ability of the people to act, think and speak freely at any time. Daniele is unable to stand aside selfishly and not participate in an attempt to hinder the spread of tyranny. His is an instinctive devotion to man: 'Non mi sento neutro [...] Sono nato uomo.' (*La volpe*, p. 482)

In taking this stance, Daniele sets himself up in a very lonely position. He has never been able to talk about his work, except with his political allies, and has thus denied a large part of himself to his family. Secrecy, by its very nature, is divisive. The very people for whom he fights are unaware of his sacrifice.

In questo lavoro non mi sono mai fidato di nessuno, se lo vuoi sapere. Neppure delle mie figlie. Ho sempre fatto tutto da me. (*Il segreto*, p. 518)¹⁰¹

In the same way as the earlier characters, those who were considered 'pazzo' or 'allo sbaraglio', Daniele puts himself on the margins, a situation that make it extraordinarily difficult for him to form any lasting relationships. Yet it is only in this position that he can maintain his honour and integrity. Herein lies the risk and the sacrifice, and ultimately the sadness.¹⁰² The pathos of this character is similar to that of all those who silently fight the good fight.

La lettura lascia quindi un'impressione finale di velata tristezza per la fondamentale solitudine di chi ha scelto la via della lotta per la libertà e la giustizia.¹⁰³

The only relationships from which Daniele is able to derive comfort are with Agostino, an Italian exile and political ally, and with Silvia, his oldest daughter. In Agostino, Daniele has a true friend. The first description of him is as a 'uomo onesto', and one with whom he has a special bond.¹⁰⁴

La verità è [...] che assieme ad Agostino io mi sento più sicuro. Ma non saprei spiegarne la ragione. (*La volpe*, p. 449)

For this reason he is particularly content that Silvia seems to be in love with Agostino. His hope for Silvia was always that she would find happiness with someone of a similar moral ethos:

'Mi auguravo per te un uomo non banale, ecco tutto.'
'Un eroe? [...]'
'No, semplicemente un uomo onesto.' (*La volpe*, p. 497)

Agostino certainly fits into that special Silonian conception of friendship, one of the most poignant expressions of love:

'È un uomo d'amicizia' aggiunse l'autista. 'Non so se mi spiego. Lui è uomo d'amicizia come altri sono uomini di partito, o uomini di chiesa, o uomini d'affari.'
'Non c'è nulla che valga l'amicizia.' affermò Daniele. (*La volpe*, p. 499)

Silone's insistence upon the value of friendship serves to emphasize the void in those who are without and to illustrate a deep longing within himself. Thus, with the arrival of Cefalù, the young Italian Fascist with whom Silvia falls in love, Daniele's disappointment is

paramount. This is one of the most important events of the novel. Daniele is aware of the arrival in the vicinity of a Fascist spy, sent to drill Nunziatina, the old seamstress, for information on political dissenters, and he must seek him out. When it turns out that Cefalù and the spy are one and the same, tragedy must ensue.

When Cefalù appears on the scene, Silvia is immediately taken with him. She knows her love for him will disappoint her father, who wishes her union with Agostino, but is powerless against her emotion. There follows an increase in tension within the family unit and a breakdown in the relationship between father and daughter, further highlighting the solitary nature of the struggle.

Ma il genere di tensione creatasi in famiglia in seguito al breve soggiorno del forestiero, diventava tanto più penoso quanto meno si discorreva.
Silvia metteva ogni attenzione a evitare di restare a quattr'occhi col padre [...] (*La volpe*, p. 491)

Silvia's mother, Filomena, is determined that her husband be happy for their daughter's choice. She considers him to be a 'giovane onesto' (*La volpe*, p. 492). This word carries tremendous weight for Daniele and cannot be used easily:

'Onesto?' egli domandò. 'Sai cosa io intenda per uomo onesto? [...] Vedo che tu neppure sospetti cosa io possa intendere per uomo onesto [...] Si capisce, onesto in confronto ai tempi che corrono.' (*La volpe*, pp. 492-493)

This is echoed again when Silvia and Daniele go for a walk in Val Verzasca, where for the first time Daniele finds it difficult to talk to his daughter, unable to reveal his innermost self to the ones he loves. He expresses concerns that in times such as these, Cefalù is able to

come and go across the border with apparent ease. When Silvia assures him innocently that Cefalù is not interested in politics, Daniele's reply is very telling:

Sotto una dittatura è uno dei modi più comodi di essere disonesto. (*La volpe*, p. 497)

Although the reader is unaware at this juncture that Cefalù is the 'volpe' sent to spy on the dissenters, there is an overwhelming feeling that the story is building up to an intense and tragic climax. This happens when Cefalù discovers Daniele's secret papers, papers pertaining to the antifascist struggle, and realises that he is supposed to destroy the father of the woman he loves. Now the 'volpe' is confronted with an impossible choice which leads, finally, to a crisis of conscience. Silone was all too familiar with this situation, as illustrated earlier when discussing *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*. However, Silone chose literature over suicide as a means to express his pain. Luca chose prison, Cefalù, though, sees suicide as the only escape to his dilemma, the irony being that it is his death that redeems him into life and love. The young Fascist now chooses the redemptive power of love over his party affiliations. The symbolism of the fox as evil, and the camelias as good, now comes into play. The fox has been outwitted by all that is decent and honourable in human nature: love.¹⁰⁵ The festival of the camelias can go ahead without fear since the pest has been dealt with – man can go forward with hope as the essence of the imminent danger has been destroyed. Silone injects hope into what is already the essence of his faith in mankind.

It is in his final act that, ironically, Cefalù becomes a 'uomo onesto'. Perhaps they are not so dissimilar after all.

Daniele e Cefalù sono uomini entrambi complessi, che in mezzo ai valori e disvalori delle proposte culturali da cui sono investiti, hanno preso vie opposte.¹⁰⁶

Both understand that violence cannot redeem man, that all action must be completed through love. It is worth recalling the words of Franz, the pacifist carpenter, on how we should behave with our enemies:

Ma se ci comportiamo come i nostri avversari, da brutti [...] in che siamo diversi? [...] Ma anche il loro ideale, astrattamente parlando, è nobile. A riflettere a mente serena, la patria l'ordine la tradizione non sono mica parole spregevoli, non ti pare? È la violenza che le rende false e odiose. (*La volpe*, p. 474)¹⁰⁷

Franz, nicknamed Agnus Dei, and his philosophy reveal the presence of the author. In his attempt to reconcile Marx with Christ, Franz is expressing his belief in a kind of secular messianism with which many of Silone's protagonists were familiar. He allows for the possibility that an eventual saviour of man may come from a secular front and not necessarily a spiritual one, that man might actually be saved by himself and by his good deeds. All the main characters in the novels have displayed evangelical traits, yet they all operated outwith the body of the Church. Silone is pointing out that it can be very difficult to distinguish between good and evil, that we should always be alert to danger. As Daniele can never be sure as to where and when the fox will appear, so he warns his daughter never to take pity on parasites in the garden - implicitly it is understood that she should not take pity on them anywhere - they must be stamped out.¹⁰⁸ To her question 'vuoi dire che non si è mai al sicuro?' he can only acquiesce. However, he encourages her not to give up hope.¹⁰⁹

Il male e il bene sono così delineati e se non si può affermare che il bene trionfi, il male viene provvisoriamente scongiurato e l'uomo continuerà la sua lotta perché 'finché si vive, molte cose si possono rimediare.'¹¹⁰

It is Cefalù's suicide that reunites the family and reasserts their love. Daniele's contempt for the Fascist regime does not waver, but he feels compassion for the young man and is thus enabled to resume dialogue with Silvia.

La famiglia è così riunita nella tristezza per la sorte di colui che ne aveva scosso l'equilibrio e ristorata dal calore della ritrovata pietà umana, per un attimo dimenticata nel mezzo della lotta per la sopravvivenza. Il gesto di Cefalù ha riscattato non solo la sua umanità ma la fiducia nella stessa che Daniele, preso com'era nella lotta contro il fascismo, cominciava a sentir vacillare, compromettendo anche la moralità dei mezzi usati dalla 'sua' parte nel proseguimento della lotta contro la crudeltà dei nemici.¹¹¹

Thus *La volpe e le camelie* is a simple novel telling a complex tale. In this work Silone endeavours to strengthen his moral code, present in all the novels, by demonstrating the loneliness of the honourable choice, the inevitable complications that accompany that choice, and the dignity to be found in adopting and maintaining a firm stand. With his desire to do the right thing and his final sacrifice, Cefalù renders himself worthy to join that special group of friends, the 'amici', taking his place amongst those such as Pietro, Simone, Rocco and Luca. Implicit in that dignity is the virtue of compassion. It is in his compassion for the enemy that the character of Daniele finds true nobility.

Inoltre, non si tratta più di una ricerca della verità (come in *Pane e vino*, per esempio), e neppure di svelare quella che è maturata da una crisi già vissuta (come ne *Il segreto di Luca*), ma piuttosto di farci sentire la tensione che prende Daniele, ulteriore sviluppo di Pietro, Rocco e Andrea dei precedenti romanzi, ingaggiato nella stessa lotta dettata dalla propria integrità morale, ma resa questa volta diversamente drammatica dal conflitto di dover dividere le sue energie tra la famiglia e l'attività politica dell'uomo libero e ribelle, che trova alla fine un equilibrio tra il suo senso un po' puritano di giustizia (tipicamente 'Spiniano') e un più magnanimo senso di umana comprensione (fondamentalmente 'cristiana').¹¹²

Both of the novels, *Il segreto di Luca* and *La volpe e le camelie*, display a continuity of themes and style in the works of Silone, each furthering the goals of *Una manciata di more*

whilst adding their own individual flavour to the wealth of the body of writing. International acclaim was quick to follow publication, and in Italy the critics began to take note, several managing to see past the simple language and appreciate, as Slonim writes, 'the humanness and sincerity, the natural wisdom that irradiates from the novel.'¹¹³ Silone continued to write in a manner that shared no similarities with the then current trends of neorealism and experimentalism and still many Italians were unable to define him. As was indicated in the Introduction to this thesis, this was a time when the critics realised Silone could no longer be ignored and began to investigate him more thoroughly. With the benefit of time, of course, the general consensus would change. As has been illustrated, there are differences of location and background, as well as a significant reduction in the number of protagonists, but each one is significantly indicative of the author in all that it represents: love, moral dignity, friendship, justice, and the search for truth. Silone's request is that a man be judged on his deeds rather than on his words, and his deeds should lead to the pursuit of human happiness and the afore-mentioned ideals. In the quest for those basic ideals, Silone has never wavered, and as such he endorses his position as a serious moral writer with a serious moral purpose.

Il destino del romanziere Silone mi pare proprio quello di rimanere legato indissolubilmente, nel bene e nel male, al suo tempo, alla sua generazione, al bisogno morale di chiarire o denunciare gli errori di una particolare società e di dar luce a certe speranze; un destino assai più di 'testimone' che di 'poeta'; esser più che rappresentare; proporre una presenza, una voce, più che un'immagine compiuta del mondo [...] La parte di Ignazio Silone, sinora, non è stata quella di chi si libera nell'arte, di chi cerca, nell'espressione, felicità, ma al contrario quella di chi porta il suo bagaglio di parole e di certezze morali nella prigione del mondo. E di questa scelta cosciente è traccia in ogni sua pagina.¹¹⁴

Notes

¹Francesco De Core & O. Gurgo, *Silone. L'avventura di un uomo libero* (Venezia: Marsilio Editore S.p.A., 1998, p. 233).

²Enzo Biagi, 'Oggi la vita diventa burocrazia', *Corriere della sera*, 26 January, 1975. 'Non cerco la solitudine, la sento.'

³Giuseppe Leone, op.cit., p. 35.

⁴Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op.cit., p. 25. See also N. Aiello, 'Ignazio Silone tra populismo e cristianesimo', *Il Mulino*, September, 1953: '[...] in *Una manciata di more* c'è l'interpretazione e la giustificazione posteriore di tutta la storia siloniana, la sua messa a punto ideologica, le sue conclusioni'. See also Francesco De Core & O. Gurgo., op. cit., p. 282: 'Il libro è il nuovo e più maturo atto d'accusa'.

⁵R.W.B.Lewis, op. cit., p. 176: 'It is the wisdom begotten of suffering, the wisdom that history and politics spent themselves to create [...] But still more important is the fact that the experience recorded in the book and the experience of writing it have made it possible for Silone not only to continue writing but to enter a stage of creativity in which he is altogether and unqualifiedly a novelist'.

⁶ibid. See p. 154.

⁷K. Allsop, 'Conversation with Silone', *Encounter*, 18 (March 1962), p. 49.

⁸R.W.B.Lewis, op.cit., p. 17, quoting directly from Camus' *Caligula*.

⁹N. Ajello, op. cit.: 'E *Una manciata di more* è perciò anche il libro più scopertamente e serenamente autobiografico di Silone: i termini del conflitto anticonformistico riappaiono nella loro drammaticità iniziale, ma sono rivissuti a distanza di tempo, quasi dall'alto di una riconquistata sicurezza e di una caparbia lealtà ai propri principi morali.'

¹⁰A.M. Linfonso, *La cultura come educazione alla libertà; motivi etico-pedagogici nell'opera di Ignazio Silone* (Lecce: Edizioni del Grifo, 1991), p. 7: 'Silone uomo e Silone scrittore caraminano sempre parallelamente, entrambi impegnati nella faticosa ricerca di una verità, morale e poetica, spesso scomoda, ma sempre intimamente sofferta e sentita nella coscienza di un intellettuale che ha sempre rifiutato ogni "torre d'avorio".'

¹¹Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 252.

¹²I. Quigley, 'Moralist with a cause', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 August, 1961.

¹³R.W.B.Lewis, op.cit., See p. 28.

¹⁴Giuliana Rigobello, *Ignazio Silone*, op.cit. See also p. 93: '[...] vivendo come parte attiva la politica dei comunisti nella Marsica dopo la liberazione, Rocco constata che l'interesse del povero e l'interesse del Partito non coincidono, anzi vanno per vie diverse. Nell'ora della verità bisogna decidersi. Il gesto è penoso per chi lo compie: significa ammettere un errore: ed è anche pericoloso: il partito può diventare di colpo un nemico che non dà tregua.'

¹⁵Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁶Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, p. 46: 'Martino [...] È quello delle lettere. Non s'era più sentito parlare di lui.' 'Trying to incriminate Martino for a petty crime the authorities raided his house. Unsuccessful in locating evidence, they took love letters written to him by his fiancée and proceeded to read them aloud in Church. Martino's humiliation was the congregation's entertainment and instrumental in increasing his defiance of authority. With his return, all those who laughed at his expense worry that Martino may be intent on revenge. Thus his welcome is tinged with fear.'

¹⁷ibid. Note the terms used to describe the forest: 'selva rubata', 'selva maledetta', and 'la dannazione della valle.' (pp. 56 and 58).

¹⁸ibid. Martino's decision to take a stand against the Tarocchi is, by his own decision, an impulsive one. See p. 89. Refer also to Maria N. Paynter, op. cit., p. 135 'The motifs of the kinship of the spirit and of the individual pursued by God, which are often found in Silone's work, inform this novel as well. When he meets Martino, Rocco feels compelled to help him with a readiness equal to Pietro's toward Infante.'

¹⁹ibid. Stella's concerns for Rocco echo a similar sentiment: p. 132; 'Tu sei cresciuto là dentro [...] Hai sacrificato al Partito la tua gioventù.' Equally, she tells us the importance of the institution, p. 189: 'il Partito è la nostra vera famiglia [...] Padre madre figlio antenato nascituro. Esso è la nostra tribù.'

²⁰A.M.Lifonso, op. cit., p. 9: 'Anche per Silone, quindi, la cultura, questa cultura come pedagogia, diventa antropologia, e dunque politica, perché la "coscientizzazione" in cui tutti i suoi personaggi sono costantemente impegnati è opzione, decisione, impegno, continua scelta di vita. E in questo cammino anche loro cercano se stessi, in un percorso che è anche, appunto, autoliberazione, crescita perenne di coscienza.'

²¹Elio Guerriero, op. cit., p. 151.

²²Maria N. Paynter, op. cit., pp. 136-137, 'Lazzaro is a good old man [...] here he becomes the symbol of God's justice. Like Rocco and Martino, he is pursued by God and impelled to do his work. [...] Lazzaro transforms experience into conscience to the point that, after the tragic accident, he can no longer hold a rifle in his arms and can only obey the voice of conscience.'

²³Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., p. 92.

²⁴Elio Guerriero, op. cit., pp. 155-156. See also the opinion of Giorgio Petrocchi in his article 'Il romanzo italiano di Ignazio Silone', *Idea*, 2 November, 1952: 'Il tema della tromba domina nel romanzo ma non ha (è bene precisarlo, che qualche inesatta interpretazione è stata avanzata sull'argomento) alcun valore messianico e simbolico, né vuole richiamare artificiosamente il sapore dei miti o delle leggende meridionali. Sta piuttosto a significare la necessità di un'attesa come è sentita dai contadini abruzzesi, l'insostituibilità di una "speranza" cristiana in un mondo migliore e ad esprimere la profonda adesione della vita di tutti i contadini al richiamo affascinante di un annuncio che non può mancare.'

²⁵Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, p. 55: 'La tromba veniva suonata per chiamare i cafoni a riunirsi', and p. 130. 'Ma la tromba quando serve?' insisté Oscar. "Quando proprio non se ne può più," gridò Massimiliano perdendo la pazienza. "Se c'è qualcosa che rivolta lo stomaco di tutti, e se tutti tacciono impauriti. È un modo di chiamarsi, di stare assieme, di farsi coraggio."

²⁶Ermano Paccagnini, 'Ma come scrittore resta grande', *Il sole-24 ore*, 30 May, 1999, quoted in Luce D'Eramo and V. Esposito, eds., *Quaderni Siloniani* (Pescina: Centro Studi 'I. Silone', 1999), p. 13.

²⁷Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, refer to pp. 108, and 115-118.

²⁸ibid. Refer to pp. 127-128. See also p. 194: 'Egli non ha voluto riconoscere che i problemi dell'uomo non possono essere risolti dall'uomo, ma dal Partito. Il Partito ha sempre ragione.' and p. 200: 'Egli non aveva dimenticato le obiezioni del Partito contro il sentimentalismo piccolo-borghese.' Individual thought or sentiment is intolerable to the Party, which in itself removes the possibility of freedom of choice from the individual. This was, in turn intolerable.

²⁹ibid. p. 236: 'Tornerà Lazzaro, vedrai, Tornerà con la sua tromba. Avrai giustizia.' Refer also to Claudio Marabini's comments in his article 'Silone', *La Nuova Antologia*, November, 1968. 'In *Una manciata di more* il motivo più patetico è fornito dalla famosa tromba della lega dei contadini, simbolo del diritto e della speranza dei poveri, che, nascosta in periodo fascista, poi ricomparsa, deve di nuovo scomparire: la tromba che rivedremo in *Uscita di sicurezza*.'

³⁰Elio Guerriero, op. cit., p. 153.

³¹Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, op. cit.: refer to p. 11; 'Mi apparve evidente che la più alta aspirazione dell'uomo sulla terra dev'essere anzitutto di diventare buono onesto e sincero. La mia attività di scrittore è stata la testimonianza di questa mia lotta e maturazione interna.'

³²R.W.B.Lewis, op. cit., pp. 172 and 175.

³³Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*. In the latter stages of the novel, the Tarocchi realise they are unable to count on the support of the priest to quash the impending peasant uprising because his moral principles are too firm. Refer to p. 226: 'Sul curato non si può contare [...] Ora meno che mai.'

³⁴K.Allsop, op. cit. In this interview Silone explained: 'So I am one of the few Italian writers, perhaps the only one, whose characters are preoccupied with moral and religious problems - the revolutionary in my books is the man who has turned to politics out of a religious need.'

³⁵Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, refer to pp. 184-190 for an example of don Nicola's tolerance and ecumenical spirit. He refuses to try to convert the dying Signor Stern to Christianity, respectful of the Jewish religion and ever mindful of the recent atrocities perpetuated on these people by an allegedly Christian society.

³⁶Luce D'Erano, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit., p. 291.

³⁷Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., p. 94.

³⁸Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*. It is important to note that the priest is not unaware of Rocco's brutal past; he knows that Rocco is not perfect but is equally able to appreciate his humanity because he is his friend and he loves him: 'È un uomo che io disapprovo e ammiro [...] gli voglio bene.' (p. 183)

³⁹Luce D'Erano, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit. Quoting from William Mueller's novel, *The prophetic voice in modern fiction*, D'Erano sees that 'La comunità di Rocco e di suoi amici appartiene al gruppo di persone che vogliono seguire il volere di Dio come si rivela a ognuno di loro e rimanere fedeli l'uno all'altro a qualsiasi costo [...] La passione divorante di Rocco per la giustizia e la convinzione che il senso della giustizia è inversamente proporzionale al suo successo causa la rottura con le due istituzioni predominanti dell'epoca: la Chiesa cattolica e il partito comunista.' See also p. 291.

⁴⁰Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, p. 27: 'Ma erano tutti adulti e validi, poiché dal Casale erano esclusi, secondo una regola in vigore da tempo, i bambini gl'infermi e gl'imbecilli.' Stella is the only exception.

⁴¹ibid. p. 45, 'Figlio mio, da qualche tempo mi sembri un'anima in pena.'

⁴²ibid. Refer to p. 127, the story of the young Polish girl, and to p. 199, the shooting of the innocent Bonifazio

⁴³ibid. Stella is intent on reintegrating Rocco, she is concerned with 'saving' him; p. 189: 'Dobbiamo salvarlo [...] Non possiamo abbandonarlo a se stesso' and believes that she and Oscar have a similar goal: to 'salvare un amico, liberarlo dalle sue debolezze, guarirlo.' (p. 194)

⁴⁴I. Quigley, op. cit. See also Francesco Jovine, 'L'ultimo Silone', *L'Italia che scrive*, 29 November, 1945, pp. 7-8: 'Non c'è vera opera d'arte che non sia universale; ma la sua universalità, come è chiaro, non deriva da una posizione spaziale, ma dalla sua intima verità, coerenza, vigore di ispirazione.'

⁴⁵Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, refer to pp. 196-199.

⁴⁶R.W.B Lewis, op. cit., Silone experienced a similar conversion: 'Silone managed somehow to die into life - a life grounded in the search for community, and that is the invisible community of free and responsible men everywhere. This is Silone's real *Civitas Dei* [...]' (p. 137)

⁴⁷Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 273.

⁴⁸Vittoriano Esposito, *Vita e pensiero di Ignazio Silone* (Cerchio: A. Polla, 1993), p. 63.

⁴⁹Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero* op. cit.: 'il socialismo che Silone e i suoi compagni avevano in mente - è bene ribadirlo - era incentrato soprattutto sulla insufferenza per le ideologie; sul totale rifiuto dei dogmatismi; su un'intesa con il socialismo democratico basata sulla comune avversione a identificare socialismo e statalismo (e lo stalinismo) che invece dominava il bolscevismo [...] un socialismo imperniato su una sorta di parola d'ordine ("perché la politica deve sempre emanciparsi dalle ideologie") e denso di una religiosità sorgiva e popolare capace di far lievitare spinte liberatorie' (p. xiii)

⁵⁰Angus Wilson, 'Out of the ordinary', *The Observer*, 9 May, 1978: 'In the earlier novels they would have gone underground, but now, of course, the underground has become part of the oppression. There is the rub [...] Silone's utopia has become for him, one feels, a very distant land.'

⁵¹R.W.B.Lewis, op. cit., p. 122. See also *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 822.

⁵²Vittoriano Esposito, *Vita e pensiero di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 87.

⁵³Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit., pp. 257-258. Here D'Eramo quotes from an anonymous article which appeared in *Rinascita*, July-August, 1952. Perhaps the most telling aspect of this article is that it was unsigned.

⁵⁴ibid. pp. 258-259.

⁵⁵Giuseppe Petronio, 'Le acerbe more di Ignazio Silone', *L'avanti!*, 14 August, 1952.

⁵⁶Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit.; refer to pp. 254-257 for further critical insight. In 1965, Indro Montanelli would recant his opinions of Silone, and in an article in the *Corriere della sera*, 2 February, 1999, he wrote, 'Certo, Silone era un uomo tormentato, È la caratteristica delle coscienze più alte.'

⁵⁷Giancarlo Vigorelli, 'L'esempio: non il "caso" Silone', *Giovedì*, 30 April, 1953. See also Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit., pp. 261-291 for a more comprehensive reading of the critics.

⁵⁸Paolo Milano, 'Analisi di una fedeltà', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 11 April, 1954.

⁵⁹Guglielmo Petroni, 'Il più riservato degli scrittori italiani', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 27 July, 1952.

⁶⁰Eugenio Montale, 'Silone', *Corriere della sera*, 4 December, 1952.

⁶¹Claudio Marabini, article in *Il Resto del Carlino*, 24 August, 1978. See also V. Esposito, op. cit., p. 137.

⁶²A.M. Lifonso, op. cit., p. 11.

⁶³Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, op. cit.: p. 11.

⁶⁴Guglielmo Petroni, op. cit.

⁶⁵Ignazio Silone, *Ed egli si nascose*, op. cit., p. 10: 'Nella storia dell'uomo sulla terra, purtroppo siamo ancora al Venerdì Santo. Gli uomini affamati ed assetati di giustizia sono ancora derisi perseguitati uccisi. Lo spirito per salvarsi è costretto ancora a nascondersi.'

⁶⁶Ignazio Silone, taken from an interview with Geno De Sanctis, 'Credere senza obbedire', *Il Messaggero*, 17 October, 1972.

⁶⁷Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., pp. 160-162.

⁶⁸Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 802.

⁶⁹Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit. Refer to p. 158: 'Essere uomini, diventare uomini, "acquistare la coscienza della propria umanità": è la frase vergata di Pietro Spina per un proclama destinato alla stampa antifascista, una frase che colpisce il giovane tipografo Luigi Murica e ne provoca la conversione da spia fascista a martire della libertà.'

⁷⁰Ferdinando Virdia, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 120.

⁷¹Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 316.

⁷²Irving Howe, 'Silone: the power of example', *The New Republic*, 22 September, 1958.

⁷³Ferdinando Virdia, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 117. It is worth noting Virdia's other comments with regard to the 'sfondo politico'; p. 121: 'non c'è dubbio che un nuovo Silone appaia in questo romanzo, anche in una problematica che non è più quella del suo dissidio di fondo con la parte politica che lo aveva avuto tra i suoi dirigenti internazionali. Certo gran parte della sua ispirazione, e saremmo per dire uno stimolo, una continua tensione, nasce da quella frattura, con un riverbero diretto o indiretto nel suo lavoro di narratore e di saggista.'

⁷⁴ibid. p. 118.

⁷⁵Ignazio Silone, *Il segreto di Luca*, refer to p. 384.

⁷⁶Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 125.

⁷⁷Ignazio Silone, *Il segreto di Luca*, refer to pp. 301-302.

⁷⁸ibid. Refer to pp. 315-317.

⁷⁹Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit.: Refer to p. 101 for further details of the autobiographical element contained in this statement. It appears that in Silone's own life there was a 'Luca', a family friend, who was wrongfully imprisoned and with whom Silone established a correspondence.

⁸⁰ibid. p. 102. Refer also to Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., pp. 299-301. Here D'Eramo quotes from an article by Silone in *The New Leader*, November 1958, in which the author emphasised the autobiographical element in his work: 'Ma volevo raccontare la storia di un uomo semplice e l'ho raccontata nel modo più semplice che ho potuto. Mi pare di averci messo tutto me stesso [...] ogni autore è sempre in tutti i suoi personaggi, anche nei più odiosi.'

⁸¹Ignazio Silone, *Il segreto di Luca*, pp. 330 and 332. It is interesting to note the reaction of an Aunt who invites Andrea to dinner, only to remain horrified when she discovers his intention to bring Luca with him. Her conclusion is that Andrea is 'pazzo da legare.'

⁸²ibid. pp. 354 and 360-361

⁸³ibid. Refer to chapter 11.

⁸⁴ibid. Refer to p. 383.

⁸⁵ibid. Refer to p. 387. 'È sempre terribile quando arrivano al potere gli ex perseguitati.' This message pervades each and every work.

⁸⁶ibid. p. 393: 'Sapevamo che Luca si trovava in una situazione disperata e intollerabile. L'ergastolo era una via d'uscita.'

⁸⁷Claudio Marabini, 'Silone', *La Nuova Antologia*, November 1968.

⁸⁸Ignazio Silone, *Il segreto di Luca*, refer to p. 415: it is his sense of honour that forbids him to marry Lauretta: 'Ma non si può amare una donna e fare figli da un'altra. Sarebbero dei bastardi.'

⁸⁹Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 129.

⁹⁰ibid. p. 130. Refer also to p. 118: '[...] e il protagonista che la vive drammaticamente non è più l'intellettuale comunista [...] bensì il naturale sviluppo etico della figura di Lazzaro, Luca Sabatini, cafone innocente che subisce la violenza della società per non infangare l'onore del suo amore per Ortensia, e accetta l'ergastolo quale ultimo prezzo per mantenere la sua integrità morale.'

⁹¹Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit., p. 100.

⁹²Piero Aragno, op. cit., pp. 125-126.

⁹³Giuliana Rigobello, op. cit.; refer to p. 101, '[...] egli torna a casa, non ha rancore né verso gli altri né verso se stesso, non ha rimpianti: la lettura del diario di Ortensia lo ha consolato, infondendogli la certezza che la sua vita non è stata spesa invano. Il suo sguardo può posarsi sereno e sicuro sulle cose e sugli uomini tra cui è tornato a vivere.'

⁹⁴Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 131.

⁹⁵Ignazio Silone, *La volpe e le camellie*. Refer to p. 447.

⁹⁶Francesco De Core and O. Gurgo, op. cit., refer to p. 346.

⁹⁷Maria N. Paynter, op. cit., p. 158: 'On the one side Daniele and his friends form a community where friendship, love, and Franciscan spirit impart an aura of sacredness even to ordinary farm life; on the other are those who, under a superficial appearance of dignity, harbor only egocentric feelings and callousness.'

⁹⁸Ferdinando Virdia, op. cit., p. 123.

⁹⁹Ignazio Silone, *La volpe e le camellie*. Refer to p. 447: '[...] avendo bisogno d'un parere d'amico, non sapeva a chi chiederlo.'

¹⁰⁰Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 141.

¹⁰¹ibid. Refer to p. 142: '[...] è soprattutto Daniele [...] che deve pagare il prezzo [...] Egli deve rubare energie ed attenzione alla famiglia e al lavoro e indirizzarle verso la sua attività politica, [...] deve mantenere famigliari e vicini all'oscuro della sua attività politica e quindi delle cause di quella sua occasionale tensione.'

¹⁰²Ignazio Silone, *La volpe e le camelie*, p. 515: 'Ma è come se in quel rischio egli avesse riposto il suo onore [...] Il suo onore d'uomo, il suo orgoglio. Temo che, senza di esso, per lui la vita non avrebbe senso.'

¹⁰³Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁰⁴Ignazio Silone, *La volpe e le camelie*, see p. 448.

¹⁰⁵Marc Slonim, 'Life's simple rewards, so hard to win', *The New York Times Book Review*, 28 May, 1961, p. 33: 'In *The fox and the camelias* Silone puts true emotions above imposed social rules and political structures. Thus Silvia's lover, victimized by base conditions, turns into a fox – while instinctively he longs for love and friendship, which for Daniele are as normal as breath and food. Herein lies the basic meaning not only of this new novelette, but of all Silone's work.'

¹⁰⁶Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit., p. 326.

¹⁰⁷K. Allsop, op. cit. p. 49. In his conversation with Allsop, Silone was quick to point out that his criticism of this time and the struggle between good and evil was not a purely anti-Fascist invective: 'I do not consider myself to be an anti-Fascist writer. Fascism was painful, but it was banal and superficial, and a passing phase. My criticism of Italian society goes deeper than Fascism. The reality I try to depict is something which existed long before Fascism and which has outlasted it.'

¹⁰⁸Ignazio Silone, *La volpe e le camelie*, p. 463.

¹⁰⁹ibid. p. 463.

¹¹⁰Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 151.

¹¹¹ibid. p. 150.

¹¹²ibid. p. 153.

¹¹³Marc Slonim, op. cit., p. 1.

¹¹⁴Geno Pampaloni, 'L'opera narrativa di Ignazio Silone', *Il Ponte*, January, 1949.

Chapter Three

The Final Works

At a convention in Brussels in 1950, a convention whose principal theme was the freedom of culture, Silone spoke of the horrors of the Siberian work camps, the limitations placed upon art and the repression of the human spirit in the Soviet Union.¹ He insisted upon the global struggle in defence of man and his basic human rights. This theme has been reflected in all the work mentioned thus far and now found its culmination in the highly autobiographical literary achievements of the 1960s, *Uscita di sicurezza* and *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*. Throughout the years, Silone's literary ambition remained constant:

passerei volentieri la mia vita a scrivere e riscrivere lo stesso libro: quell'unico libro che ogni scrittore porta in sé, immagine della propria anima, e di cui le opere pubblicate non sono che frammenti più o meno approssimativi.²

Circumstances may change, indeed for the author they were doing so constantly, but the inspiration behind his artistic creations remained the same, the need to testify on man's behalf and to fight for justice on every level being always of the greatest importance. Nowhere is this struggle illustrated as clearly and as honestly as in *Uscita di sicurezza*.

Uscita di sicurezza

This work, a collection of narrative stories and essays, appeared in its definitive edition in 1965, published by Vallecchi after Mondadori's refusal of publication, and, as will be seen, was perhaps singlehandedly responsible for the critical turn-around and

national acclaim that was to be bestowed upon the author, hitherto a literary *persona non grata* in his homeland. This book sees the author enter into the most honest and open dialogue with the reader. He offers his reasons for and explanations of his writing in an explicit fashion, leaving us in no doubts as to the urgency of his intent. Through further discussion, it will be demonstrated that it is in this work that Silone best defines himself; he gives an autobiographical account of the circumstances which led him to be the man and author we know, and offers the reader immense insight into the moral and social framework upon which his actions were largely based. Most importantly, from this work we see that his commitment to man, to humanity, to the fundamental principles of his socialism, has been unwavering, even when circumstances have pushed him into seemingly hopeless situations. For Silone, freedom is the foundation of the person, and by this he meant true freedom, not any theoretical concept. This is not something which is handed to every man as though a gift from God, rather it is an ideal, a goal to be sought, usually obtained at the end of a period of intense personal suffering. This collection of essays is the most explicit account of the author's own suffering and the events which led to his freedom, particularly after his break with the Communist Party. His goal has remained firm, the search for understanding constant:

poiché il bisogno di capire, di rendermi conto, di confrontare il senso dell'azione, in cui mi trovavo impegnato, con i motivi iniziali dell'adesione al movimento, si è impossessato interamente di me e non m'ha lasciato tregua o pace. (*Uscita*, p. 51)

The central essay *Uscita di sicurezza* was inspired by Silone's departure from the ranks of the Communist Party and illustrates the struggles faced by the author in the wake of such a move. There is a confessional element to the work; the author must accept responsibility for all his choices, good and bad, and there is, of course, the moral

framework, the code of ethics so present in all his work, the persistent faith in the essence of man and his ability to fight injustice and tyranny at all levels. The other essays in the collection afford greater insight into the pre- and post-Communist Party experience of the author. This is a work which focuses on man and the role he plays in the greater scheme of things.

Poiché la sola realtà che veramente mi ha sempre interessato è la condizione dell'uomo nell'ingranaggio del mondo attuale, in qualunque sua latitudine o meridiano. E naturalmente mi sento, ovunque, dalla parte dell'uomo e non dell'ingranaggio. Se i miei personaggi sono più sovente contadini poveri, intellettuali e preti inquieti, burocrati di opposti apparati e se si muovono in un paesaggio arido, ciò non accade per la mia predilezione di un certo colore locale. Questa è la realtà che meglio conosco, la porto, per così dire, in me stesso, e in essa la condizione umana del nostro tempo mi appare più spoglia, quasi a nudo. (*Uscita*, p. 924)

Essentially, this is the autobiographical account of a 'cristiano allo sbaraglio', the same *cristiano* who is so evident in the novels, and the reasons that led Silone down this particular path. Although inspired by his break with the Party, the essays contained within the collection were not all written as a result of this and indeed, some are far more openly political than others, some more poignant and personal, but each of them tells a familiar tale: each illustrates the profound moral framework inherent to the author, his passionate stance against injustice and his need to testify on behalf of man, a need that was perhaps strengthened by his political positioning:

E se la mia opera ha un senso, in ultima analisi, è proprio in ciò: a un certo momento scrivere ha significato per me assoluta necessità di testimoniare, bisogno inderogabile di liberarmi da una ossessione, di affermare il senso e i limiti di una dolorosa ma definitiva rottura, e di una più sincera fedeltà. (*Uscita*, p. 802)

The entire collection *Uscita di sicurezza* unfolds as a series of episodes in the author's life, told in order of memory rather than chronologically, each story illustrating an

autonomous moment in the moral and physical development of Silone, from young boy to adulthood. The narrative essays which account for the first part of the work are of profound importance for the reader who seeks to understand the life and work of the author. In these, Silone manages to combine both his love and hatred of certain memories from his youth in a way which permits him not only to inform the reader of the facts but also, with a degree of hindsight, allows him to imbue those facts with a mature political conscience that was only nascent at the time. It is in these stories that we discover the essence of the earlier novels, we recognise the characters we have met there and the moral code upon which their lives were built. Most importantly, it is in these recollections that we see the author at his most vulnerable, as a child, in his own environment, learning the lessons that will accompany him on his journey through life; ultimately, it is through these passages that Silone speaks to us of the people and the events which shaped him (and of course his protagonists) as a man and as an author, and he tells us in the most open terms of the code of ethics instilled in him as a boy, a vision that remained steadfast into adulthood, in spite of the turbulent and ever-changing times in which he lived. For this reason, their relevance to any study on Silone's morality could not be greater. To understand the man, therefore, it is necessary to begin at the beginning.

Silone's moral code, his thirst for justice, and his opposition to tyranny were instilled in him during his formative years in the Marsica district of the Abruzzi, a region long worn down by excessive poverty and superstition.³

È una contrada, come il resto d'Abruzzo, povera di storia civile e di formazione quasi interamente cristiana e medievale [...] La condizione dell'esistenza umana vi è sempre stata particolarmente penosa; il dolore vi è sempre stato come la prima delle fatalità naturali; e la Croce, in tal senso, accolta e onorata. Agli spiriti vivi le forme più accessibili di ribellione al destino sono sempre state, nella nostra terra, il francescanesimo e l'anarchia. Presso i più sofferenti, sotto la cenere dello scetticismo, non si è mai spenta l'antica speranza del Regno,

L'antica attesa della carità che sostituisca la legge, l'antico sogno di Giocchino da Fiore, degli Spirituali, dei Celestini. (*Uscita*, pp. 822-823)

It is under the heavy yoke of this tradition and cultural inheritance that the young Silone became a rebel, one at odds with the 'quieto vivere' and the 'badare ai fatti suoi' that was so pervasive, and it is from this that he made his first emergency exit.¹ To understand this urgency in his writing, this need to escape and to continue the struggle elsewhere - for his fight is always that of his fellow man - the reader need only look at the accounts he gives of his youth, of the days spent with his father or in the company of the peasants, those *cafoni* whom he will make his own, and of the injustices he witnessed at an early age, injustice perpetuated by both Church and State, by neighbour upon neighbour, all seemingly belying the very Christian ethos of love thy neighbour. It is here that his moral framework was decided, his thirst for justice first aroused, his staunch opposition to tyranny and his defence of liberty first instilled: this is where Silone first began his search for utopia, for the 'pace dell'anima', a kind of socialist paradise in which all men are free and equal. Undaunted by reality and the increasingly popular nihilistic tendencies of the times, Silone embraced hope, in man and in life, and continued his search for the 'società ideale'.² It is important to note that although he embraced hope, Silone never truly embraced the idea that man was on the road to enlightenment or a positive end. Indeed, he went so far as to say that man was in rather bad shape, in essence a tragic figure, nevertheless a figure that must move beyond the intellectual and function as a moral being.³ Theory and dogma could never substitute experience. Silone's focus was never man as an intellectual and abstract concept, but rather as a living, breathing creature involved in interaction with other similar creatures. The protagonists of the earlier works shared the desire to be actively involved in the grist of life, to move freely in the company of friends and to shun the intellectual refuge

of the 'ivory tower'. This desire to be involved in the very real action of life is reflected in Silone's rejection of Party and Church: politics and religion are not theoretical notions, they permeate every aspect of daily life: 'Sopra un insieme di teorie si può costituire una scuola e una propaganda; ma soltanto sopra un insieme di valori si può fondare una cultura, una civiltà, un nuovo tipo di convivenza tra gli uomini.' (*Uscita*, p. 863). He went forth with 'poche certezze', and these were 'certezze cristiane', one of the few remnants of his youth (*Uscita*, p. 893).

The common denominator in the collection is his focus on man in the *ingranaggio* of this existence, and from the outset man has priority. The initial stories are of human encounters in his home town, stories which involve the local characters and the local authorities, through which Silone shows the corrupt and the corrupted. These are the stories that sowed the seeds of Socialism in the young boy's heart and thus began his journey, the odyssey that took him from young, alert Abruzzese through the expanses of the continent on the lifelong search for utopia. Silone's journey began with the awakening of his social conscience, took him through his experiences of the Socialist and Communist Parties into his position as an 'ex' and then led him home again, back to the *contrada* that he knew more intimately than any other place, even after a long period of absence. The theme of the return is expressed beautifully in the final narrative essay, *La pena del ritorno*, which reflects not only Silone's physical return to his native heartland, but equally a sentimental one; the ideals that were given to him by his father at the outset are those with which he remained familiar and to which he was ever constant. As for those values and ideals, they in themselves bear witness to Silone's struggle to testify on behalf of his fellow man and betray a willingness to set himself apart from the mainstream, to stand on the margins, if necessary, and to accept any hand that fate may deal. Integrity, thirst for justice, love of

man, honesty, constancy, faith in man and belief in God, a strong social conscience and a healthy respect for difference, compassion and understanding: all of these are component parts of the whole, instilled and awakened in the young Silone by his father.

In the opening essay of the collection, *Visita al carcere*, Silone's father is presented as a tough yet gentle soul, a man capable of great strength yet of great emotion. Immediately we become aware not only of the abuse of power and the father's mistrust of authority, but also of the gift of compassion that is ever present in Silone's work. Like the entire collection, this tale has a circularity to it, beginning and ending with the fate of a prisoner. Initially, the young Silone receives a rebuke from his father for having laughed at the prisoner, the suggestion being that there are more unfortunates than guilty parties in the area: 'Non si deride un detenuto, mai. [...] Perché non può difendersi. E poi perché forse è innocente. In ogni caso, perché è un infelice'. (*Uscita*, p. 751) Immediately then, Silone inherited a mistrust of the law and a healthy respect for the unfortunates, more often than not their only crime being that of poverty. His thirst to testify on behalf of the *cafoni* and all those not served by law was thus born. The image of the manacled prisoner is one seen frequently in the novels: in *Infante*, *Pietro Spina* and *Luca*.⁷ By the end of the story, his compassion for the prisoner induces him to return the present of a cigar, thus illustrating the lesson learned and offering great homage to his father. We must at all times be aware of the fact that this *Uscita di sicurezza* is a collection of stories and episodes told in retrospect, and at the time of writing Silone had no immediate family left alive. His father, a figure who is best represented in the novels by characters such as Massimiliano and Zaccaria, died in 1911, followed by his mother in the tragic earthquake of 1915, leaving Silone practically alone.⁸ Again, in *La chioma di giuditta* it is the wisdom of the older man and his capacity for compassion that sets the example for Silone to follow. Here he learns to respect the

unfortunates in this world, but equally he learns the importance of taking responsibility for one's actions, be they just or otherwise. The postman, Nicola, must surrender himself to the police for having committed a crime: Silone's father is willing to help him in this and to offer support, but is not prepared to ignore the problem. It is his inherent sense of justice that enabled Nicola to turn to him in the first place. To go against all that he has so long offered would be an act contrary to his conscience. This example of fair-mindedness is one that Silone carried with him at all times. To take responsibility for one's actions and to accept the consequences, that is what gives a moral sense to our lives and it is a perspective that never left the author. Hence the reason for which Pietro feels compelled to accept the blame for Infante's patricide; it happens as a result of his new-found conscience, instilled in him by Pietro. This is why Luca feels he must face life imprisonment; why Rocco must reject the Party; why Cefalù ultimately killed himself.⁹ It is the essay detailing Silone's encounter with Don Orione, *Incontro con uno strano prete*, which represents the first tentative steps of Silone, a young boy, towards a politically turbulent future, and which best expresses the author's regard for God, if not the Church. This essay reinforces the idea of the journey, the physical movement of the author towards the north of Italy being emblematic of a spiritual shift; from the poverty of the Abruzzo Silone reaches the verdant climes of Liguria, but more importantly there begins an awakening of social conscience, of being treated as an adult by this priest whose quiet demeanour belies an inner strength and a tenacity of spirit that, again, is present in characters such as Don Benedetto and Don Nicola.¹⁰ Don Orione's willingness to converse with Silone, to treat him as an equal and to respect his opinions instilled in him a sense of self-worth and righteousness. This was a crucial moment in the young boy's life, without a father figure, and in need of guidance. Don Orione filled the void in every way and remained a life long friend to the author. His example of faith in God, whilst not exactly comfortable with the institution, is echoed in

Silone's own life. Having disassociated himself from the Church, Silone continued to believe in a benevolent and forgiving God right up until his death, as his will testifies. Echoes of Pietro Spina and don Benedetto are surely resounding in don Orione's somewhat prophetic words:

'Dio non è solo in Chiesa. Nell'avvenire non ti mancheranno momenti di disperazione. Anche se ti crederai solo e abbandonato, non lo sarai. Non dimenticarlo.' (*Uscita*, p.779)

Throughout the novels Silone presents many pictures of the corrupt nature of the Church, of her leaders and those who purport to represent her, yet these individuals are never given over entirely to themselves and their inherent selfishness. There is always someone to take up the challenge, someone willing to stand '*allo sbaraglio*' and cry out with the voice of the offended conscience: Don Benedetto, Don Nicola and Fra Pietro, already mentioned, are examples of the positive aspect to the Church. Unfortunately, their negative counterparts are more plentiful; it is easier to follow the flock than to stand on the margins and be ostracised for your dissent. Silone's encounter with Don Orione is a poignant moment in his journey, one which teaches many lessons, not the least of which is that it is possible to remain faithful to the ideal while rejecting the body, as is the case with both the Church and the political parties to which Silone would yet adhere. As he tells us, after his departure from the ranks of the Communist Party, his belief in the ideal remained firm: 'La mia fiducia nel socialismo (di ciò, oso dire, testimonia la mia condotta successiva) mi è rimasta più viva che mai'. (*Uscita*, p.862). In *Polikusc'ka*, the story of Silone's dealings with the Peasant League and his entry into the circle of those who are at the bottom end of the social scale, his political conscience began to define itself in the face of social injustice and the pathos of those who suffer at its hands. It should be noted, however, that at this

stage his entry into the political world is somewhat immature, a young man in search of his place in a very political and turbulent world. Lazzaro, one of the leaders of the League, speaks to the young Silone of injustice, of the wrongs of the Church (ringing the bells to disturb the League's meetings), of the tyranny of the state ('[...] vi sono persone istruite che si servono dell'istruzione per ingannare la povera gente') and of those who, like the figure of Christ dressed in red, presumably a political reference, are representative of the struggle for equality: 'Beati gli assetati di giustizia'. (*Uscita*, p. 78)¹¹ Silone's interest is aroused and his political career can begin. The clever use of Tolstoy's story serves not only to illustrate the lack of compassion in the local farmers - they consider the servant a fool for having killed himself - but also to show that this ignorance is a product of the environment rather than premeditated judgement. The political and the religious will be inextricably linked in his life and his work in the maxim of love thy neighbour and in his respect for a brotherhood of man. As he tells us in *Uscita di sicurezza*, the longest and most personal essay in this collection, his choice was clear: he had to adhere to the workers' struggle, thus setting himself on the margins, a rebel. He listens to and follows the example of the elderly doctor: 'Qui non c'è di mezzo: o ribellarsi o essere complici.' (*Uscita*, p. 821)

Uscita di sicurezza offre, a nostro giudizio, la guida più sicura per chiunque voglia addentrarsi nel mondo siloniano, ripercorrerne il cammino politico e insieme umano letterario, ricostruirne le vicende segrete di pari passo con quelle ufficiali. Il racconto, infatti, è tutta una sofferta testimonianza, apparentemente rivolta a scoprire le ragioni delle scelte, prima, e poi del rifiuto del comunismo, ma più sostanzialmente intesa a tracciare le coordinate della condizione drammatica di tanta parte della storia del nostro tempo che ha visto Silone, con molti altri dello stesso partito, protagonista e insieme vittima.¹²

In this essay, first published in English in the volume *The god that failed* in 1949, then reproduced in Italian in the same year, with the definitive version appearing as part of the collection in 1965, Silone gives his most personal 'testimonianza umana'.¹³ Herein we

find the principles and themes that have long been present in his work: the search for truth, liberty, and brotherhood, the desire to live by love, adamant opposition to tyranny, the eternal revolt of man, and a fervent belief in God and in Socialism that would accompany him throughout his life. This is a continuation of the one book, the only story Silone has ever sought to tell, as expressed at the beginning of this chapter. As can be seen in the struggle which is Silone's, standing up to testify on man's behalf often meant standing alone, sure only of the value of the testament:

Mi apparve evidente che la più alta aspirazione dell'uomo sulla terra dev'essere anzitutto di diventare buono onesto e sincero. La mia attività di scrittore è stata la testimonianza di questa mia lotta e maturazione interna. [...] Io non credo che i miei libri abbiano un valore letterario molto grande; io stesso conosco bene i loro difetti formali. Il loro valore è essenzialmente quello di una testimonianza umana; vi sono delle pagine in quei libri che sono state scritte col sangue.¹⁴

Essentially, with the calm and reflective benefit of hindsight, in the essay *Uscita di sicurezza* Silone tells the story of what led him to politics, to the Socialist and then the Communist Parties, what it meant to belong to such groups, and then what it meant to leave them. In his own words, he promises: 'Posso soltanto garantirne la sincerità, non l'obiettività.' (*Uscita*, p. 821) The initial impetus for the essay is an evening in 1926, a night spent talking with other Communists who were hiding from the authorities. Over the course of the evening the small group of political outlaws told each other their stories in order to give some meaning to their clandestine existence. For Silone it was a night of definition, when he truly became a rebel and from which he was able to gain more perspective on his life thus far. With the birth of this collection of essays, perhaps the author was able to recognise the events of that night as being the genesis of his desire to write.

Whatever the story, and Silone illustrated this often, his writing was always autobiographical, more out of his intense desire to share his experience with his readers than any purely narcissistic thirst. In that life experience, the reader is able to discern the uniqueness of this author, the values to which he testifies and the message he endeavours to spread. The three fundamental life experiences that have shaped the author are poverty, Christianity and of course, Communism. Born into the Marsica and given a sincere but rudimentary education, the young Silone was immediately confused by the apparent total lack of concern of his neighbours, people he held in some regard, for the outrageous injustices that were continually perpetuated in his home town. There was a very obvious divide between public and private life, people declaring themselves hostile to injustice but never actively condemning this when startlingly appropriate. Silone remembers a particularly unconscionable incident involving a member of the local gentry and a seamstress. The alleged gentleman set his dog upon the young woman and as a result she was quite severely wounded. This incident was witnessed by many, including the local prelate, and of course it was declared an infamy by all. Only this condemnation was private and useless to the pursuit of justice. The seamstress chose to make a judicial case of the matter, yet was unable to find a lawyer willing to defend her or any witnesses to corroborate her story. The magistrate, of whom Silone says 'in privato una degna ed onesta person', absolved the gentleman and insisted the seamstress pay the court expenses.¹⁵ That being insidious in itself, worse was the fact that the magistrate had been present at the incident and had been as vocal as everyone else in his condemnation of such behaviour – like everyone else, that is, in private. It wouldn't be proper for him to condemn a member of the gentry in public. This episode illustrates the profound hypocrisy that was so prevalent in society – and what is most interesting at this juncture is that Silone's scorn for those who would seek to pervert the course of justice, those who willingly ignore what is morally

correct, is not limited to the members of the upper classes or governed by quasi-communist prejudice. He is equally frustrated by the *cafoni*, themselves content to turn a blind eye. Of course, behind the scorn is the realisation that perhaps the peasants would be more susceptible to punishment for their disagreement and daring to register discordance. Equally present at the afore-mentioned incident was the local priest. He is representative of a Church that actively encouraged the peasants to 'badare ai fatti suoi' in order to avoid being entangled in any public scandal, and therefore damaging their family name. From the lessons already learned from his father, Silone was too sensitive to support such indoctrination and thus began two very important movements: his gradual distancing from the Church, and the arousal of his interest in the social problems of his area (with time, of course, the interest would be of a more global nature). He began to seek out the company of the very poor, though his own social level was scarcely any higher, and soon adopted a moral seriousness that led him more and more into the company of the older peasants. These older men, considered sage in the village, were as consumed by contempt for injustice as the young boy, but they were tired and worn down after years of repression. Again this served to illustrate the very different attitude of the Church, which sought to instill only those virtues which could be extolled in private life and was content to ignore the social plight of her people. The young Silone's conscience is pricked by the thought that public and private virtues should be one and the same, that hypocrisy was unacceptable and that social freedom was priceless. Even then, he was making a conscious choice to ignore blind acceptance and to side with what he believed was right. There is not one particular reason for which some are unable to resign themselves to stagnation and despair, that they feel compelled to fight rather than accept injustice. It is perhaps the result of those values given to him at an early age by his parents, the honesty and goodness that would accompany him throughout his life, or is it just a feeling from within, an inherent sense of

right and wrong that governs the individual's actions and is inspired by love of fellow man? It is an enduring search for liberty on all levels that accompanies the author for life.

After the earthquake of 1915, Silone's attitude towards the government and the Church really matured into rebellion. This area was all too familiar with natural disasters, but this time it was personal to the author. He lost his mother, and was left with only one brother, Romolo. As horrific as this loss was, and it was compounded by the enormous losses suffered by the community as a whole, the misuse of the authorities who were charged with repairing the damage was more shocking than the actual number of deaths (the *cafoni* being so used to disaster and catastrophe that they are resigned even in their acceptance of a violent and untimely end).¹⁶ To add insult to injury, Silone then recalls how, in spite of the general horror of the situation and the alarming tragedy faced by everyone in the region, the Church's response was to continue to preach about the licentious dress code of certain women at the beach. The seeds of Socialism began to sprout, and the inner voice of the author compelled him towards action. He wrote three articles to the socialist newspaper *Avanti*, and when the third remained unpublished due to the intervention of a well-known socialist lawyer, Silone realised that it was time to take his politics seriously.¹⁷

Vi era nella mia ribellione un punto in cui il rifiuto e l'amore coincidevano: sia i fatti che giustificavano l'indignazione, sia i motivi morali che l'esigevano, mi erano dati dalla contrada nativa. Il passo dalla rassegnazione alla rivolta era brevissima: bastava applicare alla società i principii ritenuti validi per la vita privata. (*Uselta*, p. 822)

Silone accepted his future and chose to rebel, to leave his studies and to pursue that sense of freedom and justice that was so elusive to his birthplace. He did not know that this choice would lead him to the Communist Party and then on to a period of intense suffering, self-questioning and eventually to literary fame. His rebirth began in 1917, with what he called

his first emergency exit, when he moved to Rome and became a member of the Socialist Party. As was the case when he first encountered the old men who belonged to the workers' movement in his village, Silone was completely beguiled by this new existence, this new sense of family and belonging, and he felt happy. By 1919 he was elected as the leader of the Socialist Youth and was then officially recognised as a 'subversive' by the rampant Fascist powers that were gradually taking control. He soon realised that belonging to the Party meant more than just a shared passion for justice and freedom, it was about giving yourself entirely to the movement and to those within. This was a period of intense political fighting and rivalry in Italy, even within the same parties. At no time can the reader forget that Italy was a relatively new country, recently unified and searching for its place amongst other European nations. Feeling disillusioned by its participation in and the outcome of the First World War, it was a breeding ground for discontent and for the genesis of any new political ethos. Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci were amongst the foremost men in the Socialist Party, and although divided in their opinion on the war, Marx, and the workers' culture, they shared a common desire for revolution, and for the rights of man: the worker. Silone was now working in the company of such men, and the young boy from Pescina could not be anything except impressed. Rome and all the political machinations were a long way from the rather parochial backdrop of his adolescence. In 1920 he was privileged to travel to Moscow as part of the Italian delegation to the Second International and was therefore present for Lenin's address and insistence that henceforth all those wishing to belong to the Party must take the name Communist, that the Socialist Party must be transformed. In 1921, in his capacity as Secretary of the Socialist Youth, Silone spoke at the Party congress in Livorno where he actively supported the dissolution of the Socialist Party and the immediate establishment of the Italian Communist Party. Thus began a decade of political and personal turmoil for the author, one that would culminate in his

absolute rejection by those to whom he was committed. At that stage, Silone was so dedicated to the cause that he was unable to see how this kind of blind devotion could actually be harmful and it is only now, in the essays he writes with the benefit of hindsight, that he is fully aware of the sacrifices required by the Party.¹⁸ At all times it should be remembered what it meant to declare oneself outside the political mainstream in Italy at that time:

Per me, come per molti altri, era una conversione, un impegno integrale, che implicava un certo modo di pensare e un certo modo di vivere - erano ancora i tempi in cui il dichiararsi socialista o comunista equivaleva a gettarsi allo sbaraglio, rompere con i propri parenti e amici, non trovare impiego. [...] Nell'intimo della coscienza tutto venne messo in discussione, tutto diventò un problema. Fu nel momento della rottura che sentii quanto fossi legato a Cristo in tutte le fibre dell'essere. [...] La piccola lampada tenuta accesa davanti al tabernacolo delle intuizioni più care fu spenta da una gelida ventata. [...] Così, all'insaputa di tutti, il mondo cambiò aspetto. (*Uscita*, pp. 823-824)

The price of this revolt was high. The new Party became everything, and outside of it the world ceased to have any real meaning: 'Il partito diventò famiglia scuola chiesa e caserma; all'infuori d'esso il mondo restante era tutto da distruggere'. (*Uscita*, p. 825)

Over the next few years Silone spent a great deal of time travelling with prominent members of the Party, establishing his position within it and witnessing the unfolding of several important events: the Fascist march on Rome in 1922, the death of Lenin in 1924, and the assassination attempt on Mussolini in 1926. It was after this last incident that true freedom was all but eradicated from Italy; Mussolini's Special Laws prohibited the right to meet in a public place, the freedom of the press and the right to existence of any political faction that was not completely within the Fascist Party. The individual could be arrested at any time for daring to speak out in any way against the regime. This suppression sent the Communists, already existing on shaky ground, into hiding and for the most part into exile.

Initially Silone submitted to the dogma of the Party without asking too many questions about its validity, much in the same way as Rocco or Stella, or the young Pietro Spina. At all times, however, his devotion was to man, not the political ideal, and soon he had to rethink his position within the Party. As he was to find out over a relatively short period of time, the Party he had joined with such enthusiasm in the belief that it shared his commitment and love of justice and freedom was rather more preoccupied with defending its own interests than the rights of the poor and downtrodden. In many ways, particularly with their thirst for power, the Communists were no different to their Fascist counterparts. Final illumination would come for Silone after his defining visit to Moscow in 1927. He was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the power struggle and in-fighting within the Party, the different factions all vying with each other for control at the expense of the original goals of the workers' party. As illustrated in the novels, when liberty is compromised, there can be no truth. The aim of his struggle has always been to testify for the common man, to try to understand the world and in so doing to make others understand; when this becomes impossible, there is only one course of action. His disillusionment reached a climax in his visits to Moscow, where to Silone's eyes freedom of thought was not appreciated and the restrictions that became apparent were intolerable: 'La libertà [...] è la possibilità di dubitare, la possibilità di cercare, di sperimentare, di dire di no a una qualsiasi autorità, letteraria artistica filosofica sociale e anche politica'. (*Uscita*, pp. 827-828) This was a view not openly supported by his Party.

In 1927, Silone and Togliatti met in Berlin and left there together to journey to Moscow as members of the Italian Communist delegation, to participate in a meeting of the International. Amongst the various topics of discussion was a certain document written by Trotsky with reference to the Stalinist purges and senseless massacres that had taken place

in China. Trotsky had written to the Politburo to condemn in the strongest possible manner the way in which the Party in China had been treated. With Stalin attaining staggering new levels of power and means of intimidation, this act of dissent could be seen as both a brave yet inherently foolish move. Such arbitrary acts of independent thought and expression were not generally welcomed by an increasingly paranoid Communist Party. As such it was considered that Trotsky was operating outwith the bounds of Bolshevism and Leninism, thus offending the sensibilities of her members.¹⁹ What ensued was essential to Silone's eventual departure from the party ranks. Thälmann, the leader of the German Communist Party, set about the official condemnation of Trotsky, only to be interrupted by apologies from Silone for having arrived late and having obviously missed the reading of the offensive document in question. To his surprise and indeed horror, Silone discovered that in actual fact none of the others had heard the contents of the letter. Such was his disbelief that he asked the interpreter to translate Thälmann's words again, sure that there had been a gross misunderstanding. In actual fact, the letter had not been translated at all, Stalin claiming that it contained too many references to Soviet policy at home and in China and was therefore a real threat to national security. This was unacceptable to Silone, and whilst he accepted a nation's right to defend its security he could not see how the same logic could be applied to the condemnation of an article – and by definition, the man – when the letter in question had been largely unread. This desire to ignore all that offended Party sensibilities and to condemn it as destructive was, for Silone, insupportable. This was corruption at the highest levels, and such an infringement of liberty could only offend his conscience.²⁰ Stalin eventually conceded that it was unreasonable to expect the delegates to lend their names to the condemnation and then brought the matter to a swift close. Unfortunately, the entire experience had left Silone questioning the Communist ethos and served only to increase the unsettling feelings of discontent that were growing steadily

within him. What really sealed his fate, however, in terms of Party adhesion, was the conclusion reached by Kolaroff, his Russian counterpart, discussing the allegedly offensive document. While Silone remained firm in his conviction that to sign a condemnation would be wrong, that his inability to simply conform was a result of a life-long moral code, based on integrity, he was met with the worrying words, 'Voi non avete ancora capito che cosa sia la politica'. (*Uscita*, p. 838) With increasing clarity Silone realised that the differences between Communism and Fascism were minimal and that the Russian dictatorship was as susceptible to the same twists as any other dictatorship. He saw that Stalin was gradually reducing the number of people he wanted to be in control, and with his desire to rid the movement of the Independent Socialist he was attempting the insidious removal of any kind of political resistance, most especially within his own Party. Tyranny has many faces, and the final straw came when Silone arrived back in Berlin to discover that Stalin had lied and that in his absence his name had been added to the document. He had participated in the 'unanimous' condemnation of Trotsky. Silone was aghast, furious, horrified at such blatant iniquity. When he complained to Thälmann, he was greeted by an astonishing degree of indifference:

Egli mi spiegò che, in caso d'urgenza, lo statuto dell'Internazionale autorizzava la presidenza ad adottare qualsiasi deliberazione a nome dell'Esecutivo. [...] ma dovrete imparare dai comunisti americani, ungheresi e cecoslovacchi cosa significa disciplina comunista. (*Uscita*, p. 844)

Even his own comrades in the Italian Party wished for quiet, insisting he withdraw his complaint, thus showing their own brand of 'badare ai fatti suoi'. Togliatti, who had been present with him and shared his discomfort in Moscow, now opted for the quiet life, urging Silone to accept what had happened and move on. How could Silone remain affiliated to such a group? 'Era questa la vera faccia del comunismo? [...] Come fu moralmente

possibile, dopo l'ultimo soggiorno a Mosca, rimanere nel partito così a lungo?' (*Uscita*, p. 845) This ignorance could no longer be tolerated, Silone returned from Moscow a disillusioned man, though he did not leave the Party immediately, indeed he remained fairly active within it. In 1929 his health began to suffer quite seriously, affected no doubt by the various impromptu and dangerous trips to Italy that he made on behalf of the Party, by the spartan living conditions he endured (along with many other 'senzacarte'), and of course by the moral, emotional malaise he had been experiencing for some time. Equally, by this stage he was aware of the imprisonment and torture of his brother, Romolo, who, as shall be illustrated, was suffering for Silone's political affiliations. Gradually, however, his feelings were difficult to hide and became very apparent to the leadership. Togliatti's compliance with the Stalinist rule, his aversion to anything other than a unified Communist front (to the exclusion of all other Socialist groups) and his support for the Party's revolutionary return to Italy served to distance Silone even further. In 1930 he published an article in *Lo stato operaio* in which he condemned the now totally obscure nature of the Party's politics, he voiced his objection to the proposed return to Italy, he criticised the lack of a clear, political nucleus, and called for profound, political discussion. His position, however, was a minority one.²¹ This behaviour could not but offend the Party directorate and sent Silone even further down the road towards political independence. However, the Communist Party was not one from which a member was able to walk away:

La verità è che non ci si libera dal Partito comunista come ci si dimette dal Partito liberale. [...] il Partito comunista, per i suoi militanti, non è solo, né principalmente, un organismo politico, ma scuola chiesa caserma famiglia: è un'istituzione totalitaria nel senso più completo e genuino della parola, e impegna interamente chi vi si sottomette. (*Uscita*, p. 852)

He had seen the other side of Communism too clearly to return to what he was before. His further refusal to condemn the dissident activists Tresso, Leonetti, and Ravazzoli, all opposed to Togliatti's compliance and political agenda, complete the emergent picture of a very disillusioned man. The three Trotskyists were expelled for having criticised the International and their own Party directorate, and due to Silone's disagreements with Togliatti's leadership and his refusal to sign their condemnation, they assumed they could convince him to side with them in opposition. Silone, however, had no interest in re-engaging himself within the political mainstream and refused to stand with them, ignoring the letters sent by Tresso and maintaining his distance from them. It is important to remember at this juncture that Silone had begun *Fontamara* and to involve himself wholeheartedly in writing. However much he disagreed with Togliatti and his Stalinist sycophancy, he realised he had very little in common with the three dissidents. This made him a difficult character in the eyes of the Party leaders, rendering him disloyal and suspicious.²² Togliatti wanted Silone to sign a declaration of faith to the Party; in fact he typed the letter himself and in so doing sealed the definitive rupture of relations between the two men. The Party wanted him to return to a more active role, which of course he could not accept, and his refusal to extend any grand gesture of loyalty, to persist in their deception, could only infuriate the relevant authorities, precipitating his expulsion - after all, one does not simply leave the Party. Finally, in 1931, Silone left the Party, (officially he was expelled), an enormous decision for the man who had sacrificed his youth and indeed his life for the Party, choosing solitude over comrades in order to fight for the beliefs he thought that it represented. Exhausted both physically and emotionally, his Communist mission was spent and he had already embarked upon the literary journey that would be a lifelong endeavour. The second emergency exit was complete.

Avrei potuto difendermi. Avrei potuto provare la mia buona fede. [...] Avrei potuto; ma non volli. In un attimo ebbi la chiarissima percezione d'ogni furberia, tattica, attesa, compromesso. Dopo un mese, dopo due anni, mi sarei trovato da capo. Era meglio finirla una volta per sempre. Non dovevo lasciarmi sfuggire quella nuova, provvidenziale occasione, quell' 'uscita di sicurezza'. Non aveva più senso star lì a litigare. Era finito. Grazie a Dio. (*Uscita*, p. 858)

The same sense of morality and honesty that led him to join the PCI is the very one that led him away from it, though not as quickly as might have been expected, prevented perhaps by a number of reasons: the lack of alternative, the sacrifice of friends and family already made, the debt to fallen comrades, his belief in Socialism, the imprisonment of his brother Romolo.²³ As he moved around Europe in the clandestine manner of the communist outcast, one of the principle concerns of Silone was his younger and only surviving sibling and his penchant for irrational and rather dangerous behaviour. Don Orione had pursued an interest in young Romolo and gone to extraordinary lengths to keep him in school, to afford him a chance at education and a better life that had not been anticipated in the wake of the earthquake. Yet as brother to Silone, Romolo was inevitably seen as a threat to the Fascist authorities and was under constant police surveillance. He found it increasingly difficult to find work and therefore to carve out his own existence. It is probable that Romolo was a member of the PCI, though certainly by no means as actively involved as his older brother, therefore he presented the ideal opportunity for the authorities to strike at Silone, at this stage an outlaw in exile and threat to the fascist regime. It should be noted that at the time Silone was presumably unaware of this and only with the benefit of experience and of hindsight was he able to rationalise it, at least to a certain degree. The tragedy of Romolo was to have far-reaching emotional consequences for Silone, and the circumstances of his death were to haunt Silone until his own demise, many years later. Whilst in exile in 1928, Silone heard of Romolo's arrest in Milan, accused of carrying out an assassination attempt on King Victor Emanuel III. The authorities claim – certainly without any concrete

evidence – was that Romolo had perpetuated this action on behalf of Silone and his communist comrades. In exile, they were physically unable to strike at the heart of the country, therefore the logical choice was to use someone *in situ*. Even more ludicrous was their claim that this plot had been hatched in Moscow in 1927 during the now infamous summit of the International. Romolo was tried and found guilty, sentenced to prison and left without recourse to appeal. Don Orione continued to try to help, indeed he was one of the last people to see Romolo alive, but all Silone could do from exile was send the occasional sum of money – in itself an enormous sacrifice, given the conditions in which he lived in exile – and letters of affection and support. Finally Romolo was moved to prison on the island of Procida where, after continuous moral and physical beatings, his health deteriorated rapidly and he died in 1932. The grief at losing the last member of his immediate family was immense for Silone, most especially because of the sense of guilt he must have felt for Romolo's condition. From exile there was very little that Silone could have done to aid in his release. The authorities had used him to attack Silone, and they had won. There is no doubt that these tragic events kept Silone in the Communist Party for longer than he would have perhaps remained. Romolo had not been able to give too much information on Silone to the authorities because he genuinely didn't have any. In a vain bid to emulate his older brother, however, Romolo wrote to Silone telling him how he had behaved in the face of their aggression: 'Ho cercato di comportarmi [...] come ho immaginato che ti saresti comportato tu, al mio posto.' (*Uscita*, p. 856) It is not surprising that this burden of guilt stayed with Silone for life, so painful was this subject for him that, in the literature he was to publish, there is no direct mention of Romolo. Apart from the shared dedication at the beginning of *Fontamara* there is no real reference to his brother at all, a conspicuous absence given the autobiographical nature of his work. Following his death in 1978, Silone's wife recorded the very real and painful truth as revealed to her:

La perdita di mia madre nel terremoto fu un dolore terribile, ma era stata causata da una calamità naturale. La prigionia e la morte di mio fratello sono rimaste il mio tormento intimo, perché non sarebbero accadute se non fosse stato per me. Perciò di Romolo non ho mai parlato. È un genere di dolore difficile da comunicare.²⁴

To resign from something which has been your life, and which in itself has set you upon the fringes of society, forcing you to abandon all that was once familiar, now forcing you to do the same, takes enormous courage, especially in the face of not knowing where to go next. 'La verità è questa: l'uscita dal Partito comunista fu per me una data assai triste, un grave lutto, il lutto della mia gioventù.' (*Uscita*, p. 860) This is a sentiment echoed by most of the main protagonists of his novels, having abandoned that which for so long had been more than a political party. It had been a way of life. It was 1931, Silone found himself exiled from the friends and comrades he had made within the Party ranks, he was alone in a foreign country, without passport or support, his brother languishing in prison for his adherence to the very body that Silone was now rejecting. Now the reader can begin to understand the relevance of the Dante reference found at the beginning, the essay's subtitle, 'Non vi si pensa quanto sangue costa.' It is of little surprise he found himself 'sull'orlo del suicidio'.²⁵

Per Silone, uscito dal movimento comunista a causa di un dissidio profondo con i suoi dirigenti, dopo esserne stato un esponente di primo piano, la vocazione di scrittore comportava inoltre il ripensamento di quelle che erano state le sue esperienze giovanili, l'ambiente storico della sua formazione, il mondo popolare della sua terra, le cui sofferenze ed il cui stato di sottoposizione avevano ispirato in lui giovane l'assillo di lottare per il suo miglioramento e per la sua libertà, e insieme la scoperta di una profonda riserva di immagini e di pensieri, di tradizioni misconosciute, di un antico dolore che si immedesimava nella tradizione cristiana, nel senso originale e primitiva di questa parola, soprattutto in quella di un'antica passione religiosa che si traduceva in uno spontaneo sentimento di giustizia, nella fraternità operante tra gli esseri umani.²⁶

Thus Silone turned to literature as a means to express himself and his ideals, the decade of the thirties being a period of prolific writing, the perfect medium through which to continue his attempts to testify on man's behalf.²⁷ In 1931 he founded the German magazine *Information* which allowed him the freedom to publish more personal work. Through this he was able to distance himself even further from Stalinist Communism and was able to rethink his socialist beliefs.

In the essays which follow, *Situazione degli ex*, *La scelta dei compagni*, and *La lezione di Budapest*, Silone strove to underline that break, to show how it affected him and his writing and to illustrate, most importantly, that his break from the Party and from active politics did not, in any way, undermine his faith in Socialism and the ideal of universal brotherhood. He remained very much a 'franco tiratore del socialismo.' (*Uscita*, p. 872)

These essays, written between 1942 and 1956, serve to illustrate that the author's commitment to man, society, and to Socialism was unwavering. Silone was never interested in 'isms' and 'ologies', nor in literary trends, he wanted to write for himself and for his companions, for the *cafoni*, because 'Noi non possiamo però rinunciare a renderci conto.' (*Uscita*, p. 884) In becoming an 'ex', Silone continued his war against oppression and injustice, only now he chose to do so independently of a body that in itself had the potential to turn from oppressed to oppressor. It is not difficult to recognise the actions of Pietro Spina and Rocco de Donatis in those of the author. Again, his faith in the ideal remained strong, as he tells us at the end of *Uscita di sicurezza*.

Nei suo nucleo essenziale essa è tornata a essere quella ch'era quando dapprima mi rivoltai contro il vecchio ordine sociale: un'estensione dell'esigenza etica dalla ristretta sfera individuale a tutto il dominio dell'attività umana; un bisogno di effettiva fraternità;

un'affermazione della superiorità della persona umana su tutti i meccanismi economici e sociali che l'opprimono. Col passare degli anni vi si è aggiunto un reverente sentimento verso ciò che nell'uomo incessantemente tende a sorpassarsi ed è alla radice della sua inappagabile inquietudine. (*Uscita*, p. 862)

The later essays in this collection are an example of how the moral guidelines put in place by don Orione and by Silone's father have remained intact over the years and through some very difficult times. As Silone left the PCI and began to write, Italy - indeed the world - was enduring a very turbulent period. World War Two was imminent, to be followed by the Cold War and global suspicion. War raged in Asia and the general fear of Communism was spreading, thriving particularly in the States, under McCarthyism. The atmosphere was one of tense suspicion and general mistrust. When the definitive version of *Uscita di sicurezza* was published in 1965, this tension was at its peak. Yet Silone remained firm to his unshakeable faith in the Socialist creed, choosing to continue with his message of love and liberty and basic moral values with the same intensity as always, finally reaching a degree of acceptance in his own country, where for so long his literature had been virtually ignored. Throughout it all, his values remained constant, always siding with truth rather than convenience, not wavering until death. Lies, suspicion, jealousy, he tells us in *La situazione degli ex*, are the traits responsible for true solitude, in the isolationist sense. These are the prerequisite attributes of any tyranny, and as such must be rejected. This is exactly what he himself did when opting out of the Party and accepting a life alone.

Nella lotta coi lupi, per salvarci, un certo numero di noi, siamo stati costretti a oltrepassare i nostri limiti borghesi e ottocenteschi, e a riscoprire la nostra filiazione paleo-cristiana. Essa consiste essenzialmente nella validità permanente di alcuni valori morali per sottrarre la convivenza degli uomini alle leggi della foresta. La nostra anima, ho scritto in altra occasione, ha ora dimensioni scavate dal dolore che ignoravamo nel 1919. (*Uscita*, p. 873)

Although he had officially distanced himself from active politics at the beginning of the thirties, Silone could not help remaining involved. In the wake of his expulsion it became even more difficult to move around Europe, and he no longer enjoyed the support of friends and comrades who had once offered shelter. This period of prolific writing would be remembered as a particularly lonely and desperate time, but at no stage did the author feel compelled to join any of the 'ex' movements, groups which seemed to thrive on criticism of their former comrades. This sedulous character pursued his own path, finding literature to be the best means by which he could expound his love for man. In 1940 he accepted a post as head of the socialist 'Centro Estero' in Zurich, hoping that this return to a political position would allow him to play his part in ridding Italy of Fascism and help forge a new political way and spent a brief period as editor of *L'avvenire dei lavoratori*. After his return from exile in 1944, he assumed the role of director for *Avanti*, enjoying a fragile peace with Rodolfo Morandi, the secretary of the Socialist Party and a man with whom Silone shared few beliefs. This peace could not endure and Silone eventually left the paper, believing the paper did not allow enough freedom. At this time, various voices within the workers' movements were making noises. Finding himself involved once again in the debate on fusionist politics, Silone stood with Saragat and Pertini and opposed the proposal to unify the Socialist and Communist Parties – this was exactly what he had originally fought against in the thirties. 1947 proved to be a year of political hurdles within the Left, the Socialist Party was split and redefined, from it was then born the PSLI and later, the PSU. Once again Silone found himself forced to choose loyalties, but his ideal of a political environment free from compromise soon left him isolated and he was left with no option but to leave the arena and live in the company of others with whom he had a shared passion: like the protagonists of the novels, he went in search of those who espoused his love of liberty and brotherhood. In 1950 he closed the doors on his political career

definitively: 'La colpa iniziale fu certamente mia, nel pretendere dell'azione politica qualcosa che essa non può dare.' (*Uscita*, p. 861)

After his expulsion from the Party in 1931, free of constraints, Silone was able to choose. 'Ciò che definì la nostra rivolta fu la scelta dei compagni.' (*Uscita*, p. 883) This could be Pietro or Rocco, defining what makes their inner circle of friends such a strong community, a community based on love. At all times the reader is reminded of Rocco's words, 'Amo ergo sum' and can see how the author makes these his own.²⁸ In this particular essay, *La scelta dei compagni*, Silone deals with the wave of nihilism sweeping Europe, engulfing the individual in despair and angst. He emphasises this by noting the frequent number of suicides among writers and artists, depressed by the despair and lack of a belief system which was then prevalent. Silone believed that the war merely unmasked the truth about capitalist societies, thus giving rise to a general loss of faith in institutions. Once this occurred, naturally the moral and religious framework of the nation was tested, with nihilism being one of the results. In literature, nihilism produced work devoid of any truly human dimension, rooted in the belief that no objective reality stood behind any theories or dogma, though Silone does allow exceptions to the rule, such as Camus and Junger, and this lack of human dimension could not possibly appeal to a man who was so firmly rooted in the human condition. His experiences as a child, represented by the narrative stories in the first part of this collection, contributed to an early understanding of man and his role in the greater scheme of things. Maria Paynter notes that in *La scelta dei compagni* Silone perceived two considerations, the class and the conscience within that class, that when times become difficult it is essential for man to retain his conscience within the group and resist the temptation to become intoxicated by a new or prevailing ideal or climate.²⁹ Like justice, he must be ever ready to change sides to the one which represents truth. He writes

that although the man of today is in poor shape, hope lies in his ability to question his existence and the responsibility individuals have to each other, as moral beings. Essentially he argues that man is free and responsible and therefore must accept a degree of control over his life. These attributes are essential to Silone's choice of companions and friends. Most especially, he objects to the idea of reducing God to a problem, believing instead in a few truths that save him from the 'lupi':

Si, vi sono certezze irriducibili. Queste certezze sono, nella mia coscienza, certezze cristiane. Esse mi appaiono talmente murate nella realtà umana da identificarsi con essa. Negarle significa disintegrare l'uomo. Questo è troppo poco per costituire una professione di fede, ma abbastanza per una dichiarazione di fiducia. [...]
Essa si regge in fin dei conti sulla certezza intima che noi uomini siamo esseri liberi e responsabili; si regge sulla certezza che l'uomo ha un assoluto bisogno di apertura alla realtà degli altri; si regge sulla certezza della comunicatività delle anime. (*Uscita*, p. 893)

The most important messages that can be taken from *La lezione di Budapest* are, firstly, one of a literary nature, secondly political, since the riots in Hungary were most certainly of a political nature. In the demonstrations staged by the Hungarian people to express their intolerance of the Soviet invasion in 1956, Silone saw the very best parts of man come to the fore, his refusal to use blind acceptance as an excuse for passive resignation. He begins this essay by stating the differences between Hungarian writers and intellectuals, who definitely stood by the proletariat, and foreign 'progressive' writers, whose silence on the situation was ominous. The few communist (and fairly rebellious) writers who did offer an opinion did not enjoy the support of their communist leaders and were pressured into submission. The focus of Silone's severest criticism was Sartre, mainly for his refusal to credit the Hungarians with a right to choose. This was a people whose very existence was threatened by the might of the Soviet Union, and their defiant stance was, to Silone's mind, a credit to their existence. For Sartre, this was going against the

grain of the political body, rejecting Communism and therefore mother Russia. In rejecting this, Sartre believed the Hungarian people were rejecting the people, the workers' movement, and thus they were rejecting the notion of progress. Silone did not agree with Sartre because he was an exponent of free thought, of man's right to decide when the ideology that was fundamental to the Party has been overshadowed by greed and demagoguery, and therefore to reject the ideology. Equally, on a more prosaic note, progress itself was an ethos that could only be attained through freedom and choice – indeed, when Sartre visited the Soviet Union, and realised how many people had read his books, he was amazed, since they had been banned. Their reading was testament to the will and ability of the people to choose for themselves. The Hungarian writers were not surprised at the way the events unfolded, and when the tanks rolled in and threats of oppression became the norm, they did not flinch in their unhesitating devotion to the people. Indeed, they chose the people over the Party and chose the truth. For Silone, they set an example of moral seriousness. This episode serves to illustrate just how far the Communist Party in Russia had moved away from the original ideals. What Silone admired amongst the Hungarian proletariat was their refusal to entertain more lies, their ability to remain Socialists without compromising themselves and their ideals to appease the dictatorship. Silone continued by discussing the defects of the communist system, questioning the validity of Imperialist politics in Russia, asking how this varies, if at all, from western Capitalism, and openly criticising the assumed moral superiority of arms dealers over those who use the weapons. He was at odds with the choice of vocabulary. The last true Soviets had disappeared from Russia in 1920, so instead of using the term to describe the Russian troops, Silone wonders whether they shouldn't rephrase: 'Le truppe imperialists russe contro i Soviet d'Ungheria.' (*Uscita*, p. 900) Silone believed that the faults in the system could never be resolved as long as Soviet-Stalinist politics decreed the

unity of one, true Party, and nothing outwith the Party: 'Nessun comunista, senza romperla con la teoria e la prassi dell'ideologia totalitaria può discutere la legittimità del partito unico.' (*Uscita*, p. 902) This kind of abject acceptance without reason was offensive for Silone, from a literary and political standpoint: he had lived the Communist experience and was all too familiar with the lack of freedom to chose. The principal focus of Silone's criticism was Togliatti, with regards to communist leaders and their response to this illegal occupation of Hungary, whom he attacked in no uncertain terms:

Nei confronti degli insorti ungheresi, Togliatti è stato di una volgarità e di una insolenza che la lingua italiana non aveva più conosciute dalla caduta del fascismo. (*Uscita*, p. 906)

He was unable to understand the ambiguous position adopted by Togliatti, always content to appease his Soviet masters at the expense of his people (in Silone's opinion, of course). In particular, Silone was affronted by the position adopted by Togliatti and the faithful towards the reading of Gramsci: in spite of the fact that the leadership in Moscow were unable to find any unorthodox opinions that would compromise their control, Togliatti managed to have his work limited to study in Italy, in order to avoid possible danger. All this controversy surrounded a man who had been present, and indeed instrumental, in the birth of the Party in Italy.

Silone maintains that there are positive lessons to learn from this event in history, most especially from the behaviour of the Hungarian workers, who were bold enough to strike the day after the invasion of their home, and in the courage of the Russian soldiers who changed sides. These actions assured Silone that the perennial struggle for freedom was still alive and assuaged a fear that the Pietro Spinas of this world were confined to

history. The defection of the Russian soldiers was a source of enormous hope for Silone, not only in the purely imminent sense of man deciding to fight on the side of what is right rather than carry out what appeared to be unjust actions. For the author, this action revealed a general awakening of Russian sensibility, which for him had long been asloep under the threat of Stalinist purges:

I russi che noi abbiamo sempre amato cominciano dunque a svegliarsi: i nipoti di Herzen, Tolstoj, Bakunin, Vera Figner, gli studenti che secondo la più nobile tradizione dell'attività clandestina distribuiscono libri proibiti, i contadini che nascondono e nutrono i detenuti e i deportati evasi. Ora, ed è questo che importa, nessuno può più parlare della Russia come di un blocco. (*Uscita*, p. 910)

The political importance of the Hungarian revolution was enormous, of course, but for Silone perhaps the most relevant message was that it seemed to condemn the validity of one, single Party, a bone of contention for many years between the author and the Party he once helped forge:

L'importanza storica della recente rivolta ungherese consiste appunto nel rifiuto della menzogna totalitaria: socialismo? Sì; partito unico, unanimità obbligatoria? No. (*Uscita*, p. 903)

Lastly, this essay is a testament to the resourcefulness of the human condition, of the great things that are possible when man has a true awareness of the sense of self. For Silone, who had been so preoccupied for so long by the nature of the struggle and the need for freedom within any movement, the actions of the Hungarian people and the dissident Russian soldiers illustrated that spirit of rebellion that he had always championed. It embodied defiance in the face of oppression and fear, highlighted the endeavour of those 'allo

sbaraglio' who are willing to put themselves on the line in the search for brotherhood and peace, and helped sustain his faith in the human spirit.

The narrative essay at the end of the collection *La pena del ritorno* seems to be a fitting end to Silone's journey. Here he imagines a return to Fontamara, the town he left so hurriedly many years before and to which he has never been back. He had promised Lazzaro and his daughter that he would return, that he would not forget them, yet it seems as though he did not honour these promises. The pathos in this story is enormous, from the repetition of the promise to return to the realisation that it is too late, from the stubborn determination not to respond to the priest to it being the priest who informs him of Laurina's ill health, from the memory of a hasty retreat made under cover of darkness, many years before, to the long, slow journey back, again by train, giving symmetry to his life's adventure. Even the war didn't affect the area too much, to the disgust of the locals who would have been happily compensated. The story in itself is a simple one: Silone returns but is too late, Laurina, the only person in the village he would have wished to see - and perhaps the only one who would have recognised him - has died, and once again, he retreats hastily. This world which the author once knew so well is no longer familiar, in fact it is only in his return that he is able to reconcile the distance that now exists between him and the place he once called home. There is a slightly judgmental tone to this essay; the idea of the author having moved on but the world of his youth having stagnated is obvious, yet this tone should not be mistaken for arrogance. Silone had always striven to be honest and to tell the truth, even when that truth was uncomfortable. To shirk that responsibility now, because it involved himself, would have been against his conscience.

The final essay in the collection, *Ripensare il progresso*, is one in which the author continues his contemplation of man's place in the modern world and his relationship with his fellow man. Initially he debates the position of wealthier societies, discussing their affluence and asking whether this prosperity leads to new problems and moral degeneracy. Silone lived in Switzerland and witnessed first-hand the luxuries of a progressive society. He cites the Swiss intellectuals themselves as being concerned with the spiritual and moral decline of such a materialist society. Silone does not seek to offer any definite solutions to this problem, but offers a certain amount of advice as to how Socialism might play an important role in the governing of such a society: if affluence is devoid of morality - and he spent a lifetime defining what he meant by that term - then the future is bleak for mankind. The same attention to a morally attentive state is given to the problem of public welfare and social aid, to mass media and to mass civilisation. The mutual relationship between affluence and morality is the main theme of this essay. Silone argues that the duty of the mass media is to inform society, thus allowing the individual to act on the facts and to therefore act responsibly. He is quick to observe that although there is no doubting the enormous conditioning power of the media machine, the independent thought of the strong individual will not easily be overcome by propaganda. Essentially, Silone argues, there is no substitute for human experience, and would seem to suggest that societies, particularly affluent ones, must continue to reassess their moral condition and to focus at all times on the dignity of man.

With *Uscita di sicurezza*, Ignazio Silone finally found a degree of acceptance in Italy, though the *caso Silone* continues to be an issue.³⁰ He is always a disquieting figure; his determination to question endlessly and to strive for honesty and equality is an oddly disconcerting characteristic in his writing. To the end, then, he remained focused upon man

and his role in society, always fighting to testify on his behalf. The autobiographical nature of that struggle, represented in this work, serves as the most important guide to anyone wishing to understand the man and the writer. It presents the reader with a sincere account of events that shaped Silone, his moral code, and his profound love of justice and freedom.

'Uscite di sicurezza', l'una e l'altra, raggiunte per intima vocazione, per una scelta morale nata quasi istintivamente, e poi maturata in piena consapevolezza, sotto la spinta di una assoluta intolleranza per tutto ciò che è compromesso, ingiustizia, sopraffazione. Uscite verso il più vero di se stesso: fuori dalle costrizioni dell'ambiente e perfino dai vincoli sentimentali, quella giovanile; da un'ideologia e da un partito divenuti regime, dittatura, l'altra. Uscite la cui sicurezza è data, appunto, dal sentirsi Silone in coerenza con se stesso, o, meglio, con quella vocazione che è, da sempre, la ragione di se stesso.³¹

If *Uscita di sicurezza* was welcomed and considered by the critics as an autobiographical summation of the author's life, then *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* must surely represent the thematic climax of that life.

L'avventura di un povero cristiano

Con *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* [...] Ignazio Silone ha scritto forse il suo più bel libro, più semplicemente, il 'suo' libro, quello che ne riassume la profonda ispirazione originale e l'esperienza dell'uomo.³²

The opinion of Carlo Bo, shared by many critics, is, in this writer's opinion, an accurate one.³³ With *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, Silone offered the reader a largely autobiographical text, the culmination of his life's work and his life experience, imbued with the themes and ideals that have been so dear to him and that continue to be so now in this, the latter stages of his life. With each autonomous work he has continued to emphasise his devotion to the cause of the oppressed, those who hunger for rectitude, always fighting

on behalf of those who most need help. In this work, Silone remains steadfast in his struggle for justice and freedom for mankind, in the search for brotherhood and love, in the quest for 'le tracce di un'utopia a lui cara.' (*L'avventura*, p. 561) This idea of utopia, the elusive state in which all men are equal and are treated as such, is very familiar to the author and is, of course, a great impetus for his work. The fact the the author himself recognises this state to be utopian introduces the inevitable element of pathos, the sad realisation that his desire for a free and just society - a society built upon strong moral foundations - is not a desire shared by everyone, because man's inherent selfishness generally precludes such possibility. His concerns are forever for man, how he reacts to and interacts with his fellow man in any given society. These concerns grew with the years, slightly overshadowing the political and social dimension of his work, becoming a genuine moral force. As is noted in the earlier works, rarely is humanity depicted in a favourable light, and the characters who do emerge from their experience as heroic and memorable are those who have lived on the margins, social deviants, outcasts, those with whom the mainstream - especially those in power - does not wish to associate. More than that, this same mainstream went to great lengths to ensure these deviants were ostracised. However grim society seemed, Silone refused to abandon the struggle. Here the search for humanity is conducted through the story of a medieval Pope. He sets his play and players in an entirely religious atmosphere, an atmosphere that until now has only ever been implicit: the protagonists of the earlier novels were born into a christian heritage and as such had their actions and behaviour judged by standards imposed by the organised Church and by the society that followed her instruction.³⁴ All these protagonists displayed some kind of religious vocation, whether as children or in their acceptance of the priesthood, but more often than not, this vocation was overshadowed by the powerful desire to live more closely in the society of men. Like the author, these protagonists abandoned entire devotion to the

religious life in favour of one that allowed both their Christian and Socialist values to flourish. This temporal difference serves to emphasise how little things have changed within the Church since the Middle Ages: the concerns that are highlighted are of a very contemporary nature, and have a global message. Silone offers the seemingly pessimistic opinion that very little has changed, yet at the same time he refuses to abandon hope, choosing instead to believe that the utopian ideal must exist somewhere and that there will always be those prepared to look for it, regardless of personal suffering and cost.³⁵ It is not a surprise that this play comes from one who abandoned the Church at an early age, never to return, and whose faith in Christ was always contentious, always the subject of deep, introspection and questioning, even in his later years: 'Io sono cristiano alla mia maniera.'³⁶

What emerges here is an examination of Christianity as dictated by the Gospels and lived by the faithful, set against the concept of Christianity understood by those who seek to mould it into a hierarchical structure and use religion as political power: the might of the few set against the volition of the many. The relevance of this examination in modern times is explicit, given the development of Vatican II and Silone's personal admiration for Pope John XXIII, and in the author's own words:

Sai bene che ogni mio interesse, come scrittore, è rivolto al presente. (*L'avventura*, p. 539)

Exploitation of power in any structure, spiritual or secular, is exploitation of man, and it is against this that Silone has always rebelled. However, and Silone is always at great pains to point this out, it is also exploitation *by* man, which is where the element of choice is introduced to the equation: man can choose his destiny, he is not born with inherited greed or thirst for power, that is nurtured by society. It is a choice the individual must make,

whether to take part in the perpetuation of injustice or to stand against it. In this play, Silone presents two men who epitomise the struggle that takes place within any given individual, the two sides of the one coin, each representing the result of that choice and the different ways of acting when power is bestowed. Power in all its forms will play a central role in this drama.

Ignazio Silone si pone sin dalle prime sue opere come un autentico scrittore del dissenso. [...] È qui appunto il segreto della sua doppia vena di scrittore del dissenso: quella del narratore e quella del saggista, che non di rado confluiscono l'una nell'altra come riflesso dell'autobiografismo di fondo della sua ispirazione: la prima portata a ricostruire inizialmente una profonda traccia di vita popolare, e poi ad articularla e a trasfigurarla oggettivandola in una realtà storica; la seconda in una ricerca polemica nella quale si fondono motivi personali e immagini-racconto, personalissime 'epiphanyes' e lucide analisi storico-politiche, esami di coscienza e ricordi di un'epoca e di un ambiente.³⁷

L' avventura di un povero cristiano is a book in three parts: the first is a narrative premise which offers great insight into the mind of the author and which is integral to the understanding of the play; the last part is comprised of bibliographical and historical facts; the middle is the play itself, divided into three acts. In this study, the first two parts will be analysed separately as each depends on the other for a complete understanding of the whole. The focus is multiple: how accurately do the events and characters of the play portray the life and experiences of the author?; what is the importance of Christianity to Silone?; how are the themes of the previous works reflected in this work?; how loudly can the voice of dissent be heard in the struggle for morality?; who is the humble Christian?; and, if a general consensus with the critics is to be reached, in what way does this constitute the most complete work of the Silonian opera? With the emphasis being firstly on the narrative *Quel che rimane* then on the play itself, these questions will be answered and Silone's continuing commitment to man and his place in the community will be illustrated.

Egli infatti non solo crede ancora nell'uomo ma vede la vita stessa e, di riflesso, la sua opera poetica, come un dialogo tra uomini reso possibile dal ritorno alla franchezza e oggettiva comunicabilità della 'parola', ripristinando la stessa quasi ritualmente alla sua primitiva e originaria funzione poetica, simbolica, di presa di coscienza della realtà morale e sociale dell'uomo alla ricerca di una 'nuova' verità. [...] Silone ha sempre cercato l'incontro col compagno uomo [...] Il suo partito dopo la penosa esperienza comunista conclusasi nel '30, è diventato quello della verità e della giustizia.³⁸

His devotion to the cause of man is unwavering, and in *L' avventura di un povero cristiano*, as in the previous works, this devotion is solid.

Ormai è chiaro che a me interessa la sorte di un certo tipo d'uomo, d'un certo tipo di cristiano, nell' ingranaggio del mondo, e non saprei scrivere d'altro. (*L'avventura*, p. 540)

Silone's 'type' of Christian is undoubtedly imbued with Socialist characteristics.

The introductory narrative, *Quel che rimane*, divided into four sections, offers the reader great insight into the author's mind. Here he delineates his intentions for the play, its relevance to modern times, his hopes and aspirations and, very clearly, his own understanding of and belief in Christianity. As illustrated above, this Christianity has always been an important factor, one with which he has always identified and in which his Socialist ideals find fruition. Pope Celestine V is the medium through which the author best expresses the aspirations he holds for himself and for every man, the personification of good and moral strength, symbolic of courage and determination in the face of power and eager selfishness. Cleverly, the author allows the reader to understand his own beliefs before illustrating them in action, demonstrating that everyman can be the 'humble Christian'. Celestine may have been a medieval Pope, but the theme of the tortured conscience and the rebel struggling against injustice is all too familiar to Silone, easily

interpreted in contemporary life, as all his work reflects. At all times the author's own wish must be remembered, to spend his life writing the one book, improving or adding to it as he continues along life's journey.

È teatro di idee, proiettato nella profondità della storia medioevale, ma scopertamente allusivo al nostro tempo e al dramma dell'uomo che sceglie la libertà contro il potere e la norma della propria coscienza [...] Nell'avventura di un povero cristiano Ignazio Silone rinnova i motivi ideologici della sua polemica e della sua lotta per la libertà dell'uomo. [...] Silone addita in Celestino la virtù di chi antepone la coscienza al potere politico e si eleva perciò sulla corruzione del suo tempo. [...] La vicenda di Celestino ha offerto a Silone il destro per commisurare la sua ideologia ai termini della religione.³⁹

Firstly there must be an attempt to discover what exactly Silone understands by religion and how this compares to a wider conception of Christianity, and how he reconciled himself to his faith and to Christ, standing outwith the Church. When the two concepts of Christianity and Socialism are placed side by side, it is all too apparent that in Silone's view, each was a doctrine based on the rule of love, on respect for man. Or at least, each doctrine should be. The same basic rules applied to his adhesion to both institutions, so when he witnessed that the Church was not following the rule of the Gospels but walking the path of greed and selfishness, he had to leave. He had made his feeling clear on more than one occasion:

Now I consider myself to be a Socialist without a Party and a Christian without a Church. I still feel bound to the ethics and idealism of each but I can no longer have any part of what the state has made of Socialism and the Church has made of Christianity.⁴⁰

In leaving the Church, therefore, his intention was to extricate himself from the organised body of the Institution, it was never a sincere attempt to abandon Christ. From all he has written, the overwhelming impression remains that he certainly had a desire to possess a

faith in something. In fact the author considered his rebellion, his decision to stand out with the main body, his deliberate positioning of himself on the fringes, an act of supreme Christianity, that of the individual being in possession of free will and the ability to exercise it. His thirst for justice could never be quenched, and when the Church no longer upheld the values and teachings of its foundations, he could no longer remain within her faithful - at least, not in the conventional sense. This realisation was apparent at an early age, springing from his youth in the Abruzzo. The Abruzzo has always been a place of intense religious tradition; it was one of the first regions in Italy to embrace Christianity, and into this tradition Silone was born and raised.⁴¹

Capì che era cristiano per lo stesso motivo per cui era abruzzese: perché era sempre rimasto unito al suo popolo e il suo popolo era cristiano. Senza dubbio, fuori della chiesa.⁴²

Growing up in this atmosphere, surrounded by 'le ispirazioni benedettine, joachimite e francescane' (*L'avventura*, p. 555), it was inevitable that Silone's formative years were coloured by the Church.⁴³ Yet even at an early age he had the ability to see the injustices, if not perpetuated by the Church, then certainly supported by it, and these were insupportable to one of such a strong, burgeoning moral conscience.

Mi riferisco in modo particolare a quelli che, dopo aver ricevuto la consueta educazione religiosa in qualche istituto o collegio di preti, si siano in gioventù allontanati dalla Chiesa, non per la naturale indifferenza che sopravviene nella maggioranza dei maschi appena escono di pubertà, né per dubbi o dissensi intellettuali sulla sostanza della fede [...], ma spinti da insofferenza contro l'arretratezza, la passività, o il conformismo dell'apparato clericale di fronte alle scelte serie imposte dall'epoca. [...] In quel periodo di confusione massima, di miseria e disordini sociali, di tradimenti, di violenze, di delitti impuniti e d'illegalità d'ogni specie, accadeva che le lettere pastorali dei vescovi ai fedeli persistessero a trattare invece, di preferenza, i temi dell'abbigliamento licenzioso delle donne, dei bagni promiscui sulle spiagge, dei nuovi balli d'origine esotica e del tradizionale turpiloquio. [...] era uno scandalo insopportabile. Come si poteva rimanere in una simile Chiesa? (*L'avventura*, p. 563)

Even after the Second Vatican Council, for which Silone had an enormous respect, it was impossible for him to return to the main body of the Church.

A meno che il ribelle, nel momento in cui si allontana, non cada in catalessi, è inevitabile che, col passare del tempo, l'area del dissenso vieppiù si estenda. [...] Non intendo dire che, una volta 'fuori', i dogmi religiosi appaiano all'improvviso artificiosi e arbitrari; no, essi non perdono subito il loro prestigio, il loro fascino, la loro plausibilità; ma, presto o tardi, finiscono col manifestarsi per quello che sono: le verità proprie ed esclusive della Chiesa, il suo patrimonio spirituale, quello che la distingue dalle altre chiese, anche cristiane; in una parola, la sua ideologia. [...] una nobilissima, una veneranda sovrastruttura. Ma che diventa il povero Cristo in una sovrastruttura? (*L'avventura*, p. 563)

Who is the poor Christian? In this work, of course, the immediate response would be Pope Celestine V, but given Silone's enormous respect for man, he would seem to say that each of us is a poor Christian, that the interminable power struggle is part of the human tragedy, and every one of us is caught in it. As such, every man is recognisable in the drama, either in the figure of Celestine or in his literal opposite, Boniface. At no time must the reader forget that Silone is interested in man and his place in society, he is not beholden to theories or dogma simply because they have official sanction. When the Church, as a superstructure, no longer serves the needs of the people, then it becomes redundant. All Silonian heroes have abandoned the Church for this reason - Berardo, Pietro, Rocco, Andrea, Simone, Lazzaro - they feel unable to align themselves with any power whose existence depends upon the poverty and helplessness of the masses.

Pietro Spina abbandonò la chiesa [...] perché gli parve che essa s'identificasse con la società corrotta, meschina e crudele che avrebbe dovuto invece combattere [...] Era dottrina ufficiale della chiesa che 'le ineguaglianze sociali sono state create anch'esse da Dio e noi, dobbiamo umilmente rispettarle.' (*Vino e pane*, p. 120)⁴⁴

Faith in the institution is shattered, but faith in God is omnipresent. All of Silone's main protagonists have displayed strong religious characteristics, have lived by the Christian ethos of 'love thy neighbour', and religious overtones are never far from any of his pages. It is this fundamental humanism which endures in his work, and the nature of his faith is what makes it so compatible with Socialism. Each doctrine has a 'social' concern.

Silone più che un ricercatore di Dio si sente, come Pietro Spina - il protagonista dei due romanzi - un perseguitato, inseguito da Dio.⁴⁵

The institution that is the Church may be redundant to Silone, but 'Fortunatamente Cristo è più grande della Chiesa.' (*L'avventura*, p. 564) In the same way as Silone's exit from the Communist Party, then from all party politics, reflected an intolerance for structure and ideology over the well-being of man, so too the resignation of a medieval Pope served to illustrate that devotion to God could continue, indeed thrive, without the support of the recognised institution.⁴⁶ Outside party politics, then, Silone remained a Socialist, imbued with the fervent belief that man must be above the machine, the same ideal which kept him a Christian outwith the institutional Church. His refusal to accept injustice and his profound love and respect for his fellow man led him to rebel against hierarchy and to his lifelong stance against tyranny of any form. Thus Silone's conception of Christianity is what it has always been, a devotion to man, not institution, living a life based on the laws of love not economics. As such, his devotion is to Christ the man, the crucified image of Christian tradition (it is important to remember the image expressed in *Ed egli si nascose*, and in so many of the other novels, of Christ being forever on the cross, agonising in some interminable Good Friday) and not to his later followers, those bound in the ecclesiastical chain of command. These are the 'false prophets' who bear responsibility for the hypocrisy

and deceit within the Church, these are the people who have led her away from the original message of her founder. Boniface VIII will be the ultimate representative of this group in the play.

Silone's conception of Christianity and its place in the world reflects that of the early religious orders in the Abruzzo, those who were united in 'una comune fede nell'imminente Regno di Dio, quale era stato annunziato nel secolo precedente da Gioacchino da Fiore: l'attesa di una terza età del genere umano, l'età dello Spirito, senza Chiesa, senza Stato, senza coercizioni, in una società egualitaria, sobria, umile e benigna, affidata alla spontanea carità degli uomini.' (*L'avventura*, p. 555) It is this theme of love of Christ the man that will be developed in *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, Silone and Celestine being undoubtedly of one mind. The utopian ideal of the kingdom of Christ being lived on earth, being of a more humanly attainable nature, is one which has never disappeared from the south of Italy, nor indeed from the rest of the world. This utopia of which Silone speaks is the same as it has always been, the ideal place for his conception of human morality to flourish, a place where truth, justice, liberty, and love are commonplace and bountiful virtues. It is certain that Silone was aware that the realisation of such a place was a very distant possibility, but it was paramount that he continue the search and the effort to actualise it.

La storia dell'utopia è in definitiva la contropartita della storia ufficiale della Chiesa e dei suoi compromessi col mondo (*L'avventura*, p. 555)

Indeed it is the story of historic compromise by the Church that lends strength to the play, where, as we shall see, the power play between wealthy families is fundamental to the

decisions taken by the Church; their wealth decides their position and gives them control of spiritual matters, their morals in that role being decidedly dubious. Church and State are inseparable, a situation that would last several hundred years.

Dal momento che la Chiesa presentò se stessa come il Regno, cioè da Sant'Agostino, essa ha cercato di reprimere ogni movimento con tendenza a promuovere un ritorno alla credenza primitiva. L'utopia è il suo rimorso. L'avventura di Celestino si svolse, per un lungo tratto, nell'illusione che le due diverse vie di seguire Cristo si potessero ravvicinare e unire. Ma, costretto a scegliere, non esitò. (*L'avventura*, p. 555)

When Celestine is forced to make a moral decision, whether to remain Pope or not, he has no doubts. He is perhaps Silone's greatest conscientious objector, certainly the most famous historically, a rebel in the tradition of Berardo and Pietro, and indeed, the author himself. His abdication in the play is seen as an act of great courage by his loyal followers, but certainly the majority of Curia and Christians in the thirteenth century would not have seen it as such. As Silone presents the case, the reasons behind the resignation were unimportant to the Curia, they were just delighted to see him depart. Does this abdication make him any less of a Christian? Is his rejection of the Papacy a rejection of Christ? Indeed, as Silone illustrates, it is to the contrary:

Non esito ad attribuire ai ribelli il merito di una più vicina fedeltà a Cristo [...] Ogni cristiano continuerà a trovare la collocazione che il più delle volte le circostanze gli preparano, o a far la scelta che gli detta la coscienza. (*L'avventura*, p. 557)

It is in risking earthly rejection and condemnation that Silone's rebels find redemption. It is not difficult to see a correlation between the courage required for Celestine to abandon the Papacy and that necessary for the author to have abandoned the Communist Party, that which had been his whole life up until that point. These rebels are always ready to put

themselves 'allo sbaraglio' in matters of conscience. From an examination of the play itself we will be able to see how clearly Celestine and his decisions reflect the author, how accurately he embodies the qualities and experiences of all the Silonian protagonists, all of whom are rebels, outsiders, and objectors, for the most part isolated in their struggle for justice. Most importantly, this is a story of power in all its forms, for the most part misguided and corrupt, and the value of love as an opposing force in the struggle against such might.

Questo Celestino del dramma di Silone va considerato, come già Pietro Spina, come una proiezione della sua coscienza e nel tempo stesso la personificazione trasposta di quel cristianesimo popolare 'che non coincide con quello della gerarchia', ed è la molla profonda della sua ispirazione, che lo scrittore medesimo fa rivivere attraverso una sua ricerca, come egli scrive in *Quel che rimane*, 'nel sottosuolo della sua contrada, tra vecchie storie di frati e di eretici', sulle 'tracce di un'utopia a lui cara.' [...] Così pure questo suo fra Celestino, attraverso il quale lo scrittore ripercorre ancora una volta l'iter della sua vocazione di agitatore, quello della sua militanza politica [...] del recupero delle radici cristiane, richiama ancora una volta il suo interesse per la sorte 'di un certo tipo d'uomo, di un certo tipo di cristiano, nell'ingranaggio del mondo'.⁴⁷

Through Pope Celestine V, Silone continues in his search for that utopia where love is more important than law. For Silone, the confrontation between those in search of this utopia and the organised Church was inevitable. But the struggle must continue, and this struggle and search for utopia is the one of the principal goals of the author, not only in the play but in all his work and in his life. It may be a distant dream, but Silone does not give up hope.

Se l'utopia non si è spenta, né in religione, né in politica, è perché essa risponde a un bisogno profondamente radicato nell'uomo. Vi è nella coscienza dell'uomo un'inquietudine che nessuna riforma e nessun benessere materiale potranno mai placare. La storia dell'utopia è perciò la storia di una sempre delusa speranza, ma di una speranza tenace. (*L'avventura*, p. 556)

As Silone demonstrates continuously, there is always a link between Christianity and Socialism, as both should be centred on respect for fellow man, and when this is lacking problems arise.⁴⁸ Celestine, as the other protagonists before him, is searching for simple clarity in religion and in life, a harmonious return to the way of the Gospels.

D'altra parte, l'iter etico dei 'vari' protagonisti si svolge sotto i nostri occhi in modo lineare e progressivo fino a raggiungere quella chiarezza di contorni nella quale stanno racchiuse le 'certezze irriducibili' che Silone chiama 'certezze cristiane'.⁴⁹

Silone's insists upon his Socialism, like that of all his protagonists, as being his way of serving God. And so what, if anything, remains? He answers the question himself:

Rimane dunque un cristianesimo demitizzato, ridotto alla sua sostanza morale e, per quello che strada facendo è andato perduto, un grande rispetto e scarsa nostalgia [...] rimane il Pater Noster. Sul sentimento cristiano della fraternità e un istintivo attaccamento alla povera gente, sopravvive anche, vi ho già accennato, la fedeltà al socialismo. (*L'avventura*, pp. 564-565)

It is this 'Christianity without myths' that Silone chooses to explore, a return to the initial teachings of Christ that have been compromised. The example of Celestine is one to be imitated. He is the ideal rebel, the conscientious objector, defender of the weak. He is the perfect medium through which Silone might express his faith in man and in God, in politics, religion, and life.⁵⁰ His adventure is the adventure of every poor Christian.

La narrazione iniziale de *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* raccoglie le intenzioni, le preoccupazioni, e anche le speranze dell'autore che già enuclea quei temi che andrà poi sviluppando nel conflitto tra autorità e libertà, potere e Santità. [...] Abbiamo già detto che nei libri di Silone il problema religioso è vivo quanto la difesa dei poveri umiliati. In questo libro esso occupa tutta la trama, oltre le riflessioni iniziali, e riflette piuttosto il dramma della sua personale avventura di cristiano uscito dalla Chiesa che non riesce a trovare motivi per doversi ritornare una volta che ha riscoperta la validità del messaggio cristiano.⁵¹

'Romanzo, saggio, dramma?' (*L'avventura*, p. 540) Silone was unsure as to which literary genre would best describe this work. Perhaps the appeal of the work is that each term seems applicable: there is narrative, dialogue, drama and investigation. Silone was never terribly concerned with labels and conventions, preferring to deal with the text as the basis for argument and the reality of life as his theory.⁵²

Questo dramma tiene del racconto e del saggio. L'impostazione e la tecnica sono drammatiche, ma la trama si snoda con l'andamento del racconto, e i dialoghi che dibattono idee rimandano al saggio.⁵³

In the examination of the play, it is evident that the label of literary genre seems less important when the reader considers that the author wishes to minimise the historical background, 'M'interessano soltanto i contrasti morali e di pensiero.' (*L'avventura*, p. 540), and it is clear that he intends to continue along the path of some very familiar themes: love, honesty, justice, brotherhood, morality. The historical backdrop has, as already noted, a very contemporary importance, in post-Vatican Council Italy, and the language of the work is modern Italian, emphasizing its relevance to today.

L'autore non usa il dialetto abruzzese, e tanto meno quello del Trecento [...] ma l'italiano dei nostri giorni, con strutture sintattiche tipiche della lingua parlata, aliena dall'accogliere il lessico regionale, ma piegata però a riflettere, qua e là, la psicologia del popolo. Lo stile non è mai prezioso né lirico, ma disadorno, severo, talora povero.⁵⁴

The drama centres on power, the different conceptions of which are illustrated by the two principal characters, Pietro Angelerio del Morrone (Celestino V) and Cardinal Caetani (Bonifazio VIII). Where Caetani seeks supremacy of power on all levels, spiritual

and political, Pietro Angeliero, in becoming Pope, seeks only to continue as he did as a hermit, believing in the power of the Christian concept of love.⁵⁵

Il tema centrale, poi, è il contrasto fra due visioni, l'una spirituale, l'altra temporale, della Chiesa, del suo governo, della sua missione, o, meglio ancora, fra due realtà cristiane, quella profetica e quella storica, quella popolare e quella ufficiale. Il dissidio si approfondisce nell'antitesi carità-potere, libertà-istituzione: un tema che, se non è estraneo al cristianesimo del Trecento, è, prima ancora, proprio dell'umanesimo sioniano, che giudica il potere come un fatto negativo, per qualunque fine lo si eserciti (è la posizione ultima a cui è pervenuto l'autore nella valutazione della politica), e nell'istituzione, anche la più nobile, e nell'organizzazione, anche la più veneranda, vede dei meccanismi alienati, in cui gli amministrati cessano di essere considerati persone e gli amministratori si trovano costretti a scendere a compromessi, sempre più gravi, col mondo.⁵⁶

Injustice in power, particularly at the highest levels, is intolerable, as Celestine V displays with his eventual abdication from the Papacy. The struggle - often an inner struggle - is between the power of institutions and the freedom of man. Celestine, like Silone, chooses the latter:

In Pietro Angeliero si concretizza un problema che è di tutta l'umanità, quello dei rapporti tra lo spirito e l'istituzione, tra l'autorità e la libertà. [...] Sono queste due realtà conciliabili? Può un cristiano esercitare il potere? La risposta di Silone è negativa [...] Per l'autore il potere è intrinsecamente cattivo. Esso corrompe e non può non corrompere [...] La sua concezione dell'uomo è quello del paradiso terrestre, prima del peccato, quando viveva nella piena libertà e nella più perfetta armonia [...] l'utopia non è altro che una speranza mal centrata [...] La speranza cristiana si fonda non sulle aspirazioni umane, ma sulla parola di Cristo.⁵⁷

Complete agreement with the opinion of Dom Grasso would then rule out the possibility of wise government. It is perhaps more honest to say that Silone believed that power corrupts absolutely unless it is under good regulation - after all, love, the ethos of Celestine, is surely a great Christian virtue (and by no means exclusive to Christianity). Cardinal Caetani, the soon to be Pope Boniface VIII, is the opposite; as shall be seen, he is interested in, and very adept at, wielding power, Celestine is not. The latter desires a return to the Gospels, to live

as Christ intended for man, with due attention to conscience and the power of love.⁵⁸ Where the Church, or any organisation, is built on a hierarchical structure, the temptation of power will always be there. But, as Silone believes, 'Fortunatamente, Cristo è più grande della chiesa.' (*L'avventura*, p. 564)

Scegliendo la strada del cristianesimo egli intende abolire tutto ciò che è struttura, tutto ciò che è stato trasferito dal registro umano nel quadro dell'organizzazione. [...] egli appare dominato dallo spirito della verità, colpito come è stato da sempre, anche quando non si diceva cristiano, dalla strana coincidenza dell'immagine del povero eterno con quella superiore di Cristo.⁵⁹

As opposed to Caetani's desire to exert a supreme power in all matters, Celestine is increasingly concerned by the secularisation of the Church.⁶⁰ His desire is to save men from the temptation of power, one to which he too was susceptible in his acceptance of the Papacy.⁶¹ He let himself be led, naively perhaps, by the temptation to power, hoping that he would be able to right the wrongs he could see within the Church. In a few short months, he was able to see how futile this endeavour was, and to recognise his own part in the power struggle, a puppet within which Scurani refers to as 'un anticristianesimo mascherato'.⁶²

It is this urgent desire to return to the original ideals of the Church that will bring about Celestine's downfall, for it is a desire ill-matched with power.⁶³

Questo comportamento evangelico mal si concilia con le esigenze del potere [...] Tutti lo vogliono ingannare: vogliono ridurre il Papa a un paravento delle loro ambizioni di famiglia, come hanno sempre fatto. [...] Di fronte a un ennesimo inganno, la coscienza di Celestino si ribella: 'Dio mio, Dio mio, che schifo, che abbiezione, che nefandezze [...] Non avrei mai immaginato di dover affrontare inganni di tale bassezza proprio qui, all'apice della vostra chiesa.'⁶⁴

Silone and Celestine shared a similar desire: 'l'esigenza di un ritorno al cristianesimo delle origini nella linea della povertà e della carità.'⁶⁵ The fundamental problem remains man's relationship with his fellow man:

Infatti, i motivi d'ispirazione, che si incentrano tutti nel problema dell'uomo e dell'umana convivenza e si inquadrano in una precisa visione della vita e della storia, riguardando la natura sacra dell'uomo, la sua coscienza, la sua libertà, la sua dignità, la sua sete di giustizia, la sua fame d'amore; fra tutti questi valori nel dramma siloniano vengono ad essere posti in contrasto violento e irriducibile con le istituzioni, l'autorità, il potere; nell'opera dell'autore, ma naturalmente ancora prima, secondo Silone, nella storia.⁶⁶

Thus the themes and ideals expressed in the play are a continuation of those which Silone has always expounded, those which remain fundamental to that much sought-after utopia.

Alla politica come menzogna preferisce la strada della verità. Tanto più oggi, che Silone è riuscito a portare a compimento e chiarificazione il tema centrale di tutta la sua opera, 'il confronto tra una visione della religione e della politica di tipo testimoniale, di ricerca della verità e di lotta per la giustizia a partire dalla condivisione di una speranza, ancorata nella dimostrazione concreta di una carità-solidarietà, e che rinvia sempre al domani e che distingue i fini dai mezzi.'⁶⁷

With the knowledge and idea of the power struggle instilled in the readers' minds it is then possible to analyse how it is illustrated in the main body of the text. Truth, as ever, is to the fore. For Celestine there is no place for pretence: 'Figli miei, non lo dimenticate: c'è solo il bene, puro e semplice; non c'è "a fin di bene".'⁶⁸ (*L'avventura*, p. 690)

Fra Pietro del Morrone is perhaps the most complete of Silonian rebels.⁶⁸ From the quiet security of an Abruzzese cave he is elevated to the highest spiritual seat. Ideally it is from this position, as head of the Church, that he should be able to govern and administer to the needs of the faithful, live according to the Gospels, and lead by example. The realisation that this is a dream that cannot be fulfilled is the catalyst that leads to his

abdication after only five months. Celestine's adventure is that of an entire Christian life, it is 'soprattutto il dramma della coscienza di un povero cristiano, che si ribella allo stesso potere del quale è stato investito', the tale of one poor man's stand against the tyranny of power.⁶⁹ He is a reactionary Pope, in the sense that he desires a change in the Papacy and advocates a return to the formative days of the Church when Christ was the central figure and the theological virtues were acknowledged and extolled. He is an example of early Christian man intent on safeguarding the precepts of the Church. For Silone it becomes the tale of every man in the continual struggle against corruption: the Pope as the ultimate rebel: 'La santità, dunque, come eterna obiezione di coscienza.'⁷⁰

Before his elevation to the Papacy, Pietro Angelerio is described in very positive terms:

È un uomo buono e semplice come il pane [...] È un vero cristiano dei tempi apostolici [...] è al di sopra delle beghe [...] è rispettato da tutti. (*L'avventura*, p 573)⁷¹

So good a man is he that there is great surprise in his election.⁷² The irony behind this is startling: surely such a man would be the ideal pontiff? Thus we are introduced to the power struggle of the medieval Church, the college of cardinals having delayed more than two years in electing a Pope because 'preferiscono eleggere uno di loro' (*L'avventura*, p. 574).⁷³ The powerful families who rule the college do not want a good and honest leader, they want someone they can manipulate for their own purpose.⁷⁴ Pietro is a poor hermit, a defender of the 'Spirituali', monks who are pursued by the Church for their adherence to the rule of St. Francis, and a man who lives by his conscience, believes in love over law, and the sacred nature of the soul.⁷⁵ Given the powerful families' desire for a puppet Pope, his election seems very unlikely.

Il punto centrale dell'utopia spiritualistica è l'abolizione delle leggi, per sostituirlle con la carità. Dirà Pier Celestino: 'Può esistere un'opposizione tra la vita di un'anima seriamente cristiana e l'attesa del Regno di Dio? Non mi pare [...] Rimane senza dubbio il contrasto dell'anima con le istituzioni e le leggi esistenti [...] Quando e come la carità sostituirà le leggi? [...] E la nostra preghiera quotidiana rimane l'invocazione: Venga il tuo Regno.'⁷⁶

Fra Clementino, one of the 'Spirituali', will echo these sentiments, with his definition of the kingdom of God on earth as

Un modo di vivere assieme secondo la carità e non secondo le leggi. (*L'avventura*, p. 595)

This is exactly what Silone envisaged in his utopia. The actual position of the Church does not impress Celestine, the rule of love seems all but forgotten in the struggle for power. His Christianity is grounded on faith in Christ and love of his fellow man, a love that is never blind, one that inspires him to behave according to what is morally correct rather than what is socially acceptable. For this reason, religious differences notwithstanding, he is a firm defender of the 'Spirituali', because 'essi sono perseguitati per motivi di coscienza.' (*L'avventura*, p. 577); he will not sign any documents of which he has not a clear understanding and definite position: 'Non sono in grado di pronunziarmi secondo coscienza.' (*L'avventura*, p. 637);⁷⁷ he will not bless armies going off to war:

Non posso benedire alcuna impresa di guerra. Sapete a che cosa si riduce l'insegnamento di Cristo? [...] vogliatevi bene. [...] Il segno della benedizione cristiana è quello della Croce [...]; in nome del Padre, del Figlio e dello Spirito Santo. [...] col segno della Croce e i nomi della Trinità, si può benedire il pane, la minestra, l'olio [...]; ma non le armi. Se avete un assoluto bisogno di un rito proporzionario, cercatevi qualcuno che lo faccia in nome di Satana. È stato lui a inventarle le armi. (*L'avventura*, pp 656-657)

To act against his conscience is unthinkable, for conscience and love stand together. 'Per i cristiani il valore supremo sono le coscienze: esse meritano dunque il massimo rispetto.'

(*L'avventura*, p. 650) Because of this firm belief in the responsibility of the moral content of our actions, Celestine's eventual confrontation with the powers of the Church is inevitable. He cannot conceive of the Church of Christ as an institution, a structure, which seeks to maintain a rule based on inequality.⁷⁸

Il cristianesimo non è e non può essere prima di tutto una dottrina, tanto meno un'organizzazione: è uno stato di grazia, celato sotto le vesti dell'umiliazione e della carità.⁷⁹

In his acceptance of the Papacy, Celestine aspired to guide the Church away from this hierarchy. What he sees is the Church organised like a State, where people are no longer considered as individuals but as objects of a greater regime.⁸⁰

L'uomo è stato avvilito, degradato a cosa, a strumento da parte della società, così come è stata organizzata, mentre per Silone è persona, anzi anima. Si dice che in questa concezione dell'uomo convergono il socialismo e il cristianesimo dell'autore.⁸¹

This is opposed to everything written in the Gospels where man is considered of the highest value for his being in possession of a soul: 'L'anima non è il bene supremo?' (*L'avventura*, p. 667)⁸² Equally, it is opposed to the importance of the individuality of the human soul, as expressed by the author in the speech given in 1950, *Habeas animam!* It is also in opposition to the beliefs of the future Pope, Boniface VIII, whose desire for power seems boundless. For Celestine, the politics of power are redundant.

Io sono rimasto al Pater Noster e al Vangelo [...] Perciò vi chiedo scusa se io non so concepire relazioni cristiane che non siano relazioni personali; voglio dire, non relazioni di cose, ma di anime. (*L'avventura*, pp. 648-649)

The relationship between men is what is important.

L'avventura d' un povero cristiano [...] è una sacra rappresentazione sul tema della reale possibilità di un cristianesimo categoria universale, sinonimo di virtù autonoma, di schietta disciplina evangelica; sul tema della disponibilità di un mondo nominalmente, culturalmente cristiano, ad un integrale, eroico cristianesimo.⁸³

As Pope, but more importantly, as a Christian man, he cannot tell lies to maintain the power of the Church, as Caetani advises.⁸⁴ The latter does not hide his contempt for this naïveté.

Ma la Chiesa, nel suo insieme, è ora una potenza, anzi, la più elevata delle potenze, e deve regolarsi come come tale. Non si governa col Pater Noster. (*L'avventura*, p. 649)

The irony of such a statement is startling; surely that very sacred prayer is exactly the tool with which the Church should govern, a call for compassion, forgiveness and the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Nothing he can say can persuade Celestine to behave in a manner that would be contrary to the dictates of his conscience.

La cristianità è vastissima, sì, ma pur tuttavia è composta di anime e non di cose. (*L'avventura*, p. 649)

The institution and its laws will always be in conflict with the faithful if the politics of power are allowed to prosper.

Rimane senza dubbio il contrasto dell'anima con le leggi esistenti. Quando e come il Regno sarà instaurato con la partecipazione libera di tutte le altre creature? Quando e come la carità sostituirà le leggi? (*L'avventura*, p. 693)

This 'Regno' is the very one at which Silone has hinted in *Quel che rimane*, the utopian ideal. In his final conversation with Boniface, the differences in their understanding of power are illustrated once again through the concept of the soul.

Quando parliamo della realtà di cui bisogna tener conto, voi vi referite alle istituzioni e al potere, io alle anime. [...] Dio ha creato le anime, non le istituzioni, non i regni, non gli eserciti, non le chiese, non le nazioni. (*L'avventura*, pp. 724-725)

Christianity cannot be a superstructure with a monarch, it is rather 'un modo di vivere' (*L'avventura*, p. 633) and in order to live as the Gospels and Christ intended, Celestine concludes that the only mission left to him and his followers is, 'con l'aiuto di Dio, resistere all'ingiustizia.' (*L'avventura*, p. 689)⁸⁵ The voice of the author is clear.

For these reasons, and in order to fight injustice, Celestine must abdicate, for he cannot support or lead an institution that deviates more and more from the teachings of Christ. There follows one of the most profound statements of the play, one behind which we can hear the author's own vehemence: 'La coscienza è al di sopra dell'ubbidienza.' (*L'avventura*, p. 593)⁸⁶ His 'gran rifiuto' stems from the discovery that: 'è difficile essere papa e rimanere buon cristiano.' (*L'avventura*, p.664)⁸⁷ The politics of power have no place in his faith.

Difficoltà di essere cristiano, difficoltà doppia quando si tratti di un cristiano povero, impossibilità quando il 'povero cristiano' arriva a sedere sul trono di Pietro ed è costretto a soddisfare i suoi doveri di monarca. Silone cita due casi, quello della giustizia e quello dell'amministrazione, ma sono sufficienti per dimostrare fino a che punto la battaglia sia impari fra chi procede con l'unica arma del Vangelo e chi invece intende la vita della Chiesa come quello di un organismo essenzialmente umano.⁸⁸

For Boniface, politics are integral to the standing of the Church and he has no interest in any separation of power. He does not believe the Church is able to withdraw from the political scene, he wants to adapt it to more worldly needs; that is, to the needs of the large and wealthy families to which he belongs.

L'uomo brama il comando più della libertà e della virtù. (*L'avventura*, p. 664)

Such a statement encapsulates the differences between these two men, their goals and ambitions for Christ's Church. Boniface is forever at the service of himself. This is the opposite of Celestine's view.

È il potere che si serve di noi. [...] L'aspirazione a comandare, l'ossessione del potere è, a tutti i livelli, una forma di pazzia. (*L'avventura*, p. 690)

For this devout man, power in all its forms is the root of evil.

La potenza non mi attira, la trovo anzi, essenzialmente cattiva. Il comandamento cristiano che riassume tutti gli altri, è l'amore. [...] la radice di tutti i mali, per la Chiesa, e nella tentazione del potere. (*L'avventura*, p. 723)

Celestine will not be a puppet Pope, so he rebels and follows his conscience.⁸⁹

Io Celestino, mosso da ragioni legittime, per bisogno di umiltà, di perfezionamento morale, e per obbligo di coscienza, come pure per indebolimento fisico, per difetto di dottrina e per la cattiveria del mondo; al fine di recuperare la pace e le consolazioni del mio precedente modo di vivere, con tutto l'animo e liberamente mi dimetto dal Pontificato. (*L'avventura*, p. 678)

Celestine's disappointment is shared by the author.

La delusione di papa Celestino è la delusione di Silone stesso nei confronti della Chiesa, della sua organizzazione e del suo potere. Una delusione definitiva [...] Non rinnega Cristo, perché 'fortunatamente Cristo è più grande della Chiesa' [...] Rinnega la mediazione della Chiesa perché gli è di peso, lo soffoca. Vuole un 'cristianesimo demitizzato, ridotto alla sua sostanza morale', un attaccamento alla fraternità, alla povera gente. 'Rimane il Pater Noster.'⁹⁰

It is, perhaps, the ultimate rebellion, one enacted out of love: 'non è una fuga, è un atto di coraggio, un gesto di lealtà verso se stesso e verso gli altri.' (*L'avventura*, p. 670) Henceforth he will know no peace, eventually meeting his death in prison at the hands of those he sought to serve.⁹¹ 'È stato fatale a Celestino l'essere caduto, spinto anche da noi, nell'ingranaggio del potere.' (*L'avventura*, p. 699)⁹² Yet even in his imprisonment and death, Celestine harbours hope for the virtue of brotherly love. The voice of the author is unmistakable here:

Bisogna costruire qualcosa che ha tutti i colori del Regno di Dio, fondato sui valori della giustizia e dell'amore fraterno. [...] In tutto questo la Chiesa gli appariva superflua.⁹³

In other words, Celestine harbours hope for his fellow man in the 'ingranaggio' of this world:

Vi sarà sempre qualche cristiano che prenderà Cristo sul serio, qualche cristiano assurdo, come ama dire Bonifazio. Poiché gli stessi che lo tradiscono, non possono distruggere il Vangelo. Io posso nascondere, ne possono dare interpretazioni di comodo, ma non distruggerlo. Per cui ogni tanto qualcuno lo riscoprirà e accetterà di andare allo sbaraglio. (*L'avventura*, pp. 691-692)

His charity is enduring and in spite of the final menaces of Boniface, his ultimate concern is for the soul of the new Pope: 'Non pavento più nulla, Santità, ma tremo per la vostra anima. [...] Pregherò per voi.' (*L'avventura*, p. 727)

Firstly, through the narrative, then through the play, Ignazio Silone has indeed forced the reader to think, to reflect, and to try to understand:

Il dovere di riflettere, di pensare, di capire, di rendersi conto in fondo è un obbligo universalmente umano.⁹⁴

He has presented the facts, demonstrated the fundamental evil of the misuse of power, man's selfish nature and his ability to try to mould everything into a power structure, even Christ. Through the adventure of Pope Celestine V he illustrates those facts while, at the same time, offering a positive alternative in the figure of a good and morally bountiful man who acts according to his conscience. He has illustrated how 'gli uomini affamati e assetati di giustizia', when they are of sufficient character, can never be brought to submit to corruption.⁹⁵ The idea of the rebel in action, which has always been present in Silone, is now extended to the Papacy, illustrating how the search for truth and justice can be perverted, even at the highest spiritual seat. Yet, in spite of the seemingly tragic ending of this play, the reader remains filled with a sense of hope that ultimately good will overcome.⁹⁶

Ridurre Dio a un problema mi parrebbe blasfemo. E se nessun orgoglio può farci tacere di avere anche noi, nei momenti della solitudine e dell'angoscia, ripensato con pungente nostalgia alla casa paterna, al suo antico ordine, alla sua pace, alla sua sicurezza, ci corre obbligo d'aggiungere che l'amore del vero ha sempre finito col prevalere su quello della comodità.⁹⁷

The autobiographical content of this work is obvious.⁹⁸ Celestine and Silone are both searching for that utopia in which the Church is devoid of myths and in which those 'certezze cristiane' can be found. These certainties are based on the word of God, not on that of the Institutional Church. Celestine is the final development of Pietro Spina, of Lazzaro and Rocco, of Simone and Daniele, in whom the author has always been present. It is fitting that in this, his final completed work, the protagonist should be one of the many characters who find themselves 'allo sbaraglio' as a result of their humanity and their love of fellow man. Celestine is a reminder to the reader of all those characters described in the earlier novels:

Pietro del Morrone che rifiuta le costrizioni del Palazzo come Secondo Tranquilli che lascia il Partito, il Moloch con i suoi dogmi, da uomo libero? Interpretazione ardita, ma non per questo errata o fuorviante. Lo scrittore si sentiva attratto dall' 'avventura' del frate - papa perché riconosceva in alcuni caratteri di quella storia gli stessi passaggi che avevano marcato - pur tra tante diversità, e non solo d'ordine storico - il suo tribolato cammino. E allora: Celestino come Silone, Silone come Berardo, Pietro, Lazzaro; lo scrittore e i suoi personaggi come gli eterni testimoni della lotta contro il Potere che tutto stritola o assorbe.⁹⁹

Silone has demonstrated unremittingly that his Socialism is intrinsically linked to his Christianity, for both are built around faith in God and respect for His creation, man - that is, man seen as worthy for his being in possession of a soul.

Silone si è accorto che l'osservanza di un'elementare giustizia e il rispetto della libertà non possono attuarsi là dove dell'uomo non venga considerata la natura di essere sacra, [...] Per tempo il socialismo dell'autore scopre le sue radici cristiane, e personaggi come Pietro Spina [...] o Rocco [...] rivelano una fondamentale vocazione religiosa, non mai spenta, ma piuttosto deviata e che riemerge netta quando ancora militano in un partito rivoluzionario. Tutto percorso dall'interesse morale e poi 'Il segreto di Luca' [...] Ma è qui, nell' 'Avventura', che Silone libera il nucleo più autentico della sua spiritualità e insieme della sua ispirazione, là ancora come intorbidata e contaminata.¹⁰⁰

Problems arise in the difficulty of applying these concepts of Christianity and Socialism in the world. In this particular case, not even a Pope - and soon to be Saint - is able to overcome the obstacles of power. For the author, as for Celestine, Christianity is a living truth, 'un modo di vivere', not something to be found in dogma and doctrine that is, conversely, preached and not practised.

Il cristianesimo vive dentro di noi e in noi (ma nei confronti degli altri) va applicato. Credere insomma a quello che si dice di voler fare, non lasciarci portare dalle cose. Che è poi il senso della sua vita e il senso che egli ha sempre dato alla vita della comunità.¹⁰¹

This work does not herald Silone's return to the Church, rather it reinforces the devout nature of his Christianity which has never deviated from the struggle to find justice and freedom for man. This has been his quest since he began to write and it finds its culmination here, through the adventure of a Pope. The author tells us himself:

avrei amato passare la vita a scrivere e riscrivere sempre la stessa storia, nella speranza, se non altro, di finire col capirla e farla capire. (*L'avventura*, p. 540)

and this desire remains constant. In each of his works he has developed the fundamental themes: the search for honesty, truth, justice, moral integrity, and brotherhood.

Se ogni libro è per Silone (e tiene anche qui ribadirlo) una ripresa del precedente, un successivo momento di quell'interesse per un certo tipo di cristiano così inteso, alle prese con l'ingranaggio del mondo', questo nuovo libro, accentrato nella figura di Celestino, è addirittura la personificazione di quel tipo.¹⁰²

This work is a clear and uncomplicated expression of faith, in man and in God; it is the continuation of a lifelong struggle against injustice and those who seek to perpetuate it. It is the most complete condemnation of the misuse of power, illustrated admirably through the lives of those at the very heart of Christ's Church. In Celestine's words to the Lenten congregation we find the ultimate advice from Silone on how that 'certo tipo di cristiano' might find that utopia that he has always desired:

Ah, so bene che non è facile parlare con semplicità. Per riuscirvi sarebbe necessario, questo va da sé, di essere interiormente semplici, e la vera semplicità è una conquista assai difficile. L'intera esistenza d' un cristiano, si può dire, ha appunto questo scopo: diventare semplice. (*L'avventura*, p. 633)

Notes

- ¹Ignazio Silone, 'Habeas animam' (Brussels: Nov 3 1950) in *Romanzi e saggi*, volume secondo, 1945-1978, op. cit., pp. 1021-1025.
- ²Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*, p. 202.
- ³Anna Maria Lifonso, op. cit., p. 37: 'la Marsica diventa in modo più consapevole un vero serbatoio di immagini, tradizioni, aspirazioni alla giustizia, carica di un autentico dolore che trova le sue radici in una tradizione cristiana antico quanto intatta nella sua persona, un vero "paese dell'anima" sempre presente in Silone, anche semplicemente nella simbologia popolare su cui i suoi romanzi si poggiano [...] Ma l'Abruzzo siloniano è anche una terribile piattaforma di dolore, di miseria antica, di superstizione ingenua, di amarezza profonda.'
- ⁴Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 805: 'La tendenza a non farmi i fatti miei e la spontanea amicizia con i coetanei più poveri, dovevano avere per me conseguenze disastrose.'
- ⁵Alessandro Scurani, *Ignazio Silone, un amore religioso per la giustizia*, op. cit., p. 124.
- ⁶Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, refer to p. 892.
- ⁷Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*, *Il seme sotto la neve*, *Il segreto di Luca*. Refer to these novels for the afore mentioned characters.
- ⁸Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*. Refer to this novel for the afore mentioned characters.
- ⁹Ignazio Silone, *Il seme sotto la neve*, *Il segreto di Luca*, *Una manciata di more*, *La volpe e le camelie*. Refer to these works for afore mentioned incidents.
- ¹⁰Ignazio Silone, *Vino e pane*, *Una manciata di more*. Refer to these works for afore mentioned characters. Refer to D. Mondrone, S.J., 'Ignazio Silone visto da *Uscita di sicurezza*', *Civiltà Cattolica*, 2 November, 1965. He calls this 'un gioiello di un capitolo'.
- ¹¹Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, refer to pp. 786-787. This Lazzaro is surely the Lazzaro who will have such an impact on Rocco in *Una manciata di more*.
- ¹²Vittoriano Esposito, *Attualità di Silone*, op. cit., p. 59.
- ¹³Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit. Refer to pp. 345 - 354 for further bibliographical detail.
- ¹⁴Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, op. cit., p. 11.
- ¹⁵Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 805.
- ¹⁶Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 818: 'la ricostruzione edilizia per opera dello Stato, a causa del modo come fu effettuata, dei numerosi brogli frodi furti camorre truffe malversazioni d'ogni specie cui diede luogo, apparve alla povera gente una calamità assai più penosa del cataclisma naturale.'
- ¹⁷D. Mondrone, S.J., op. cit.: 'Il passo del giovane abruzzese verso il socialismo e il comunismo fu preparato, dunque, dalle sue simpatie per i figli dei contadini poveri, dalla tendenza a "non farsi i fatti suoi", dalla rivolta ad una pedagogia intesa a educare i giovani alla sottomissione indiscussa, dagli esempi di saldezza morale osservata in suo padre, restio a certi compromessi con la giustizia e con la coscienza.'
- ¹⁸Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 823: 'Fu una specie di fuga, di uscita di sicurezza da una solitudine insopportabile, un "terra! terra!", la scoperta di un nuovo continente.'
- ¹⁹ibid. Refer to pp. 833-841.
- ²⁰ibid. Refer to pp. 834-835.
- ²¹This article is quoted in Francesco di Core and O. Gurgo, op. cit., p. 121. It was published on 4 April, 1930.
- ²²Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, refer to pp. 854-858. Refer also to Francesco de Core and Ottorino Gurgo, *Silone: L'avventura di un uomo libero*, op. cit., pp. 115-138.
- ²³D. Mondrone, S.J. op. cit. Refer to p. 59.
- ²⁴Darina Silone, *Le ultime ore di Ignazio Silone*, in Ignazio Silone's *Severina* (Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori Editori, 1981), pp. 174-175.
- ²⁵Ignazio Silone, *Memoriale dal carcere svizzero*, op. cit. p. 10.
- ²⁶Ferdinando Virdia, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 13.
- ²⁷ibid. p. 14. Virdia argues that this response to literature could only happen once Silone had stepped outwith the confines of the Party.
- ²⁸Ignazio Silone, *Una manciata di more*, p. 219.
- ²⁹Maria Paynter, op. cit., p. 34.
- ³⁰Indro Montanelli, "Ignazio Silone" in *Corriere della sera*, June 5, 1965: 'mi era antipatico non per i suoi ma per i miei errori [...] Come documento umano [...] non ne conosco di più alti, nobili e appassionati.' Refer also to Claudio Marabini, "La battaglia dell'indomito Silone" in *Il Resto del Carlino*, July 17, 1965: 'Raramente un libro ha offerto in senso così pieno un ritratto d'uomo, il senso di una vita resa con un sapore di verità così nuda.' Equally, for a most thorough critical opinion, refer to Aldo Garosci, 'Silone, fedeltà e solitudine',

Comunità, 10 October, 1965. For details on the critical acclaim of the Catholic Press, which was sizeable, refer to Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*. op. cit. pp. 378-409.

³¹ Arnaldo Bocelli, op. cit.

³² Carlo Bo, 'Autobiografica la storia del papa che finì eremita', *L'Europeo*, 30 May, 1968. After the success of *Uscita di sicurezza*, Ignazio Silone was generally welcomed as a writer at home. Given the nature of this work, the Catholic critics took a particular interest. It was with this play that he won both the Monetti d'oro and the Premio Campiello in 1968.

³³ Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* op. cit., pp. 415-485.

³⁴ This led many critics to conclude that Silone had finally returned to the Church, which was of course untrue. Geno Pampaloni was moved to call Silone 'religious'. Refer to Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit. p. 428.

³⁵ Ignazio Silone, 'Ecco perché mi distaccai dalla Chiesa', *La Fiera Letteraria*, 7 November, 1965. 'Forse si potrebbe aggiungere alla lista anche i nomi di molti di noi che, in disubbidienza formale o addirittura inquadriati in formazioni ostili, continuammo a ubbidire alla nostra coscienza fondata su valori cristiani e preferimmo di andare allo sbaraglio piuttosto che inchiarci.'

³⁶ Francesco De Core and O. Gurgo, op. cit., p. 388.

³⁷ Ferdinando Virdia, *Ignazio Silone*. op. cit., p. 132. Refer also to Geno Pampaloni, 'Parabola di un dissenso', *Il Giornale Nuovo*, 24 August, 1978: 'È stato il poeta italiano di dissenso, in nome di un personalissimo socialismo cristiano: ha difeso, religiosamente, l'onore dell'eresia. Il nostro debito con lui è incalcolabile; la nostra gratitudine ha un segno preciso nella nostra vita.'

³⁸ Piero Aragno, *Il romanzo di Silone*, op. cit., p. 155.

³⁹ Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*. Introduction by Claudio Marabini (Milano: Mondadori, 1974, pp v-vi)

⁴⁰ K. Aillsop, op. cit.

⁴¹ Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, refer to pp. 554-555. See also the opinion of Guido Piovene, 'Silone grande scrittore mal conosciuto in Italia. Celestino V: cristianesimo e utopia politica', *La Stampa*, 21 April 1968. Piovene argues that Abruzzo was eminently suitable for the birth of this play as a direct result of its religious tradition: '[...] non ebbe mai una propria corte, un centro laico d'arte e di cultura. [...] fin dal secolo scorso, salvo rare eccezioni, gli spiriti non trovavano altro scampo e non conoscevano altre forme di elevazione al di fuori della religione. [...] La forma di elevazione che a Silone interessa è soprattutto quella degli oppressi [...] *L'avventura del povero cristiano*, breve e impossibile, come Silone la racconta, fu di tentare la restaurazione di una Chiesa ascetica. Il potere doveva annullare il potere, l'autorità annullare l'autorità, la Chiesa non essere più uno Stato in rapporto con gli altri Stati, ma una comunità, pastorale e apostolica, di fedeli aspettanti l'avvento del regno di Dio.'

⁴² Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 95.

⁴³ Ignazio Silone, *Romanzi e saggi. I Meridiani. vol. II, 1945-1978*. Refer to introductory essay by Gustav Herling, p. xv: 'Per Silone il metro di misura era la vita quotidiana, in particolare quella della regione in cui era nato. Lì era la vera fonte del suo modo di ragionare.'

⁴⁴ Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 71.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p. 79. Refer also to p. 88: 'Questa ricerca e sofferenza di Pietro Spina è la ricerca e sofferenza di Silone stesso. È una sofferenza che lascia il segno e che, trascorsa, illumina di mestizia tutta la precedente ostinazione: "Che tristezza però capire certe cose quando sulla testa cominciano ad apparire i primi capelli grigi, rendersi conto d'aver sciupato gli anni e le energie migliori."'

⁴⁶ Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, p. 564: 'Quel che rimane, stando fuori di ogni chiesa o partito, non può essere dichiarato in forma di credo e paragrafi: a me sembra che, nell'insieme, per ciò che mi riguarda, esso conservi, malgrado tutto, un carattere cristiano e socialista.'

⁴⁷ Ferdinando Virdia, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁸ Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 65: 'In Silone al socialismo giovanile si è aggiunto con gli anni "un reverente sentimento verso ciò che nell'uomo incessantemente tende a sorpassarsi ed è alla radice della sua inappagabile inquietudine". Insomma, anche per Silone la radice ultima del sentimento religioso va ricercata nelle ragioni comuni a ogni esigenza del sacro: la coscienza dell'uomo della propria insufficienza metafisica.'

⁴⁹ Piero Aragno, op. cit., p. 158. Refer also to Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 893.

⁵⁰ Claudio Marabini, in the introduction to *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, op. cit., p. viii: 'Il cristianesimo di Silone, fermo alla pura "sostanza morale" e all'amore per i poveri, si unisce idealmente alla fedeltà al socialismo, un socialismo che - chiarisce l'autore - intende "l'economia al servizio dell'uomo, e non dello stato o d'una qualsiasi politica di potenza."'

⁵¹ M Di Cagno, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', *Rocca*, 1 July, 1968

⁵²V. Esposito, *Attualità di Silone*. op. cit., pp. 24-25: 'Ignazio Silone, è risaputo, si disse sempre contrario alle mode letterarie, indifferente a tutti gli "ismi" più o meno contemporanei.' Refer also to E. Capouya, 'Story of a humble Christian', *Saturday Review*, 24 April, 1971: 'The genius of Ignazio Silone lies in his faculty of treating of the world not through an intercessor - some political or psychological theory - but directly, and on the simplest terms. In this scholastic age, when every activity has a theory to explain and obscure it, so ideal a Protestantism on the part of a cultivated man is bound to appear perverse or disingenuous [...].'

⁵³Giuliana Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', *Studium*, December, 1968, p. 843. Refer also to A. Bocelli, 'Romanzo-dramma di Ignazio Silone su Papa Celestino V', in *La Stampa*, 28 March, 1968

⁵⁴ibid. p. 846. Refer also to A. Bocelli, op. cit.; 'Come non anacronistico, tranne qualche momento, suona il linguaggio del dialogo: un linguaggio d'oggi, lontano dall'aulico e dal popolare, parlato però senza differenziazioni di livelli sociali e culturali, come quello di personaggi che parlano, appunto, per bocca dell'autore.'

⁵⁵The more critical reader might assume this is rather naïve, as is the case in many of the utopian ideals held by Silone's heroes. The degree of total simplicity in many of the concepts illustrated is perhaps a little idealistic. However, Silone was not assuming that his idealist views would materialise into reality, he was simply offering up the ideal as something to which all men should aspire.

⁵⁶Giuliana Rigobello, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 132. Refer also to p. 133. 'Bonifazio VIII è il politico, [...] Per lui, il prestigio politico è la condizione perché la Chiesa possa svolgere la sua missione nel mondo. Celestino è l'eremita e pastore d'anime, [...] e sente la vita della Chiesa in dimensione esclusivamente mistica e caritativa.'

⁵⁷D. Grasso, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano di Ignazio Silone', *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1 June, 1968

⁵⁸D. Lattanzio, 'La problematica etico-religiosa di Ignazio Silone', *Rivista Abruzzese*, July-September, 1968. 'Il problema è [...] quello dei rapporti tra cristianesimo sorgivo, con genuina immediatezza suggerito dalla sua fonte più qualificata, il Vangelo, o il cristianesimo come sembra essere venuto affatturando nelle mani della Chiesa, in venti secoli di storia politica ed ecclesiastica.'

⁵⁹Carlo Bo, op. cit.

⁶⁰Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, p. 722: 'Io sono atterrito dalla crescente secolarizzazione della Chiesa di Cristo. Essa è irricognoscibile.'

⁶¹ibid. Refer to pp. 623-624: 'Se accetto, mi dicevo, non pecco di presunzione? Io sono un povero cristiano qualsiasi e come posso ardire di diventare il vicario di Nostro Signore tra gli uomini?' See also pp. 689-690. 'La mia anima è dilaniata dai rimorsi. Voi ne conoscete l'origine. Perché accettai quella carica? Perché consentii che venisse gonfiato oltre misura il significato della mia elezione? Perché ingannai tanti buoni cristiani, cominciando da voi, figli miei cari, lasciandovi credere che esistessero le condizioni per un rinnovamento integrale della vita della Chiesa? [...] C'è un solo argomento capace d'attenuare la mia colpevolezza: la mia incoscienza.'

⁶²Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 119.

⁶³Giuliana Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', op. cit.; refer to p. 840 for details of how Celestine's decision to abdicate instills fear in those who seek power.

⁶⁴Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 121.

⁶⁵Giuliana Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', op. cit., p. 841.

⁶⁶ibid. p. 841.

⁶⁷Francesco De Core and O. Gurgo, op. cit., p. 393.

⁶⁸Giancarlo Vigorelli, in 'Silone e *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*' in *Tempo*, 30 April 1968, calls Silone's work 'Il suo libro integro e perfetto', and believes Celestino to be his greatest creation: 'Nella figura di Celestino, il papa del "gran rifiuto", ha riscatenato, e rappresentato, l'eterno dramma del cristiano, che è nel mondo ma non deve essere del mondo. Con questo libro [...] Silone ha saputo darci la sua opera più alta, quella che gli dà una statura morale, ma anche letteraria, che non ha confronti tra noi, non fosse altro perché qui è questione di altri ordini di altezza e di grandezza, ma più che altro di intensità e di profondità.' See Luce D'Eramo, *L'opera di Ignazio Silone*, op. cit. pp. 429-430

⁶⁹Ferdinando Virdia, op. cit., p. 136.

⁷⁰ibid

⁷¹Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, refer also to pp. 598-599: 'un uomo felice, un uomo con l'anima in pace.'

⁷²ibid. p. 624: 'Ho udito con le mie orecchie un contadino che piangeva di gioia e ripeteva: "Finalmente avremo un papa che crede in Dio".'

⁷³ibid. Refer to p. 591: 'Perché non riescono a mettersi d'accordo? Forse per qualche grave motivo di fede? No. Come tutti sanno, quei principi della Chiesa sono divisi, in parte pressoché uguali, in due fazioni nemiche, da una parte quella dei Colonna e dall'altra quella degli Orsini. Essi non si preoccupano delle

condizioni disastrose in cui si trova il popolo cristiano, ma degli interessi delle proprie famiglie. Si può immaginare sacrilegio più rivoltante? [...] La causa di questi spettacoli sconci è una sola ed è conosciuta da tutti. È l'appartenenza dei cardinali alle grandi famiglie romane, costituite da proprietari terrieri e da usurai.'

⁷⁴ibid. Refer to pp. 586 and 616. See also p. 666: 'Le grandi famiglie sono una realtà che non può essere ignorata. [...] a chi vorreste affidare i grandi affari, se non alle famiglie ricche? Sono le sole che posseggano i mezzi necessari per condurli a buon fine.'

⁷⁵ibid. Refer to p. 576.

⁷⁶Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 110.

⁷⁷Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*. See also pp. 645-646: 'Non firmerò più il minimo pezzo di pergamena se non saprò di che si tratta e non sarò convinto della bontà della decisione che mi si propone.'

⁷⁸ibid. p. 667: 'Il difetto non è tanto nelle persone, quanto nel sistema.'

⁷⁹Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 93. Refer also to p. 94, and to G. Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', op. cit., p. 842: 'Silone non mette in dubbio il valore della giustizia come virtù, come legge insita nel cuore dell'uomo; mette in dubbio quello delle istituzioni fondate sulla giustizia.'

⁸⁰Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, refer to p. 648: 'Non è terribile che la Chiesa di Cristo sia adesso organizzata come uno Stato?' and to p. 722. For further details, refer to A. Scurani, op. cit., pp. 114-115.

⁸¹Giuliana Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', op. cit., p. 842.

⁸²Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*. Refer also to p. 664: 'Il concetto cristiano dell'uomo è invece nobilissimo.'

⁸³F.L. Oddo, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano di Ignazio Silone', *Nuovi Quaderni del Meridione*, October-December, 1968

⁸⁴Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, p. 648: 'Nessuna grande amministrazione politica militare o religiosa può essere governata come una famiglia o una piccola comunità. C'è una differenza enorme. Ogni grande amministrazione, per funzionare regolarmente, ha bisogno di un certo numero di finzioni, senza le quali cadrebbe nel caos. [...] Non si tratta di menzogne vere e proprie, ma di convinzioni.'

⁸⁵Alessandro Scurani, op. cit.; refer also to pp. 111-113.

⁸⁶Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*. Refer to p. 590: 'È scandaloso che un cristiano ponga l'ubbidienza prima della verità.'

⁸⁷ibid. Refer also to p. 655: 'Forse è impossibile essere integralmente papa, cioè, vicario di Cristo.'

⁸⁸Carlo Bo, op. cit.

⁸⁹Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, refer to p. 670: the Cardinals will not object to his abdication, 'ma i buoni cristiani?'

⁹⁰Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 123.

⁹¹Ignazio Silone, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, refer to p. 698: 'Non ci sarà più libertà, non ci sarà più pace, non ci sarà più riposo per il nostro Pier Celestino.'

⁹²ibid. Refer to p. 661: 'un uomo simile [...] un simile cristiano [...] perché non ci opponemmo con maggiore energia alla sua accettazione del pontificato? È stato un delitto irreparabile sacrificare un cristiano come lui in questo ambiente miserabile di ambiziosi, d'intriganti, di canaglie.'

⁹³Alessandro Scurani, op. cit., p. 125. Refer also to D. Grasso, op. cit.: 'La sua concezione dell'uomo è quella del paradiso terrestre, prima del peccato, quando viveva nella piena libertà e nella più perfetta armonia [...] Restando sul terreno cristiano notiamo che l'utopia non è altro che una speranza mal centrata [...] La speranza cristiana si fonda non sulle aspirazioni umane, ma sulla parola di Cristo.'

⁹⁴Ignazio Silone, 'Ad occhi aperti', *L'avvenire dei lavoratori*, Zurich, 1 February, 1944.

⁹⁵ibid. *Ed egli si nasconde*. op. cit., p. 10.

⁹⁶Diego Fabbri reports this incident to the authors, Francesco De Core and O. Gurgo, op. cit. Refer to p. 395: Silone changed the original ending of the play so as not to upset the Church. In the original version, Silone had envisaged the explicit murder of Celestino. He then thought that that would be too shocking so he changed it to a less offensive conclusion, though the outcome of course remains the death of the Pope. 'Silone, che non si sentiva membro della Chiesa aveva queste delicatezze, di questi rispettosi tremori che molti membri della Chiesa non hanno.'

⁹⁷Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 892.

⁹⁸Ferdinando Viridia, *Ignazio Silone*, op. cit., p. 137: 'Non è difficile scoprire nella vicenda di Celestino, com'è disegnata dal dramma di Silone, ancora una volta un riflesso della sua esperienza autobiografica, anche se non è improbabile che il dramma stesso debba essere letto soprattutto come la metafora di un inesauroibile contrasto tra gli umili e la Storia, un dramma-saggio, come dicevamo, o un dramma-pamphlet, libero tuttavia

da ogni preoccupazione, anche formale, di teatralità o di teatrabilità.' Arnaldo Bocelli, in the above-mentioned article, shared these views on the lack of suitability to theatre, with particular regard to the language used. He states that this use of language would of course be totally inappropriate were it referring to a true and original work of theatre, but since this is a continuation, even culmination of one book, it is fitting here. See above, endnote n. 54.

⁹⁹Francesco De Core and O. Gurgo, *op. cit.*, p. 394.

¹⁰⁰Giuliana Rigobello, 'L'avventura di un povero cristiano', *op. cit.*, p. 847. Refer also to A. Scurani, *op. cit.*, p. 124: 'Questo tentativo, anzi, di conciliazione tra cristianesimo e socialismo, questo sforzo di dimostrare come il cristianesimo stia alla base del più autentico socialismo, sembra l'impegno più duraturo e ultimo di Silone.'

¹⁰¹Carlo Bo, *op. cit.*

¹⁰²Arnaldo Bocelli, *op. cit.*

Conclusion

The individual writer must decide whether he 'commits' himself or not – by that I mean whether or not he takes part in political action. But his duty remains: to defend the individual's rights against invasion or erosion by the state. He must reveal the truth that, as the state's machinery gets stronger and more efficient, it becomes more skilful in persuading the individual that he is living under freedom and democracy. Only the writer can expose this fraud.¹

With the publication of *Uscita di sicurezza* and *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, Italian critics finally acknowledged Silone's position as a writer. The entire body of his work was re-examined in a more favourable light. Certainly the independent critics and those of a more liberal nature had supported his literary ability for slightly longer - since the publication of *Il segreto di Luca* - but what was interesting now was the reaction of the Catholic Press. With the appearance of the play, Silone's stature rose within the critical ranks of the Catholic media, though he himself was quick to point out that this work did not represent a profession of faith and a return to the Church. The more astute amongst these critics understood that this was not a reaffirmation of Silone's faith in man in a post-Council atmosphere.² The Communist Press was ominously silent, as perhaps was to be expected. As an 'ex', Silone would never have been welcomed back into their fold politically, and it would seem that this influenced the objectivity of their criticisms. The publication of the play occurred at a time when the Communist Party had some rather large concerns on the political front. The political events taking place in Prague in 1968 merely reconfirmed Silone's opposition to Stalinism and the repressive politics of the Soviet Union. Alexander Dubcek's election to Party Secretary was a momentous occasion for the Communists in Czechoslovakia and for the liberal Left in general. Dubcek was instrumental in producing a charter promoting freedom of thought and political activity, a petition supported by more than seventy of the country's leading intellectuals. This positively revolutionary action could

not but displease their Russian masters and their retribution was swift and brutal. These iniquitous tactics and their undemocratic sources were the very ones that Silone had been trying to expose since the beginning of his literary endeavour and which continued to provide him with material even now. The dreadful acts carried out in Prague in the name of Communism repeated the crimes perpetuated in Budapest in 1956 and were yet another reason (if he needed one) for Silone to maintain his political dissassociation. Rather than commit to one party, Silone had fulfilled his mission of seeking to expose the flaws in society and to offer an alternative: the utopia for which he had searched continuously. As has been illustrated through his narrative, this utopia is a place in which the moral precepts of love, truth and freedom are the most important and dominant guides. In the light of events in Prague, Silone must have felt that this utopia was still a very distant dream. Yet his latter years were not spent devoid of hope and that idealism which imbued all his work: *Severina*, published unfinished and posthumously, offers the reader an insight into the author's mind in the months prior to his death. The final words of the devout nun are not a profession of faith, not a tribute to the Church in which she has spent her life. Having lost her faith, rather than die with hypocrisy on her lips, she admits to another fundamental Christian virtue, felt in an entirely secular fashion: 'Spero, suor Gemma, spero. Mi resta la speranza.' (*Severina*, p. 127) This is the same sentiment which is echoed in Silone's own testament, the same hope which kept Silone devoted to the cause of man, which helped him through the most difficult years. The theological virtues instilled in him in his youth in the Abruzzo are never far from the pages of his writing, though they are understood in a mainly secular fashion by the main protagonists. The controlling tension behind his writing has been the difficulty in attempting to reconcile the political with the religious, the result of which is what has been deemed his Christian Socialism in this thesis. The author's journey took him away from the Church at an early age and into politics. Disillusioned

with politics, he deviated from that path and sought to establish a new one, a literary one, in which he could express himself more fully, and try finally to make sense of himself and others. Organised religion and politics were similar in their institutionalised nature. Their desire for power could only ever turn them into tyrannies and Silone wrote prolifically on the inevitable result of this struggle. In the midst of it, man is forgotten. Silone's devotion to man is unwavering; he is constantly in search of a brotherhood of men comprising those who would set themselves apart, willing to take risks, *allo sbaraglio*, in order to establish a true community of friends on the earth. This community exists without any ideology, and it is based on the fundamental belief that love is the supreme virtue, a belief reflected equally within Christian and Socialist doctrine. The search for utopia continues with true commitment to friendship and companionship. As don Severino remarked, the real revolution of the new epoch is the collapse of friendship. (*Il seme*, p. 646) Berardo, Pietro, Rocco, Luca, Lazzaro, and Celestino V have all demonstrated concern for their fellow man and a desire to live free of the constraints imposed by society or ideology. They have all lived on the margins of society and have accepted their role as men 'allo sbaraglio', reconciling themselves to the inconvenience of harsh and often clandestine living conditions and the lack of moral support from former friends and family.

From the outset Silone sought to answer the question he first asked in *Fontamara*: 'che fare'? He does not offer any metaphysical answers to the fundamental questions of life and the universe, but from his own experiences and with the benefit of hindsight he does offer the reader a guide to existing in the modern world. It is exactly because of his experiences as a revolutionary and as a direct result of his clandestine existence in the early part of the twentieth century that he is eminently qualified to write on behalf of his fellow man. His experiences within the Communist Party and his

subsequent disillusionment and expulsion led him to explore the question of what exactly a man should do when faced with an authority that willingly distorted truth and obliged its followers to act contrary to their conscience. Pietro Spina, Simone, Rocco de Donatis, Lazzarro and of course, Celestino V, (all reflections of their author) rebelled and followed their conscience only to find themselves isolated from all that was once familiar and left to operate on the periphery of society. Having found themselves on the margins of existence, these characters were then brought to such an awareness of themselves and others that this solitude became a desirable state. Only now, free from the constraints that were imposed by civil and religious authorities, could they actually live freely, nurturing the spirit of brotherhood. Now they were able to choose to live amongst friends and seek to create a community built around the precepts of love and liberty, the core principles of Silone's own moral code. Altruism, faith in man and in man's capacity to love, to hope and to live in freedom are the essential tenets of Silone's community, and in living by them his protagonists found their answer to the question of what exactly to do: continue the search for utopia in the company of friends.

As discussed in Chapter One, the novels of exile offer an insight into Silone's literary awakening and the delineation of his morality which remained a solid guide throughout his life and career. *Fontamara* was born out Silone's need to act, to testify, to understand, and the reader can observe the development of this theme in the subsequent novels.³ Gradually, as he moved from the somewhat unpolished characters of Berardo and the *Solito Sconosciuto* to the more enlightened and heroic behaviour of Pietro Spina, particularly in *Il seme sotto la neve*, Silone illustrated how that utopia might be brought about. The protagonists themselves undergo the process of being reborn as new men, fit to reside amongst those 'picaresque saints'.⁴ Pietro Spina exemplifies the idea of the revolutionary saint, one who shunned his religious vocation

at an early age in favour of active revolt, condemned to the clandestine life of a wanted man. His political choice is not without religious precedence though, as don Benedetto points out: ‘E poi la Storia Sacra è piena di esempi di vita clandestina. [...] Gesù non fu costretto varie volte a nascondersi per sfuggire ai farisei?’ (*Vino*, p. 459) Equally he acknowledges that ‘Non c’è altra salvezza che andare allo sbaraglio’ (*Vino*, p. 464) Through the realisation of community, of brotherhood, of truth and freedom, comes a life based on love and respect, but all too often the price for revolt was high and resulted in isolation. Silone was familiar with loneliness, with suffering, and through his protagonists he attempted to understand the reasons for his decisions, to find meaning in the choices he made and to validate his struggle:

Le storie raccontate nei libri di Silone sono intrise di sofferenza. Le qualità morali di cui sono dotati, sembrano predisporre i protagonisti a una sorte dolorosa, ‘la sorte di un certo tipo di cristiano nell’ingranaggio del mondo.’ [...] ma il sacrificio degli uomini che sfidano il mondo, che non si lasciano prendere nell’ingranaggio e resistono all’ingiustizia non è mai inutile.⁵

The novels written after his return to Italy echo the same sense of urgency, the same need to make sense of all that had happened in his life thus far. The principal characters are more mature reflections of their predecessors, the most developed of which – and the most autobiographical – is Rocco de Donatis. Chapter Two continues to highlight the moral vein that imbued Silone and his work and the emphasis of the three novels discussed in this chapter is still on the supremacy of love and the search for community. Lazzaro, Martino and Luca exemplify the dignity of the *cafoni* and the noble spirit defined by Silone’s use of the word ‘friend’. Not only this, they represent the natural progression of the notion of self sacrifice, of a martyr complex that was first witnessed in Berardo and Pietro.⁶ The benefit of time allowed the author to work within a more reflective and critical framework. Before even beginning to write this novel he had already reached certain conclusions which Rocco would only truly understand upon

reaching the thematic climax of the novel. At a distance of more than twenty years since his expulsion from the Communist Party he was able to allow Rocco more objectivity in his criticism of the Party than would have been possible in the earlier novels. In doing so, the condemnation of the suppression of liberty, of the need to put the Party before everything else, of the ridiculous and terrifying nature of Stalinist politics was all the more vehement.

In this thesis, the division of Silone's work into pre- and post- exile novels was more for practical, analytical purposes rather than to demonstrate two different approaches or schools of thought. Indeed, the consistency of his arguments and the rigidity of his moral purpose are two of the most interesting aspects of his work. His focus remained the narrative fiction in the novel, though prolific journalistic publications throughout several decades continued to afford him the opportunity to be openly political. His political essays would of course find their definitive outlet in *Uscita di sicurezza*. His decision to write a play rather than a novel on the subject of a medieval Pope suggests that he was willing to experiment with genre; he had done so in the early 1930's with the publication of *Ed egli si nascose*. This medium afforded the author the chance to expose on a public stage the clash of ideas which permeated this work, namely power versus selflessness. Equally, it gave a public face to his inner, personal struggle. Ultimately though, the novel was predominant. When asked why he chose to write fiction Silone replied that his goal was to gain more understanding of the role of man in society:

The content or interior purpose of his fiction sometimes reflects that ulterior motive [...] Silone envisages life not only as an anecdote but as a give-and-take of anecdote; and he would like his readers to respond with the fiction of their own experience, so that understanding might grow apace amid a grand chorus of narratives, a community of *romanzieri*. Even his autobiographical sketch began that way, with the scene – historically true – of half a dozen revolutionists, hiding out in a villa near Milan, telling one another their stories as a way of defining their political and moral philosophy.⁷

The hostile critical reception which greeted the author upon his return from exile could have resulted in a weakening of his position and in a certain amount of literary crowd-pleasing in order to engender critical favour. This was not the case, rather he continued in the same vein, reinforcing his position as a writer who struggled to accept the limits of the situation without giving in. The novels written after his return to Italy were certainly to benefit from his experiences in exile and from lessons learned:

È in esilio che si compie il cammino della coscienza di Silone verso un'effettiva consapevolezza di taluni valori morali inderogabili: la presa di coscienza di un dissidio perenne tra i fini e i mezzi della rivoluzione, la ricostruzione della sua esperienza morale nel senso del movimento di liberazione dei lavoratori, il ritrovamento nel profondo di se stesso di un patrimonio morale e storico, di un profondo sedimento psicologico che è nello stesso tempo regionale e universale. È connessa, diremo, all'esilio la prospettiva utopistica della sua narrativa, che non è tuttavia limitata alle sole opere scritte in quel periodo.⁸

The autobiographical testimony of *Uscita di sicurezza* offers the reader the most personal insight into the mind of the author. The physical and mental anguish endured during his years in exile and following his expulsion from the Party are documented by Silone with a pathos that is both honest and heartfelt. This work is the essential critical guide to understanding all of the other works examined and to appreciating the life and moral impetus of the author. Published only three years later, *L'avventura di un povero cristiano* was the ultimate answer by the author to the questions he had asked himself: how was it possible to survive the communist experience?; what attributes were necessary to establish a community built on egalitarian principles?; what was man's first duty?; what place did love, integrity and freedom have in a world ravaged by war, paranoia and greed? In this play, the last work to be published before his death, Silone succeeded in finding a response in his purest celebration of love. Through the actions of a medieval Pope he was able to find a perfect harmony between his Socialism and his

Christianity, all the while remaining outwith their organisational boundaries.⁹ He reconciled both in the attention given to man, the greatness he can achieve when encouraged to listen to the dictates of conscience and when he is prepared to take responsibility for his actions. As Jean Whyte observed, Celestine's actions reflect the kind of conscientious decisions made by all the protagonists and demonstrate the level of importance Silone placed upon conscience as a moral guide. Celestine's example is one which Silone sought to emulate:

Celestine has the self-confidence of one who knows he is right. [...] It is in a serenity and a self confidence such as his, arising from a conscience developed along Christian lines to a full realization of the spiritual and physical worth of all men, that Silone optimistically sees a solution to the world's ills.¹⁰

This thesis is not intended to be a definitive study. Clearly, in light of the recent allegations made by Biocca and Canali, discussed in the Introduction, further research into the life of Ignazio Silone prior to 1930 is essential. Subsequent research will shed more light and provide scholars with a more complete biography. However, since the focus of this thesis is the morality of Silone in his novels, all of which were written after 1930 and his break from politics, the outcome of this research, whilst enormously important, is not entirely pertinent. What is germane is that the moral code which governed the protagonists from the early novels is unwavering and is as present and lofty in his last work as in the first. The solid principles by which he chose to live are the same ones he instilled in his characters and were unaffected by temporal concerns or mores. His legacy is a body of work, governed by principle and devoted to man:

There is always a crisis. But society itself remains the same: morality remains the same. But what interests me is man: his faults, his difficulties, his greatness. Men are, in the end, given over to themselves, faced with a failure of hope and moral crises. That is my story.¹¹

Notes

¹Ignazio Silone in an interview with K. Allsop, op.cit., p.50.

²Refer to Ottorino Gurgio & Francesco di Corc, op. cit., pp. 396-398.

³Giancarlo Borri, in his contribution to *Ignazio Silone, Clandestino nel 1900*, op.cit., wrote 'Lo scrittore ha fatto "il gran rifiuto" politico attivo ma ha iniziato a fare letteratura che è sempre una forma d'azione, di denuncia, di resistenza.' p. 31.

⁴R.W.B. Lewis, op. cit.

⁵Giuliana Rigobello, Ignazio Silone, op. cit., p. 162.

⁶R.W.B. Lewis, op. cit., p.178. 'In the figure of Luca – following hard upon Lazzaro [...] – Silone has reaffirmed the conviction announced in *Bread and Wine* that "a new type of man" must be born. Luca, too, is impressively and literally "a new type of martyr," [...]

⁷ibid. p.137. See also Ignazio Silone, *Uscita di sicurezza*, p. 894. 'Cosa volete che facciano dei profughi dalla mattina alla sera? Essi passano il meglio del loro tempo a raccontarsi le loro storie. Non sono davvero storie divertenti, ma essi se le raccontano, più che altro, per cercare di rendersi conto.'

⁸Ferdinando Virdia, Ignazio Silone, op. cit., p. 102.

⁹Refer to Gino di Sanctis, 'Credere senza obbedire' in *Il Messaggero*, 17 October, 1972. 'Proprio in quest'età io sono tornato alle domande radicali, a quelle dei miei quindici anni: torno sempre più alla mia radice cristiana che ha ben poco e forse nulla a spartire con la Chiesa.'

¹⁰Jean Whyte, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

¹¹Ignazio Silone, taken from an interview with H. Mitgang, 'A talk with Ignazio Silone about *Bread and Wine*', in *New York Times Book Review*, 21 October, 1962, p. 48.

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